

Spain's PSOE-Podemos government showers arms dealers with billions in contracts

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Even as COVID-19 has infected over 112 million people worldwide and killed 2.5 million, the threat of a new world war that could wipe out billions, far from being diminished by the pandemic, has only escalated. In this context, Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government is making sure its arms manufacturers cash in the global tinder box, as all imperialist powers rearm and prepare for new great-power conflicts.

According to the report "Exports of Defence Materiel and Dual Use of the Secretary of State for Commerce" presented to the Spanish parliament, between January and July 2020, the PSOE-Podemos government authorised weapons sales worth a record €22.5 billion. This is higher than the sum of 2018 and 2019 sales, which came to €21.4 billion combined.

Spain is the seventh largest arms exporter worldwide and its arms exports have seen the third-largest growth in the last four years. Its military-industrial business is a key pillar of the economy, representing 1 percent of its Gross Domestic Product.

The PSOE-Podemos government has not simply continued the traditional policy of supporting its national weapons industry, but has worked to increase its sales and diversify its export destinations. Chief behind these efforts is Podemos, articulating the interests of the affluent, pro-imperialist, sections of the upper-middle class. As a state party that attacks workers' living standards, supports wars and coups, attacks democratic rights and employs police state repression, its support for its weapons industry is part of its broader imperialist policy.

Last October, Podemos' Defence spokesman Roberto Uriarte intervened during the Information Defence Forum in parliament to call for diversification and more research and development in the weapons sector.

The sector should not "put all their eggs in one basket" said Uriarte. Instead, he said, "The defence industry must base its growth on the diversification of its solutions and on the search for new markets abroad, so that the Ministry of Defence is not the only client of the weapons industry."

Uriarte's main concern was that the industry's exports depend too much on the Gulf States. "We should not only sell [weapons] in monoculture to the monarchies of the Persian Gulf," he said. Spain must "implement public policies and facilitate the internationalisation" of weapons sales. He called for investment in research and development, which requires "long-term policies, little demagogy and a lot of sacrifice and dedication." He concluded like any arms lobbyist: "Applied research [in weapons] is the basis of the prosperity of countries."

Last years' authorised weapons sales contracts show that the policy advocated by Uriarte has guided the PSOE-Podemos government.

A record €19.4 billion of authorised weapons sales contracts are due to a series of orders for Airbus transport aircraft assembled in Spain and exported to Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

During the past decades, these European countries have relied on the US for their neo-colonial wars in Africa and the Middle East. These orders aim to increase their independence from Washington, in the name of "European strategic autonomy," to pursue their own aggressive foreign and great power policy. It is also part of a military build-up aimed at nuclear-armed Russia.

Most of Spain's defence material, 71.5 percent, went to NATO or EU countries. Germany is the largest customer in absolute terms. In early December, the

German parliament passed its 2021 budget, which includes a massive increase in military spending of at least €45 billion.

The second-largest customer is Singapore, which bought an air refuelling plane. In the last years, Singapore has boosted its military engagement in the US-led military build-up in the Asia-Pacific against China. Far from opposing the militarisation of the Asia-Pacific, Madrid is supporting Australia and Washington's fuelling of an arms race and military build-up in the region, heightening the danger of conflict.

Spain's fifth-largest buyer and the second outside NATO and the EU was Saudi Arabia, with €32.4 million. It is set to receive mortar shells of different calibres, advanced observation equipment with laser rangefinders, and targeting systems. This does not include five corvettes worth €1.8 billion that the Navantia public shipyard is building for the Saudi Navy. In addition, more than half of the €60 million in category-3 weapons (ammunition and explosive devices) in the first half of 2020 went to Saudi Arabia (€21.9 million) and United Arab Emirates (€8.2 million).

The report shows that the partial stoppage of ammunition deliveries during 2018 and 2019 to the Gulf States involved in the genocidal war against Yemen—a symbolic measure the government adopted as it took power, in response to popular anger at the war—has now ended. The war has claimed 233,000 lives over the last six years, leading to the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Millions face the risk of starvation.

This makes a mockery of the Spanish government's response to a question on arms exports to Saudi Arabia submitted two weeks ago. It stated: "The Arab League countries that are part of the coalition against the rebels in Yemen are not subject to any embargo" by the UN or EU, adding cynically, "if there was knowledge or there was a risk of improper use of the exported materials," an authorisation could be suspended or revoked.

The other country receiving category-3 weapons is Morocco (€3.9 million). A close US and French ally, Rabat is involved in its own military build-up aimed at becoming a major regional player in West Africa. These weapons will only fuel tensions with its neighbour, the military regime of Algeria, and the

Sahrawi-led Polisario Front in Western Sahara. A three-decade ceasefire broke down last November when Rabat sent troops to crush peaceful Sahrawi protests.

Spain is also rapidly becoming a leading exporter in police and riot gear as the global financial aristocracy faces mass social opposition to its policies of austerity, militarism and malign neglect in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Exports of this materiel totalled €719,026, an increase of 931 percent compared to the same period in the previous year.

The first customer was Togo, with a €575,685 contract, or 80 percent of the total. The 10th-poorest country in the world, Togo has been ruled by President Faure Gnassingbe for the past 15 years, after his father who took power in a 1967 coup. He aims to use the new equipment to confront increasing strikes and protests against his rule.

The second customer of this equipment was Tunisia. Its ruling class is currently facing mounting protests in the 10th anniversary of the ousting of the hated corrupt dictator President Zine El Abedine Ben Ali, which sparked off the Arab Spring a decade ago. Haykal Rachdi, 21 years old, died last month when Tunisian police fired a tear gas canister at him at close range. Another young man, Aymen Mahmoudi, suffered serious injuries by another tear gas can. This ammunition was in all likelihood sold under the authorisation of Spain's PSOE-Podemos government.

Other customers of this equipment include neighbouring Portugal and the United States.

Workers and youth should be warned that all of these weapons being produced and exported, in the false name of "creating jobs" will be used by the PSOE-Podemos government to repress domestic opposition amid growing opposition to its criminal policy of "herd immunity" and austerity.



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