
Russian arms exports break records.

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MOSCOW. (RIA Novosti military commentator Viktor Litovkin) - Russia exported \$8 billion worth of weapons and hardware in 2006, according to Mikhail Dmitriyev, director of Russia's Federal Military-Technical Cooperation Service.

Arms exports amounted to \$6.5 billion and spare parts and military services to \$1.5 billion. This is more than the preliminary figure for arms exports as of late 2006, estimated at \$6.3 billion, already a substantial increase on the 2005 figure of \$6.226 billion. The revised figure \$6.5 billion was officially announced in early February.

The Russian arms export business is doing better with every passing month and is facing a bright future. Sales figures are tentatively summed up at the end of every year and revised when Rosoboronexport, the state arms import-export monopoly, counts its receipts in February. The \$8 billion export record will not be broken until the next year.

Dmitriyev said the value of Rosoboronexport's contract portfolio amounted to nearly \$30 billion. Although not all of these potential contracts will be carried out, the figure clearly demonstrates a steadily growing demand for Russian weapons.

Aircraft equipment accounted for 57% of total arms exports in 2006, and naval items for 39%, with air defense and multi-service systems making up the rest. It is almost impossible to establish which systems were sold and for how much because that information is confidential. However, Russia reports its arms export figures to the UN, and military experts, as well as simply inquisitive people, can learn the details several months later from the UN Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA), which is published in the press.

Still, we know that one of the largest contracts in 2006 stipulated the delivery to India of three Tu-22M3 Backfire aircrafts, two anti-submarine Il-38SD May planes, and 13 modules for licensed assembly of Su-30MKI Flanker multirole fighters.

China imported one Project 636 diesel submarine and one Project 956EM destroyer, Rif-M naval air defense systems (the export version of S-300FM Fort-M, NATO designation SA-N-20) and Shtil-1 (SA-N-12 Grizzly) short-range surface-to-air missile systems, as well as 150 anti-submarine and anti-ship missiles.

But the biggest surprises last year were the delivery of four multirole Su-30MK2 Flanker fighters and 18 helicopters (including six Mi-17B-5 Hip, three Mi-172 civilian helicopters, eight Mi-35 and one Mi-26T Halo), along with the sale of equipment for a plant to produce AK-101 and AK-104 Kalashnikov guns, to Venezuela; the supply of 29 Tor-1 short-range air defence systems to Iran; and the export of two MiG-29SMT Fulcrum planes to Algeria.

All of the above took place despite pressure from Washington and sanctions imposed by the US Department of State on companies cooperating with Rosoboronexport. It also means that Russia is not wincing at each harsh word from Washington, because it knows that

this is part of a tough rivalry on the global arms market.

Although it has posted very good results in the past few years, Moscow is not the world leader on that market. The undisputed champion is the United States, which sold \$11.55 billion worth of weapons in 2005 (there is no official data for 2006 yet), excluding the value of spare parts, modules and other services.

The runners-up, after Russia, are France, the United Kingdom, Germany and Israel.

The latter exports mainly warfare control systems, such as reconnaissance, communications, target acquisition and navigation systems, and it also modernises and upgrades weapons for its clients. In other words, Israel exports technological systems that cost much more than ordinary weapons.

Russia is lagging behind other countries in that sector, but the government's military-industrial commission has been working hard to close the gap. This gives reason to hope that Russian-made weapons systems, the best in the world and among the least expensive, will soon be complemented by comparable warfare control systems.

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