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Germany Plans Extensive Arms Deal with Algeria

Tanks in the Desert

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German arms sales to Algeria have increased dramatically in the last two years, SPIEGEL has learned. Whereas weapons manufacturers in Germany sold less than 20 million euros worth of materiel to Algeria in 2010, sales have jumped to almost 400 million in the two years since. Not all are pleased by the development.



A German Fuchs armoured personnel carrier in Afghanistan.

Weapons made in Germany are in demand across the globe -- and the tanks, armoured personnel carriers and submarines being shipped overseas are not earmarked solely for NATO allies and countries with clean human rights records. Indeed, Chancellor Angela Merkel has made it a hallmark of her administration to export weapons to regional powers, often in the face of doubts about the recipient country's commitment to democratic values.

Now, having weathered recent mini-scandals due to large weapons deals with Saudi Arabia and Indonesia, Germany is pursuing a significant increase in arms exports and cooperation with Algeria. SPIEGEL has learned that a subsidiary of defense contractor Rheinmetall plans to produce up to 1,200 Fuchs armoured personnel carriers in Algeria in the next 10 years. All of the vehicles are reportedly for use in Algeria.

In addition, since the beginning of 2011, Berlin has authorized the delivery to the country of 54 Fuchs vehicles worth €195 million (\$248 million) as well as other military vehicles worth €286 million. Berlin has also underwritten a €2.13 billion deal for two warships bound for Algeria. The deals represent a significant increase in weapons deals with the North African country. In 2010, German arms sales to Algeria were worth a mere €19.8 million.

The Merkel Doctrine

The move to greater cooperation with Algeria is not without controversy. Left Party parliamentarian Jan van Aken told SPIEGEL that it was irresponsible to "arm Algeria in the middle of the Arab Spring."

Merkel's administration has proven particularly active when it comes to arms exports and has been heavily criticized in recent months as a result. In July, several parliamentarians questioned the legality of a planned deal to deliver 100 tanks in addition to other military vehicles to Indonesia. A declaration of intent between Rheinmetall and the Indonesian government was reportedly signed on Saturday.

More controversially, because of the country's record of severe oppression, Germany's Federal Security Council, a nine-member body made up of the chancellor and several ministers that meets behind closed doors, approved the sale of more than 200 Leopard 2A7+ tanks -- Germany's most modern -- to Saudi Arabia in June 2011. The approval came after the Arab Spring had begun and, of particular note, after Saudi Arabia had sent in tanks to help quell a popular uprising in Bahrain earlier that year.

Several other countries have also expressed an interest in German weaponry, including Qatar, India and Angola. Germany in 2010 was the world's third largest weapons exporter, behind only the United States and Russia.