

# Saudi Arabia World's Largest Arms Importer: SIPRI

RIYADH (Press TV) – Saudi Arabia has been the world's largest arms importer over the past five years and has boosted by 130 percent its major arms imports, a study by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) shows.

The results of the study also showed that the Riyadh regime accounted for 12 percent of global arms imports during the period from 2015 to 2019. Arms imports by countries in the Middle East increased by 61 per cent between 2010–14 and 2015–19, and accounted for 35 per cent of total global arms imports over the past five years. Saudi Arabia was the world's largest arms importer in 2015–19. Its imports of major arms increased by 130 per cent compared with the previous five-year period and it accounted for 12 per cent of global arms imports in 2015–19, the report said.

SIPRI added that despite continuation of the Saudi military aggression against its southern neighbor, "...both the USA and the UK continued to export arms to Saudi Arabia in 2015–19."

"A total of 73 percent of Saudi Arabia's arms imports came from the USA and 13 percent from the UK," the report added.

In March 2015, Saudi Arabia, with the help of a number of its allies, particularly the United Arab Emirates (UAE), launched the brutal campaign against Ye-



Saudi-led bombing in Yemen has inflicted widespread devastation on civilians

men, whose former President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi had fled to Riyadh a few months earlier after stepping down the previous year.

The Saudi-led campaign, code-named Operation Decisive Storm, was launched to achieve two main objectives: bringing Hadi, a staunch ally of Riyadh, back to power, and crushing the Houthi Ansarullah movement, whose fighters have proved to be of significant help to the Yemeni army in defending the Arab country against the invaders since the onset of the imposed war.

The U.S.-based Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), a nonprofit conflict-research organization, estimates that the war has claimed more than 100,000 lives over the past nearly five

years.

Elsewhere in its report on Monday, SIPRI said the UAE, which has also been militarily involved in Libya, was another huge importer of arms, making it "the eighth-largest arms importer in the world in 2015–19."

"In 2019, when foreign military involvement in Libya was condemned by the United Nations Security Council, the UAE had major arms import deals ongoing with Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Russia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, the UK and the USA," it added.

Since 2014, Libya has been split between two seats of power: the internationally-recognized government, which is supported by the UN, and another group based in the eastern city of Tobruk, supported

militarily by rebel forces, collectively known as the 'Libyan National Army' (LNA), under the command of renegade General Khalifa Haftar.

Abu Dhabi fully supports Haftar, who in April last year launched a deadly offensive to capture the capital Tripoli, the seat of the legitimate government.

SIPRI also revealed that the US had increased its total share of global arms exports to 36 percent from 2010 to 2019 through exporting major arms, adding that in the 2015-19 period its arms exports were 76 percent higher than those by Russia, the world's second-largest arms exporter.

"Half of U.S. arms exports in the past five years went to the Middle East, and half of those went to Saudi Arabia," said Pieter D. Wezeman, Senior Researcher at SIPRI, noting that major arms transferred from the US had gone to a total of 96 countries.

The Sweden-based research institute also said France witnessed its highest level of arms exports for any five-year period since 1990 as it exported 7.9 percent of the total global arms exports in 2015-19, showing a 72-percent jump compared to those of the 2010-14 period.

"The French arms industry has benefited from the demand for arms in Egypt, Qatar and India," said Diego Lopes Da Silva, a SIPRI researcher.

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Larijani wrote, demanding "urgent, effective and comprehensive" action to help Iran and other states contain the outbreak.

Larijani stressed that Iran is standing at the forefront of the fight against the disease, saying it is "regrettable" that the country has been "systematically subjected to unilateral U.S. sanctions either directly or indirectly at this very critical juncture."

Washington's "approach clearly violates the UN Charter and that of the World Health Organization (WHO) and has not only seriously hampered Iran's intensive efforts to help affected people and contain the spread of the coronavirus, but also left negative and undeniable impacts on all national, regional and international efforts to contain the virus", he said.

Larijani said Iran expects the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the entire global community to join voices and press the U.S. "unambiguously and based on their own principles" to lift the anti-Iran bans as soon as possible.

The illegal U.S. bans have severely impacted the Iranians' access to life-saving medical supplies.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has ordered the U.S. to lift the sanctions it has illegally re-imposed on humanitarian supplies to Iran, but Washington has ignored the demand.

## U.S.... (Continued From Page One)

is grappling with a coronavirus outbreak.

Zangeneh cast aspersions on the Trump administration's claims that Iran's imports of medicine and other humanitarian goods are exempt from the unilateral U.S. sanctions. "It's a big lie," the minister told Bloomberg.

Last week, online U.S. news publication The Intercept reported that a group with close ties to Donald Trump was pressuring pharmaceutical companies not to sell drugs to Tehran despite his claim that the U.S. was ready to aid Iran with the coronavirus outbreak.

