

Asia and the Middle East lead rising trend in arms imports, US exports grow significantly, says SIPRI

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Continuing the upward trend that began in the early 2000s, the volume of international transfers of major weapons in 2013-17 was 10 per cent higher than in 2008-12, according to new data on arms transfers published today by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

The flow of arms increased to Asia and Oceania and the Middle East between 2008-12 and 2013-17, while there was a decrease in the flow to Africa, the Americas and Europe. The five biggest exporters—the United States, Russia, France, Germany and China—together accounted for 74 per cent of all arms exports in 2013-17.

Arms exporters: The USA extends its lead

In 2013-17 the USA accounted for 34 per cent of total arms exports. Its arms exports increased by 25 per cent between 2008-12 and 2013-17. US arms exports in 2013-17 were 58 per cent higher than those of Russia—the second largest arms exporter in that period. The USA supplied major arms to 98 states in 2013-17. Exports to states in the Middle East accounted for 49 per cent of total US arms exports in that period.

‘Based on deals signed during the Obama administration, US arms deliveries in 2013-17 reached their highest level since the late 1990s,’ said Dr Aude Fleurant, Director of the SIPRI Arms and Military Expenditure Programme. ‘These deals and further major contracts signed in 2017 will ensure that the USA remains the largest arms exporter in the coming years.’

Arms exports by Russia decreased by 7.1 per cent between 2008-12 and 2013-17. France increased its arms exports by 27 per cent between the two periods and was the third largest arms exporter in 2013-17. Arms exports by Germany—the fourth largest exporter in 2013-17—fell by 14 per cent between 2008-12 and 2013-17. However, German arms exports to the Middle East increased by 109 per cent.

Few countries outside North America and Europe are large exporters of arms. China was the fifth largest arms exporter in 2013-17. Its arms exports rose by 38 per cent between 2008-12 and 2013-17. While Pakistan was the main recipient of China’s arms exports in 2013-17, there were large increases in Chinese arms exports to Algeria and Bangladesh in that period. Israel (55 per cent), South Korea (65 per cent) and Turkey (145 per cent) substantially increased their respective arms exports between 2008-12 and 2013-17.

The Middle East: Arms imports have doubled over the past 10 years

Most states in the Middle East were directly involved in violent conflict in 2013-17. Arms imports by states in the region increased by 103 per cent between 2008-12 and 2013-17, and accounted for 32 per cent of global arms imports in 2013-17.

‘Widespread violent conflict in the Middle East and concerns about human rights have led to political debate in Western Europe and North America about restricting arms sales,’ said Pieter Wezeman, Senior Researcher with the SIPRI Arms and Military Expenditure Programme. ‘Yet the USA and European states remain the main arms exporters to the region and supplied over 98 per cent of weapons imported by Saudi Arabia.’

In 2013-17 Saudi Arabia was the world’s second largest arms importer, with arms imports increasing by 225 per cent compared with 2008-12. Arms imports by Egypt—the third largest importer in 2013-17—grew by 215 per cent between 2008-12 and 2013-17. The United Arab Emirates was the fourth largest importer in 2013-17, while Qatar (the 20th largest arms importer) increased its arms imports and signed several major deals in that period.

South Asia: Regional tensions drive India’s growing arms imports

India was the world’s largest importer of major arms in 2013-17 and accounted for 12 per cent of the global total. Its imports increased by 24 per cent between 2008-12 and 2013-17. Russia accounted for 62 per cent of India’s arms imports in 2013-17. However, arms imports from the USA rose by 557 per cent between 2008-12 and 2013-17, making it India’s second largest arms supplier. Despite its continuing tensions with India and ongoing

internal conflicts, Pakistan's arms imports decreased by 36 per cent between 2008–12 and 2013–17. Pakistan accounted for 2.8 per cent of global arms imports in 2013–17. Its arms imports from the USA dropped by 76 per cent in 2013–17 compared with 2008–12.

'The tensions between India, on the one side, and Pakistan and China, on the other, are fuelling India's growing demand for major weapons, which it remains unable to produce itself,' said Siemon Wezeman, Senior Researcher with the SIPRI Arms and Military Expenditure Programme. 'China, by contrast, is becoming increasingly capable of producing its own weapons and continues to strengthen its relations with Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar through arms supplies.'

China's arms imports fell by 19 per cent between 2008–12 and 2013–17. Despite this decrease, it was the world's fifth largest arms importer in 2013–17.

Other notable developments

Arms imports by African states decreased by 22 per cent between 2008–12 and 2013–17.

Algeria accounted for 52 per cent of all African imports in 2013–17.

Nigeria's arms imports grew by 42 per cent between 2008–12 and 2013–17.

Total arms imports by states in the Americas decreased by 29 per cent in 2013–17 compared with 2008–12.

Venezuela's arms imports fell by 40 per cent between the two periods.

Imports by states in Europe decreased by 22 per cent between 2008–12 and 2013–17. Deliveries of advanced combat aircraft from the USA will drive import volumes up during the next few years.

In 2013–17 China accounted for 68 per cent of arms imports by Myanmar, followed by Russia (15 per cent).

Indonesia increased its arms imports by 193 per cent between 2008–12 and 2013–17.

Australia was the sixth largest arms importer globally in 2013–17.

For editors

The SIPRI Arms Transfers Database contains information on all international transfers of major weapons (including sales, gifts and production licences) to states, international organizations and armed non-state groups from 1950 to the most recent full calendar year, 2017. SIPRI data reflects the volume of deliveries of arms, not the financial value of the deals. As the volume of deliveries can fluctuate significantly year-on-year, SIPRI presents data for 5-year periods, giving a more stable measure of trends.

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