

German arms exports, including to Europe, Israel and Ukraine, at record levels

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Germany is fuelling the war in Ukraine and Israel's genocide in the Gaza Strip with record levels of arms exports. Last year, the German government approved arms exports worth €12.2 billion—an increase of 40 percent compared to the previous year. These arms exports are integral to the great power agenda of German imperialism and part of a massive Europe-wide armaments campaign.

A statement from the German Economics Ministry reveals that, in addition to arms deliveries to the Ukrainian military, Norway was supplied with armaments totalling €1.2 billion in the period from 1 January to 12 December 2023, followed by Hungary (€1.03 billion), Great Britain (€654.9 million), the US (€545.4 million) and Poland (€327.9 million). Arms shipments were also exported respectively to Israel and South Korea.

The record total exceeds the export volume of €8.36 billion approved by the coalition government in 2022, which itself was the second-highest annual total in the history of post war Germany.

Ukraine

German arms deliveries to Ukraine almost doubled in 2023 and, at €4.44 billion, accounted for the majority of exports in the second year of the war. On December 16, the Ministry of Defence added 7,390 155 mm shells (self-propelled howitzers), six mine clearance systems, a Patriot anti-aircraft missile system with rockets, 14 drone defence systems and 47,040 rounds of 40 mm ammunition to its already long list of arms deliveries.

In addition, ammunition is being delivered at a European level. European Union governments have committed to delivering 1 million rounds of ammunition to Ukraine by the end of March 2024, consisting primarily of heavy artillery ammunition. According to EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell, EU states have already delivered “more than 300,000” rounds from their stocks to Ukraine. EU Industry Commissioner Thierry Breton declared in November that the EU's annual ammunition production capacity would “exceed one million in the spring and 1.3 or 1.4 million by the end of the year” and called on the arms industry to “prioritise customers from Europe and Ukraine.”

On December 17, the German arms giant Rheinmetall complied

with this request and concluded an agreement with Ukraine for the supply of artillery shells, explosive devices and propellants worth €1.2 billion. On its website the defence company describes itself as an “essential, strategic partner of Ukraine in the supply of 155mm artillery ammunition” and as the “sole source of supply for the Ukrainian armed forces with large quantities of new medium and large-calibre ammunition” for German Marder and Leopard tanks.

“Several tens of thousands of rounds have already been delivered, with tens of thousands more to follow in 2024,” the company's website continues. The German government has also commissioned Rheinmetall to deliver “several tens of thousands of rounds” in 2025.

The framework agreement was preceded by the establishment of the Rheinmetall Ukrainian Defence Industry LLC—a joint venture with the Ukrainian state-owned defence company Ukroboronprom—in October 2023, which is due to start producing German battle tanks on Ukrainian soil this year. In addition, Rheinmetall will supply the Ukrainian military with 25 Leopard 1A5 battle tanks, five armoured recovery vehicles and two training tanks, as well as 14 Leopard 2A4 battle tanks this year on behalf of the Dutch and Danish governments.

In an interview with *Wirtschaftswoche*, CEO Armin Papperger confirmed that Rheinmetall is already “Ukraine's largest defence industry partner.” After orders worth around €900 million in 2022, the volume had risen to two and a half billion euros in 2023. According to Papperger, “certainly more” is expected for the new year. In Hungary, which received defence equipment worth €1.02 billion last year, series production of the Lynx tank is already taking place against the background of the war in Ukraine.

Norway

According to the German military, it maintains a “strategic partnership” with Norway and has been producing submarines with improved camouflage capabilities since September 2023 in order to “effectively combat enemy surface and underwater vehicles.” Although not an EU member state, Norway is now one of the largest troop providers for the EU's EUMAM Ukraine mission, which aims to train around 30,000 Ukrainian soldiers by the end of 2024.

