

Arms exports: Germany, the armoury of the world?



Germany's arms exports do not necessarily contribute to the emergence, escalation, and prolongation of wars and arms races, an expert suggests. [EPA-EFE/JOEL CARRETT]

It's a widespread opinion that German arms exports are to blame for the world's instability. Experts now have cross-checked numbers and causalities. EURACTIV Germany's media partner "Der Tagesspiegel" reports.

There are only a few topics that trigger such widespread public outrage as reports of German arms exports. Hardly any politician defends this practice. Experts view business with rifles or tanks of German production with countries outside NATO as a crucial cause for the fact that hundreds of thousands must die and whole regions sink into chaos.

Also in the debate on what causes people in third world countries to flee, many actors name German arms exports as an important reason why people have to leave their homeland - and recommend an arms trade embargo as a means to make the world more peaceful.

But this is often a named, but nevertheless non-existent connection, political scientist Joachim Krause now tries to prove.

The director of the Institute for Security Policy at the University of Kiel has enjoyed a reputation in science for a long time as a critic of publicly traded figures and allegations of German arms exports. Now, however, he has summarized his arguments and evidence in a recently published essay in the "Sirius" magazine so clearly that even non-scientists can understand.

"Are we the 'armoury of the world'?" the author provocatively asks and tries to deal with three allegations: that Germany is the third largest exporter of weapons and armaments; that it is also the world's second largest exporter of small arms, and that German arms exports contribute to the emergence, escalation, and prolongation of wars and arms races.

First, Krause researched the sources of the figures on arms exports in Germany and other countries. Many institutions rely on publicly available evidence of contracts and deliveries, which distorts the outcome as many autocratic regimes publish few or no figures, while in a transparent society such as the German one, much material is available and the German government provides "very detailed" reports on arms transfers.

The expert's conclusion: The claim that Germany is more or less permanently the third largest arms exporter in the world does not stand up to a "critical examination of the data" and is therefore "deceptive". Krause sees Germany in fifth place, or in sixth place, when China's exports are counted.

Also, according to Krause's data, more than 60 countries worldwide produce small arms and light weapons. The data moreover shows that "German transfers of small arms are for the most part new sports, hunting and police weapons".

This is one of the reasons why Germany plays "no role" in supplying the many conflict zones and civil wars in Africa, the Middle East, South, Central and East Asia and Latin America with rifles, assault rifles and machine guns.

According to him, the much-discussed case studies - Sudan, Libya, Syria and Mexico, which the author examines - do not refute his thesis.

Even with the exports of large-scale weapon systems, which include mainly

warships and armoured vehicles, the investigation found no evidence that they had contributed “to an escalation” in wars or civil wars.

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