

European arms imports double in 2022

Arms imports into Europe almost doubled in 2022, driven by massive shipments to Ukraine, which has become the world's third-largest destination, researchers said Monday.

With a 93 percent jump compared to the year before, imports have also increased due to accelerating military spending by European states including Poland and Norway, said the report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), AFP reported.

And the rate of imports is expected to accelerate further, it said.

"The invasion has really caused a significant surge in demand for

arms in Europe, which will have further effect and most likely will lead to increased arms imports by European states," Pieter Wezeman, a senior researcher at SIPRI, told AFP.

Excluding Ukraine, European imports have nevertheless already risen 35 percent in 2022, according to SIPRI data.

Ukraine was until last year a negligible importer of arms.

But in 2022 it very quickly became the third-largest arms destination in the world, behind Qatar and India, as Western nations delivered arms following Russia's military operation in Ukraine.

Ukraine alone accounted for 31 percent of arms

transfers to Europe and eight percent of world deliveries overall, according to SIPRI's data. Ukraine's imports, including donations, grew more than 60-fold last year, the institute found. The deliveries to Ukraine were mainly weapons lifted from stockpiles.

Among them were some 230 artillery pieces from the US; 280 Polish armoured vehicles; and more than 7,000 British anti-tank missiles, as well as more newly produced pieces such as anti-aircraft systems, SIPRI said.

European states have either "already ordered or are planning to" weapons ranging from "subma-



rines to combat aircraft, from drones to anti-tank missiles, from rifles to rare arms", Wezeman said. The EU, which is cur-

rently fine-tuning a plan to supply Ukraine with millions of shells, is also working to increase production locally in Europe.



A patriot air defense system is seen during Polish military training at an airport in Warsaw. ● REUTERS

At least 44 dead as Cyclone Freddy pounds Malawi, Mozambique

An unrelenting Cyclone Freddy that is currently battering southern Africa has killed at least 44 people in Malawi and Mozambique since it struck the continent for a second time on Saturday night, authorities in both countries have confirmed.

At least 39 people in Malawi's commercial hub of Blantyre have died with several others missing or injured, the city's chief executive officer told The Associated Press on Monday. Authorities in Mozambique reported that five people were killed in the country

since Saturday, AP reported. The deaths in Malawi include five members of a single family who died in Blantyre's Ndirande township after Freddy's destructive winds and heavy rains demolished their house, according to a police report. A three-year-old

child who was "trapped in the debris" is also among the victims, with her parents among those reported missing, authorities also said.

The cyclone lashed over Mozambique and Malawi over the weekend and into Monday. It's the second

time the record-breaking cyclone — which has been causing destruction in southern Africa since late February — made landfall in mainland Africa. It also pummeled the island states of Madagascar and Réunion as it traversed across the ocean.

Saudi Arabia tightens grip on Israel after deal with China

The delegation initially invited also didn't travel to the kingdom because they didn't get a response from the Saudis in time on their visa requests, Israeli public broadcaster Kan reported.

Israeli officials did not push Riyadh to issue visa, noting that Saudi Arabia is

hosting several UN conferences later this year.

This development comes while Riyadh openly stated that it is not seeking to normalize ties with Israel. Yet, Axios believes that the Israelis are still sending messages to Saudi Arabia, pushing for an agreement similar to the Abraham Accords.

Similarly, the UAE has reportedly said that it would not buy Israeli defense systems. The decision seems to be a protest to the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's most recent policies. Netanyahu's office, however, rejected the report, saying that the news is

"without basis." Like it or not, Iran-Saudi Arabia rapprochement is a resounding failure to the Israeli government's foreign policy. Facing with various domestic crises, Netanyahu is dealing with a major blow to its foreign policy, as the Middle Eastern countries have welcomed

Tehran and Riyadh resuming diplomatic ties, and with the reopening of the embassies in two months, Iran will seriously pursue to normalize its ties with Jordan and Egypt. Talks are currently ongoing between Tehran, Amman and Cairo through intermediaries, and the likelihood of reaching an agreement has

increased, especially after what happened in Beijing on March 10.

