

EU defence

Two-thirds of arms imports to Nato countries in Europe come from US

Continent's deep reliance on American-made weapons underscored by Sipri data



F-35 fighter jets being built at Lockheed Martin in Fort Worth, Texas © Rodger Mallison/Fort Worth Star-Telegram/TNS/ABACA/Reuters

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Almost two-thirds of the arms imported by European members of Nato over the past five years were produced by the US, according to new research that underlined the continent's deep reliance on American-made weapons.

Arms imports by the European nations more than doubled between 2020 and 2024 compared with the previous five years, as the region responded to Russia's full-scale invasion of [Ukraine](#) in 2022, according to data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (Sipri). The US supplied 64 per cent of these arms, up from 52 per cent between 2015-19.

Mathew George, director of the Sipri Arms Transfers Programme, said states moved forward with decisions to buy US arms despite public calls "to take steps to reduce their dependence on arms imports and to strengthen the arms industry in Europe".

The figures emphasise the scale of the challenge facing European leaders as they seek to reduce their military dependence on the US, as President Donald Trump has demanded that Europe become more responsible for its own security.

Although the continent's [Nato](#) allies have been looking to bolster their national

Although the continent's [Nato](#) allies have been looking to bolster their national capabilities since Russia's invasion three years ago, Trump's return to the White House has added fresh momentum.

Most European countries have increased their dependence on US-supplied arms

Share of major arms imports coming from the US, in European Nato countries, **2015-19** compared with **2020-24**

○ 2015-19 ○ 2020-24

Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database • North Macedonia not shown. Major arms include aircraft, air defence systems, anti-submarine warfare weapons, armoured vehicles, artillery, engines, missiles, sensors, satellites and

Leaders from the EU's 27 members last week endorsed new defence funding initiatives proposed by Brussels, including an instrument that would provide €150bn in loans to capitals to spend on military capabilities.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Sunday that she wanted to use the loans to reduce reliance on arms bought outside the bloc. She said it was "very important" that the injection was used to deliver "on research, development and good jobs here in Europe".

The €150bn fund has become a new flashpoint in a long-standing battle between France and Germany over the continent's rearmament drive and whether it should include countries outside the bloc. The commission chief believed it was important to be "smart" and keep good connections with Norway and the UK.

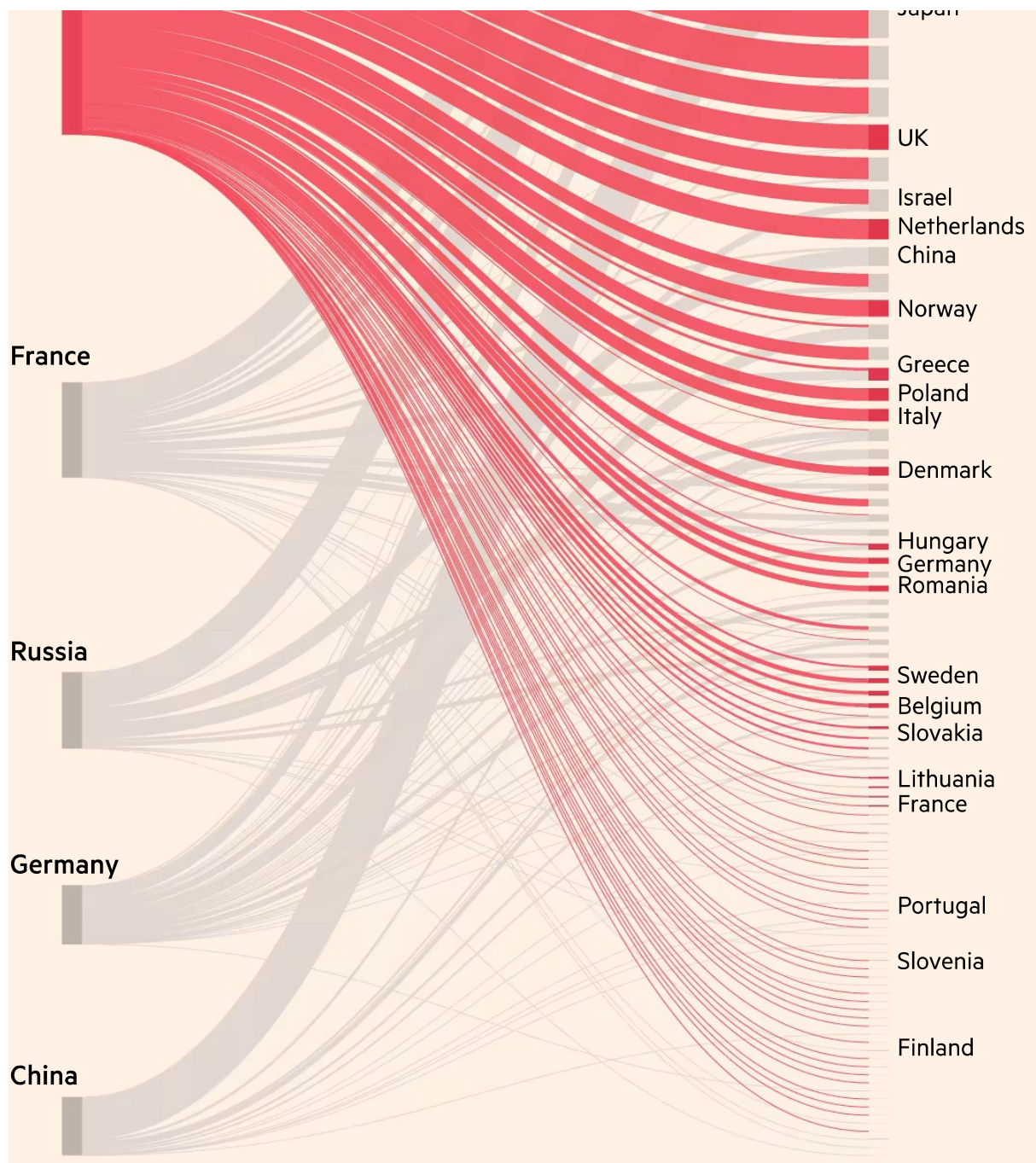
Industry executives have echoed calls that the region needed to reduce dependency on non-European suppliers in order to boost its resilience. There are growing concerns that the US could even decide to withhold critical support for critical weapon systems, such as the advanced F-35 fighter jet.

