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Global arms trade falls slightly, but imports to Europe, East Asia and Oceania rise

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The trend in international transfers of major arms, 1982–2021

(Stockholm, 14 March 2022) International transfers of major arms saw a slight drop between 2012–16 and 2017–21 (–4.6 per cent). Nevertheless, exports by the United States and France increased substantially, as did imports to states in Europe (+19 per cent), East Asia (+20 per cent) and Oceania (+59 per cent). Transfers to the Middle East remained high, while those to Africa and the Americas decreased, according to new data on global arms transfers published today by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

'The small decrease in global arms transfers masks large variations between regional trends,' said Pieter D. Wezeman, Senior Researcher with the SIPRI Arms Transfers Programme. 'Whereas there were some positive developments, including South American arms imports reaching their lowest level in 50 years, increasing or continuing high rates of weapons imports to places like Europe, East Asia, Oceania and the Middle East contributed to worrying arms build-ups.'

Europe sees biggest growth in arms imports

The biggest growth in arms imports among world regions occurred in **Europe**. In 2017–21 imports of major arms by European states were 19 per cent higher than in 2012–16 and accounted for 13 per cent of global arms transfers. The largest arms importers in Europe were the United Kingdom, Norway and the Netherlands. Other European states are also expected to increase their arms imports significantly over the coming decade, having recently placed large orders for major arms, in particular combat aircraft from the USA. Despite armed conflict in eastern Ukraine throughout 2017–21, the country's imports of major arms in the period were very limited.

'The severe deterioration in relations between most European states and Russia was an important driver of growth in European arms imports, especially for states that cannot meet all their requirements through their national arms industries,' said Pieter D. Wezeman, Senior Researcher with the SIPRI Arms Transfers Programme. 'Arms transfers also play an important role in transatlantic security relationships.'

Asia and Oceania imports down, but rising in some subregions

Asia and Oceania remained the largest importing region for major arms, receiving 43 per cent of global transfers in 2017–21, and six states in the region were among the 10 largest importers globally: India, Australia, China, South Korea, Pakistan and Japan. Transfers to the region overall fell slightly (–4.7 per cent), but there was wide variation among different subregions.

Arms imports to South Asia fell by 21 per cent and those to South East Asia fell by 24 per cent between 2012–16 and 2017–21. In the same period, arms imports to Oceania grew by 59 per cent, due to a 62 per cent increase in **Australia**'s imports, and imports to East Asia rose by 20 per cent.

'Tensions between China and many states in Asia and Oceania are the main driver of arms imports in the region,' said Siemon T. Wezeman, Senior Researcher with the SIPRI Arms Transfers Programme. 'These tensions are also a major factor in US arms transfers to the region. The USA remains the largest supplier to Asia and Oceania, as arms exports are an important element of US foreign policy aimed at China.'

Indian arms imports decreased by 21 per cent between 2012–16 and 2017–21. However, it remained the largest importer globally and India is planning large-scale arms imports in the next few years from several suppliers.

Middle Eastern arms imports level off after sharp increase

Middle Eastern states imported 2.8 per cent more arms in 2017–21 than they did in 2012–16. This followed an 86 per cent increase in arms imports to the region between 2007–11 and 2012–16.

As the conflict in Yemen continued and tensions between Iran and other states in the region remained high, arms imports played an important role in security developments in the Gulf. Arms imports by **Saudi Arabia**—the world's second largest arms importer—increased by 27 per cent between 2012–16 and 2017–21. **Qatar**'s arms imports grew by 227 per cent, propelling it from the 22nd largest arms importer to the 6th largest. In contrast, arms imports by the **United Arab Emirates** (UAE) shrank by 41 per cent between 2012–16 and 2017–21, taking it from the third largest to the ninth largest arms importer globally. All three of these states and **Kuwait** have placed large orders for major arms planned for delivery in the coming years.

US, French arms exports rise; Russian, Chinese and German arms exports fall

Arms exports by the **USA** grew by 14 per cent between 2012–16 and 2017–21, increasing its global share from 32 per cent to 39 per cent. Arms exports by the USA in 2017–21 were more than double (108 per cent more) those of the second largest exporter, Russia. The Middle East accounted for 38 per cent of US arms transfers. Especially important for the growth of US arms exports was an increase in deliveries of major arms to Saudi Arabia, by 106 per cent.

Russia, which accounted for 19 per cent of all exports of major arms in 2017–21, saw its exports shrink by 26 per cent between 2012–16 and 2017–21. The overall decrease in Russia's arms exports was almost entirely due to a fall in arms deliveries to two recipients: India and Viet Nam. However, several large arms deliveries from Russia to India are expected in the coming years.

France accounted for 11 per cent of global arms exports in 2017–21, making it the third largest arms exporter. France increased its arms exports by 59 per cent between 2012–16 and 2017–21.

In 2017–21 **China** was the fourth largest arms exporter and **Germany** the fifth largest. Arms exports by China decreased by 31 per cent between 2012–16 and 2017–21, while Germany's arms exports fell by 19 per cent.

Other notable developments:

- **Italian** arms exports represented 3.1 per cent of the global total in 2017–21 and were 16 per cent higher than in 2012–16.
- Arms exports by the **United Kingdom** dropped by 41 per cent between 2012–16 and 2017–21. The UK accounted for 2.9 per cent of total arms exports in 2017–21.
- Between 2012–16 and 2017–21 there were overall decreases in arms imports by states in three world regions: the **Americas** (–36 per cent), **Africa** (–34 per cent), and **Asia and Oceania** (–4.7 per cent).
- In 2017–21 arms imports by **South American** states were lower than in any five-year period in the past half century. **Brazil** is the only state in South America with substantial deliveries of arms pending.
- **Myanmar**'s arms imports fell by 32 per cent between 2012–16 and 2017–21. It accounted for 0.6 per cent of global arms transfers in 2017–21.
- In 2017–21 the five largest arms importers in **sub-Saharan Africa** were **Angola**, **Nigeria**, **Ethiopia**, **Mali** and **Botswana**.
- **Taiwan**'s arms imports shrank by 68 per cent between 2012–16 and 2017–21, but are scheduled to increase significantly in the coming years.
- **Israeli** arms imports increased by 19 per cent between 2012–16 and 2017–21.
- **Egypt**'s arms imports grew by 73 per cent between 2012–16 and 2017–21, making it the third largest arms importer globally.

For editors

The SIPRI Arms Transfers Database is the only public resource that provides consistent information, often estimates, on all international transfers of major arms (including sales, gifts and production under licence) to states, international organizations and non-state groups since 1950. It is accessible on the Arms Transfers Database page of SIPRI's website.

SIPRI's 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 five-year

periods, giving a more stable measure of trends.

This is the second of three major data launches in the lead-up to the release of SIPRI's flagship publication in mid 2022, the annual SIPRI Yearbook. The third data launch will provide comprehensive information on global, regional and national trends in military spending.

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