

## GLOBAL TRENDS IN INTERNATIONAL ARMS TRANSFER 2023: IMPLICATIONS FOR PEACE AND SECURITY

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March 28, 2024

*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*



In March 2024, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) released another significant ‘Fact Sheet’ highlighting a comparative analysis of trends in international arms transfer from 2014-18 to 2019-23.<sup>1</sup> The fact sheet reveals highly alarming trends in arms exports and imports. It is estimated that arms imports by Europe increased by 94 percent. Imports by Asia, Oceania, and the Middle East increased tremendously as “nine of the 10 biggest arms importers in 2019–23, including the top 3 of India, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, belong to Asia and Oceania or the Middle East.”<sup>2</sup> Due to the ongoing conflict, Ukraine rapidly moved to fourth place with a global share of 4.9 percent of arms imports. It is estimated that it received major arms from more than 30 states during 2022–23. Pakistan came in the 5<sup>th</sup> position with a total share of arms imports of 4.3 percent as compared to 2.9 during 2014-18. The Fact Sheet also indicates that from 1999-2003 onwards, arms transfer is gradually increasing as states are interested in acquiring more weapons. This reflects that to maintain peace and security states are relying on armaments and they are constantly engaged in upgrading and modernizing their armed forces.

1 Pieter D. Wezeman et al., “Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2023,” SIPRI Fact Sheet, March 2024, [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/fs\\_2403\\_at\\_2023.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/fs_2403_at_2023.pdf).

2 Ibid.

**Top 5 Arms Importers (2019-23)**

Rank	Importer	Share of global arms imports (%)		Per cent change from 2014-18 to 2019-23 <sup>a</sup>
		2019-23	2014-18	
1	India	9.8	9.1	4.7
2	Saudi Arabia	8.4	11	-28
3	Qatar	7.6	1.5	396
4	Ukraine	4.9	0.1	6 633
5	Pakistan	4.3	2.9	43

Source: SIPRI Fact Sheet, March 2024

The Fact Sheet has also revealed an important trend of change in the status of major global arms exporters and their share of global arms exports. It highlights that as compared from 2014-18 to 2019-23 the U.S. remained the leading arms exporter with an increase of 17 percent, its global share reached 42 percent.<sup>3</sup> France came in the second position, moving ahead of Russia, with a growth of 47 percent in its arms exports, and its global share reaching 11 percent. Russia moved to third position with its global share of 11 percent, almost losing 53 percent of its arms exports. China ranked at number 4 with its global share of 5.8 percent, declining -5.3 of its arms exports and Germany ranked at number 5 with its global share of 5.6 percent, after losing around 14 percent of arms exports.

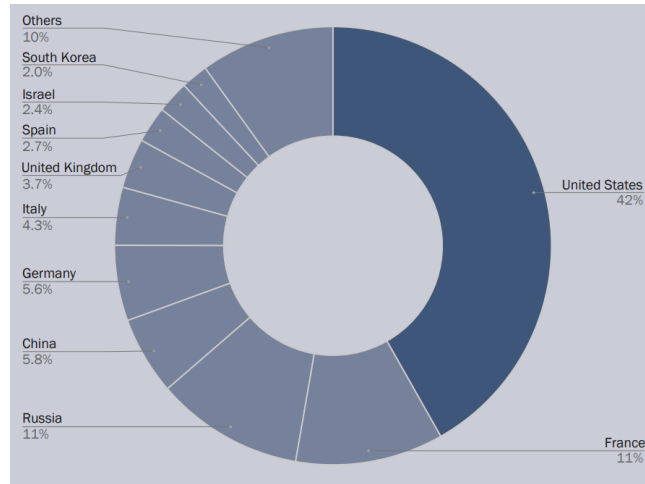
**World’s Top 5 Arms Exporters (2019-23)**

Rank	Exporter	Share of global arms exports (%)		Per cent change from 2014-18 to 2019-23 <sup>a</sup>
		2019-23	2014-18	
1	United States	42	34	17
2	France	11	7.2	47
3	Russia	11	21	-53
4	China	5.8	5.9	-5.3
5	Germany	5.6	6.3	-14

Source: SIPRI Fact Sheet, March 2024

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

The world’s top five arms suppliers account for around 75 percent of global arms exports.<sup>4</sup>