The targeted companies include Bayer, Merck, Pfizer, Genzyme, AirSep, Medrad, Becton, Dickinson & Company, Eli Lilly, and Abbott Laboratories, with pro-Israeli United Against Nuclear Iran (UANI) urging them to "end their Iran business".

The report came after the United States said last Thursday that it had issued a license to permit some humanitarian trade transactions to be conducted with Iran's sanctioned central bank.

President Trump said later the U.S. was willing to aid Iran with its coronavirus outbreak, adding that "all they have to do is ask," just after he authorized the expansion of travel restrictions against Iran.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani shot back, saying the offer was insincere and that Washington had better first lift its sanctions on medical supplies to Iran if it really sought to help the Islamic Republic.

According to Tyler Cullis, an attorney specializing in sanctions law at Ferrari & Associates, U.S. sanctions "have had a long-term impact on Iran's ability to freely import medical supplies".

Zangeneh on Monday also questioned the U.S. leaders' sincerity in offering aid to Iran. "Do they think that we have billions of dollars in deposit in the international bank to come into us to use that money for buying the food and medicines?" he said.

The minister said that the sanctions have specifically targeted the Iranian people, adding the U.S. should be held to account for making life difficult for the Iranians, especially the poor. "I believe ... at some time in the future these should be asked in a criminal court," he said.

The Trump administration pulled the U.S. out of the Iran nuclear deal in 2018 and soon after unilaterally imposed sanctions on the Islamic Republic's oil exports, saying it wanted to bring the shipments down to zero.

China has dismissed the sanctions, saying they amount to "bullying" and has defended its trade with Iran as legitimate and legal.

The U.S. says Chinese companies continuing oil purchases from Iran are seriously worrying the White House. It has accused Chinese shipping companies of turning off their transponders to conceal the location of their cargoes.

In September, the U.S. announced sanctions on five Chinese nationals and six entities, including two Cosco Shipping Corporation subsidiaries, saying they had shipped Iranian crude oil in violation of the sanctions.

The coercive measures were similar to U.S. sanctions imposed in July on energy company Zuhai Zhenrong, one of Chi-

na's largest state-backed oil companies for transporting Iranian crude oil.

## Europe... (Continued From Page One)

in stark contrast to the rapid rise around the world, particularly in Italy, where more than 9,000 cases and 463 deaths have been reported -- the most severe outbreak elsewhere in the world.

In a desperate bid to stem the spread, Italy's Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte announced the entire country would be placed on lockdown from Tuesday.

"I am going to sign a decree that can be summarized as follows: I stay at home," Conte said.

"Travel must be avoided across the entire peninsula unless it is justified by professional reasons, by cases of need or for health reasons."

The measures extended a restricted zone that Italy had imposed on Sunday across the north, including the major cities of Milan and Venice, where streets were semi-deserted.

The national restrictions will run until April 3 and mean that schools and universities will all immediately close.

Top-level football matches and all other sporting events are also being suspended for the coming month.

But it was not immediately clear how the measures would be enforced -- trains and flights continued to operate into and out of Milan and Venice on Monday despite the earlier decree.

In neighboring France, the government has banned gatherings of more than 1,000 people, leading to the cancellation of music concerts and other cultural and sporting events.

Worldwide more than 114,000 cases have been recorded in 105 countries and territories. Africa, Latin America and Oceania are the only regions yet to report major outbreaks.

Panic buying of products such as sanitizing handwash has spread across the world and officials in countries with no outbreak have begun imposing draconian measures -- India for example has banned foreign cruise ships from docking.

Senior officials have not been spared by the disease. Several Iranian top-brass succumbed in the early phase of the spread and the head of the Port Authority in the U.S. city of New York tested positive on Monday.

There are concerns that the United States could become another hotspot, with at least 26 deaths and 605 confirmed infections so far.

Uncertainty over the spread of COVID-19, coupled with a collapse in oil prices, created panic on the markets during what some dubbed "Black Monday," with the Dow Jones index losing more than 2,000 points.

The run on stocks robbed Trump of one of his main talking points ahead of the November presidential election -- he has often flagged booming markets as proof that his economic policies are working.

Market jitters eased on Tuesday as oil prices jumped as much as eight percent after plunging by a third the previous day, in the worst session since the 1991 Gulf War.

The bounce helped fuel a rally in equities in Asia and Europe but observers remained concerned over the virus spread.

## Bin Salman's... (Continued From Page One)

into historical oblivion when the crown prince eventually becomes king.

### Royal Drama

King Salman could have made Ahmed crown prince after his son's many scandals and mismanagement of the political affairs and foreign relations of the kingdom, above all the scandal over Jamal Khashoggi's death in 2018.