Iran-Saudi Arabia deal may not directly relate to Riyadh's decision to block visa issuance for Cohen and his delegation, but it will be considered an important step in the process of building the lost trust of Tehran.

U.S., South Korea hold drills as North sub test-fires missiles



● AFP

The South Korean and U.S. militaries launched their biggest joint exercises in years Monday while North Korea said it tested submarine-fired cruise missiles in an apparent protest of the drills it views as an invasion rehearsal.

The South Korean-U.S. drills include a computer simulation and several combined field training exercises. South Korean officials said the field exercises would return to the scale of the allies' earlier largest field training that was last held in 2018.

The North's official Korean Central News Agency said that the launches of two cruise missiles from a submarine off its east coast showed a resolve to respond with "overwhelming powerful" force to the intensifying military maneuvers by "the U.S. imperialists and the South Korean puppet forces."

KCNA called the missiles "strategic" weapons and said their firings verified the posture of the country's "nuclear war deterrence."

It said the missiles flew more than two hours, drawing figure-eight-shaped patterns and demonstrating an ability to hit targets 1,500 kilometers (930 miles) away. The missiles were fired from the 8.24 Yongung ship, KCNA said, referencing a submarine that North Korea used to conduct its first submarine-launched ballistic missile test in 2016.

British PM vows to increase military spending

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak pledged Monday to increase U.K. military funding by 5 billion pounds (\$6 billion) over the next two years in response to Russia's military operation in Ukraine and the "epoch-defining challenge" posed by China.

The increase, part of a major update to U.K. foreign and defense policy, is less than military officials wanted. Sunak said the U.K. would increase military spending to 2.5% of gross domestic product "in the longer term," but did not set a date. Britain currently spends just over 2% of GDP on defense, and military chiefs want it to rise to 3%, AP reported.

The extra money will be used, in part, to replenish Britain's ammunition stocks, depleted from supplying Ukraine. Some will also go towards a U.K.-U.S.-Australia deal to build nuclear-powered submarines. Britain last produced a defense, security and foreign policy framework, known as the Integrated Review, in 2021. The government ordered an update in response to an increasingly volatile world. Russia's February 2022 operation in Ukraine upended European security, and the U.K. is also increasingly concerned about what the government calls "the epoch-defining challenge presented by the Chinese Communist Party's increasingly concerning military, financial and diplomatic activity."



● AFP

NEWS IN BRIEF

Polls: Erdogan lags opposition by more than 10 points

REUTERS — New polls show the Turkish opposition's presidential candidate, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, leading against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan by more than 10 percentage points ahead of elections on May 14 seen by many as the most consequential vote in Türkiye's history. The polls also show the opposition bloc, called the Nation Alliance, leading the parliamentary race, at least six points ahead of Erdogan's AK Party (AKP) and its allies. Erdogan faces the biggest challenge to his 20-year rule after the erosion of his popularity during a cost-of-living crisis.

Tunisia's parliament convenes for first time since 2021

AP — Tunisia's new parliament convened Monday, the first time the country has had a functioning legislature since the president had the previous parliament sealed off by the army in 2021.

The main opposition coalition declared it won't recognize the new parliament, whose members were chosen in December and January in elections boycotted by the president's opponents and ignored by the masses. Just 11% of voters cast ballots.

Rohingya camps fire 'planned sabotage': Bangladesh panel



● AP

AL JAZEERA — A fire that left thousands of Rohingya refugees homeless in Bangladesh camps was a "planned act of sabotage", says a panel investigating the blaze. Nearly 2,800 shelters and more than 90 facilities, including hospitals and learning centres, were destroyed in the fire on March 5, leaving more than 12,000 people without shelter, officials said. More than a million Rohingya live in tens of thousands of huts made of bamboo and thin plastic sheeting in camps in the border district of Cox's Bazar, most having fled a military-led crackdown in Myanmar in 2017.