The Bundeswehr also emphasises the “very intensive cooperation between the German and Norwegian armed forces” as part of the European Battlegroup in Lithuania and the German-led “Brigade Lithuania,” which is to be established this year. During a recent visit to Norway, Defence Minister Boris Pistorius (SPD) praised the two countries’ joint submarine construction, troop exercises such as “Noble Jump” and the procurement of Leopard 2 main battle tanks.

At the beginning of 2023, Economics Minister Robert Habeck travelled to Norway to expand the “strategic partnership” to include the areas of “climate, renewable energies and green industry.” In the future, “cooperation in the area of raw materials and associated important strategic links will be intensified in particular,” the German Economics Ministry stated in a press release. This includes microelectronics, as well as measures to “further improve the safety of the gas pipelines between Norway and Germany.”

Israel

Since the beginning of the Israeli genocide in the Gaza Strip, Germany has increased its military exports to Israel tenfold. In 2023, exports amounted to €323.2 million, consisting in particular of components for tactically relevant spheres such as air defence and communications. One hundred and eighty-five of the 218 individual export deals last year were granted following October 7.

German militarism is thus not only directly supporting the Netanyahu government’s genocide in the Gaza Strip, it is also directly profiting from it. When the war began, Rheinmetall’s share price rose by around 15 percent within just five days — the company’s steepest rise of the entire year. Together with its Israeli partners, Rheinmetall is currently developing a 155-millimetre wheeled howitzer, as well as combat drones that can be deployed in advance and can “wait a long time for an attack.”

The demonstration of the fully automatic artillery system from Rheinmetall and its Israeli partner company Elbit Systems took place in March at the Shivta firing range in southern Israel in front of “high-ranking guests from the British, German, Dutch and Hungarian armed forces.” German and Israeli managers declared they were “proud to present the advanced 155-millimetre artillery system to the world.” Elbit Systems is one of the three largest defence companies in Israel and plays a central role in the genocide against the Palestinians with weapons systems such as the Iron Sting, a precision-guided mortar munition.

In addition to the export and joint development of weapons, Germany also imports key weapons systems from Israel that have been developed in the course of the latter’s military operations. On November 23, for example, the Bundeswehr Procurement Office and the Israeli Ministry of Defence signed a multi-billion-euro procurement contract for Arrow 3, which is intended to counter long-range nuclear missiles.

A state secretary from the Defence Ministry had already announced on October 18 that the ministry was planning to

procure an additional five PULS (Precise and Universal Launching System) Elbit multiple launch rocket systems. A corresponding €25 million proposal is to be submitted to the Bundestag in the first quarter of 2024 so that “the first systems can be delivered as early as 2024.”

According to the military magazine *Soldat & Technik*, the Bundestag’s approval would be slow, “but more expedient,” because “the Bundeswehr would thus secure political support for the introduction of the system” and German units could be equipped with PULS systems “across the board” in the future.

South Korea

Alongside Israel, South Korea is the only country among the 10 largest purchasers of German weapons that is not a member of NATO, with an import volume of €256.4 million. According to the Stockholm-based research institute SIPRI, South Korea was by far the largest purchaser of German weapons in the period from 2011 to 2022. In December, Berlin and Seoul signed new agreements to improve their intelligence and defence industry cooperation.

According to a Deutsche Welle report, the aim of the initiatives signed by Chancellor Olaf Scholz is to “strengthen the respective defence capacities in the midst of the conflict in Ukraine and tensions in the Indo-Pacific region.” A recent strategy paper by the government-affiliated German Institute for International and Security Affairs (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik) states: “For a long time, bilateral relations were characterised by an exchange on traditional cooperation topics, such as the experiences of division and reunification and, above all, economic ties. Recently, they have also expanded to include security policy and strategic issues.”

The massive extent of German arms exports to almost all of the world’s key war and conflict regions underline the aggressiveness with which German imperialism is once again acting to assert its economic and geostrategic interests globally. The government in Berlin has committed to further escalating its war course in the new year. Military aid for Ukraine alone is to be more than doubled in 2024. In addition, the military budget for 2024, totalling over €85 billion, will be the biggest since the end of the Second World War.



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