But the king missed an opportunity and now the arrest of Prince Ahmed removes a symbolic figure who is potentially capable of restoring the semblance of continuity and respectability in the royal household.

Once a secure monarchy with powerful princes who successfully contained all sorts of political, economic and security threats, Saudi Arabia is now plagued by uncertainty and dangers.

In the process of consolidating the Al Saud's grip on power, the royals have deprived all Saudis of the right to live in an open society with political institutions that can guarantee the survival of the kingdom and the participation of its citizens in the decision-making process. Unfortunately, Saudis have been turned into spectators watching the country's royal drama unfold.

\* Madawi al-Rasheed is visiting professor at the Middle East Institute of the London School of Economics.

Courtesy: Middle East Eye

## Lebanon Urges Talks With Foreign Bondholders

BEIRUT (Xinhua) – Lebanese Finance Minister Ghazi Wazne has called for holding flexible negotiations with Lebanon's foreign bondholders in a bid to avoid lawsuits over its default on debt.

"If bondholders show flexibility with Lebanon then we will be going to an organized debt restructuring but if not then we may face lawsuits by lenders," Wazne told the LBCI TV channel in an interview.

He noted that the government has appointed a legal consultant to negotiate with foreign bond-

holders over Lebanon's debt restructuring.

Wazne said that foreign lenders cannot put their hands on the assets belonging to the government in foreign countries, namely Lebanese embassies because they enjoy diplomatic immunity.

"Also, we have been told by our legal consultant that it is difficult for lenders to acquire our gold or the Middle East Airlines because they belong to the Central Bank," he said.

Wazne assured that there are

five committees currently preparing a program to be shared by the International Monetary Fund which will offer its technical advice.

The minister said that the priority of the government is to solve the electricity problem which costs the treasury around 1.5 billion U.S. dollars.

He said that the government may also increase the value added tax on luxurious products in addition to imposing taxes on some imports in a bid to reduce the trade deficit.

"We will continue halting employment in the public sector in addition to fighting against tax evasion and corruption," he said.

Lebanon has for the first time in its history announced its decision to default on its debt amid an increase in its public debt to an alarming level of over 90 billion U.S. dollars.

On Monday, the Fitch global ratings agency downgraded Lebanon's foreign currency rating from CC, indicating very high levels of credit risk to C, meaning near default.

## Turkey Issues New Arrest Warrant for Jailed Businessman

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) – A Turkish court issued a new arrest warrant against Turkish businessman and philanthropist Osman Kavala, who was re-arrested last month after being acquitted in a separate trial, one of his lawyers told Reuters.

Kavala had been cleared of charges related to nationwide protests in 2013, but was re-arrested the following day, accused of attempting to overthrow the constitutional order in a failed coup in 2016.

A second arrest warrant was issued in relation to the coup attempt, this time for espionage.

Court documents seen by Reuters said Kavala had been in contact with a man alleged to have spied for foreign governments.

Kavala denies all the charges. After his re-arrest last month, he said President Tayyip Erdogan had intervened to prevent his release from prison.

"The government should find a different occupation for itself," Kavala's lawyer Ilkan Koyuncu said.

The cases against Kavala have been criticized by Turkey's Western al-

lies and rights activists who say the charges are political.

"#OsmanKavala must be released, not face further fabricated charges that are manifestly unfounded," Milena Buyum, Turkey campaigner for Amnesty International, said on Twitter.

In December, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) said there was insufficient evidence to support the accusation that Kavala had been involved in the abortive coup. That ruling will become final on Tuesday.

Deniz Tolga Aytore, another lawyer for Kavala, was quoted in the court records as saying that the new warrant was aimed at circumventing the implementation of the ECHR ruling.

The independence of Turkey's judiciary has been hotly debated in recent years. Critics say court rulings are influenced by politicians but Erdogan and his ruling AK Party say the judiciary makes its decisions independently.

Ankara says the coup attempt was carried out by supporters of the U.S.-based Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen, who has lived in self-imposed exile in Pennsylvania since 1999. Gulen has denied any involvement.

## Lebanon Records First Death From Coronavirus

BEIRUT (Dispatches) – Lebanon recorded its first death from coronavirus on Tuesday, local broadcasters said, adding that the patient had been in quarantine since returning from Egypt.

The government has halted flights for non-residents from epicenters of the

virus, shut schools and warned against public gatherings as the total number of cases rose to 41 this week.

Meanwhile Turkish Health Minister Fahrettin Koca said on Tuesday it is highly likely that there is a coronavirus outbreak in Turkey, but there have not

been any confirmed cases for now.

"Europe is very late in taking measures and it is still being too slow," Koca said. "It is highly likely this outbreak is currently in Turkey. There are no confirmed cases of this virus," he added.