Source: SIPRI Fact Sheet, March 2024

The above-highlighted trends of global arms import and exports suggest that states rely more on weapons development and production, and that the demand to procure modern arms is constantly growing. Exporters are earning billions of dollars by selling new and advanced weapon systems and importers are willingly spending more and more on procuring this advanced weaponry to safeguard their vital national security interests. For instance, the U.S. global share of arms transfer alone increased from 34 to 42 percent, and these major arms have been transferred to 107 states including 38 percent to the Middle East. This can be further divided into 15 percent for Saudi Arabia, 8.2 percent for Qatar, 4.5 percent for Kuwait, and 3.6 percent for Israel. Most of these states are not engaged in any active conflict or war, except for Israel, which is using these weapons against innocent Palestinians. Similarly, from 2019-23, due to the growing threat perception vis-à-vis China, out of the U.S. global arms exports Japan received 9.5 percent with an estimated increase of 161 percent. South Korea received 5.3 percent with an increase of more than 35 percent. The U.S. arms exports to Australia reached 7.1 percent, an increase of more than 9.2 percent. In the same timeframe out of its global share, the U.S. exported 28 percent to Europe – an increase of almost 200 percent. The U.S. Major arms exports consist of aircraft, combat helicopters, major warships, tanks, and other related armored vehicles. From 2019-23, the U.S. exported 420 combat aircraft and an estimated 1071 aircraft deliveries are still pending which includes 785 F35s.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

**Major Arms Orders from the 10 Largest Arms Exporters, for Delivery After 2023**

	United States	France	Russia	China	Germany	Italy	United Kingdom	Spain	Israel	South Korea
Combat aircraft <sup>d</sup>	1 071	223	78	94	–	52	8	–	18	142
Combat helicopters	390	1	–	–	–	31	–	–	–	–
Major warships <sup>b</sup>	8	20	5	8	25	8	32	1	–	6
SAM systems <sup>c</sup>	35	2	16+	2	37+	–	–	–	30+	10+
Tanks	561	–	464	566	241	98	–	–	19	972
Other armoured vehicles	2 848+	498	8	1	1 314	1 757	20	558	45+	609+
Artillery	718	141	–	126+	31	–	–	12	95+	1 233+

**Source:** SIPRI Fact Sheet, March 2024

Another important development is the emergence of France as the second-largest importer of arms. From 2019-23, France's arms exports, after a jump of 47 percent, reached 11 percent of the total world share. It made arms deliveries to 64 states in Asia and Oceania (42 percent), the Middle East (34 percent), and Europe (9.1 percent), including the highest exports to India (29 percent). However, during this timeframe, Russian exports fell by 53 percent, declining from 21 to 11 percent of the global share. Russia delivered arms to 31 states in 2019, 14 in 2022, and 12 in 2023. India remained the largest recipient of Russian arms (34 percent). China ranked at number 4 with 5.8 percent, and Germany at number 5 with 5.6 percent in global share of arms transfer. China delivered arms to 40 states with the highest arms transfer to Pakistan (61 percent). Other significant arms exporters were Italy, the UK, Spain, Israel, and South Korea and the major recipient were states from the Middle East.

As highlighted above, including the top five arms importers - India, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Ukraine, and Pakistan – a total of 170 states imported arms. The demand for arms imports declined in African states -52 percent, and -7.2 percent in the Americas. Asia and Oceania remained the center of attention as the world's 6 top arms importers - India, Pakistan, Japan, Australia, South Korea, and China belong to it. Arms imports by Europe increased by 94 percent. SIPRI estimated that Ukraine imported arms from 30 states under the pretext of military aid "meaning that Ukraine was by some distance the world's largest arms importer in the year 2023."<sup>5</sup> To enhance their military capability vis-à-vis China, Japan (155 percent) and South Korea (6.5 percent) increased their arms imports, whereas China's arms imports declined to 44 percent, as it was gradually moving towards indigenization.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

In South Asia, India constantly maintained its position in the world's top five arms importers. India's arms imports increased by 4.7 percent. It is important to note that one of the main reasons for the decline in Russia's share of arms exports is that India was looking towards Western suppliers - the U.S., France, and Israel. India's imports from Russia declined from 76 percent to 58 percent. Keeping in mind the Indian military modernization program and its hostile intentions, Pakistan's arms exports grew by 43 percent. This growth also manifests the strengthening of arms procurement relations of Pakistan with China as Pakistan imported around 82 percent of its arms from China.

Due to the evolving geo-political landscape and growing threat perception, the majority of Middle Eastern powers have also accumulated advanced weapons. These have even made records of arms imports and made their position among the World's top arms importers i.e. Saudi Arabia at no. 2, Qatar at no. 3, and Egypt at no. 7. Although the Saudi arms imports declined 28 percent, it remains the second largest arms importer. Qatar's arms import requirement significantly increased by 396 percent. Israeli imports increased by 5.1 percent, Egyptian imports increased by 26 percent, and Iran's imports remained very low.

The above trends of arms imports and exports indicate that due to ongoing tensions, hostilities, conflicts, and wars, states feel more secure in strengthening themselves militarily and by procuring modern and advanced weapons. Major arms-producing states are exploiting these situations, finding it favorable that threats to peace and national security continue to exist. States like Israel are using these weapons to kill innocent people. States like India are accumulating these weapons to assert their hegemony and dominate the region militarily. Some states have withdrawn from international arms control measures and are developing more lethal and advanced weapons to maintain their regional and global dominance. Such trends are threatening international peace and security and eroding the chances of settlement of disputes through peaceful means. The international community should pay attention to these developments and focus more on the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflicts, and wars.