Pieter Wezeman, senior researcher at Sipri, said that faced with an "increasingly belligerent Russia and transatlantic stress during the first Trump presidency, European Nato states had taken steps to rescue their dependence on arms imports and to strengthen the European arms industry".

The US remains the world's largest arms exporter, delivering to more than 100 countries

Volume of major arms exports to each recipient state, 2020-24





Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database • Major arms include aircraft, air defence systems, anti-submarine warfare weapons, armoured vehicles, artillery, engines, missiles, sensors, satellites and ships.

But he also stressed the “deep roots” of Europe’s arms relationship with Washington, noting how European Nato capitals had “almost 500 combat aircraft and many other weapons still on order from the US”

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Throughout the postwar era, European governments spent lavishly on expensive American weapons, seeing this as the price of keeping Washington committed to the continent's security.

Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz, Poland's defence minister, told journalists last month: "Europe should invest more in security to retain the presence of the Americans in Europe, and not to replace them."

He added that this "insurance policy" would show the new administration that they were meeting the two conditions that Trump frequently underlines as the quid pro quo for US support — higher defence spending and "mutual economic relations for American business".

Sipri's annual analysis of global arms transfers also underlined how the US had cemented its position as the world's top arms exporter, increasing its share of exports from 35 per cent to 43 per cent over the five-year period.

A small number of countries continue to dominate the global arms trade

Share of global major arms transfers, by largest exporters/importers, 2020-24

Top 10 exporters

US						
France						
Russia						
China						

Ukraine, meanwhile, became the world's largest importer of major arms over that timeframe, with imports rising nearly 100 times as the country sought to fight off Russia's forces.

For the first time in two decades, the largest share of US arms went to Europe rather than the Middle East, although Saudi Arabia was the top single recipient of US weapons.

The US remained the supplier of choice for advanced long-range strike capabilities such as combat aircraft, Sipri said.

The data also showed that the top 10 arms exporters in the past five years were the same as those in the previous period, but that Russia fell to third place behind France as exports slid. Italy jumped from tenth to sixth place.

Russian arms exports fell by 64 per cent between 2015 and 2019, and 2020 and 2024, as the Ukraine war "accelerated" the decline in Moscow's ability to export weaponry.

Wezeman said this was because Russia needed to keep more of its domestic production to use on the battlefield, as well as the challenge of sanctions and western pressure on other countries not to buy from Moscow.

Two-thirds of Russian arms exports went to India, China and Kazakhstan, according to the research.

China's imports of arms shrunk by 64 per cent between the two periods as the country increasingly substituted imports — mainly from Russia — with locally designed and produced weapon systems. China's arms imports are likely to keep falling as the capacity of its domestic arms industry grows, according to Sipri.

Additional reporting by Henry Foy in Brussels

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