UK Arms Exports in 2024 – Addendum

26th March 2026

CAAT's annual report on UK arms exports in 2024 reported that the regular statistics from UK Defence and Security Exports (UKDSE) on the value of arms export contracts secured by UK companies had not been published. Based on an FOI response from the Department of Business and Trade, in which UKDSE sits, we had concluded that the data had been discontinued.

However, in fact the annual UK Defence Exports Data for 2024 has now been published, but by the Ministry of Defence instead of UKDSE, although the latter conducted the survey of companies that is the source for the data.

This brief addendum to the CAAT report for 2024 summarises the key findings of this data release, and compares it with other sources of information on UK arms exports discussed in the annual report.

The value of UK arms export contracts recorded by the survey in 2024 was **£13.2 billion**, an increase of 10.9% over the figure for 2023 in nominal terms, or 8.1% in real terms. However, the 5-year average remained almost constant at **£10.1 billion**, and the total for 2020-2024, of £46.5 billion, is actually 15% *lower* in real terms than the corresponding total for 2015-19, (which was £46.2 billion, almost identical in current prices).

It should be noted that the figures for 2022 and 2023 from previous editions of the data (and reported in previous CAAT annual reports) have been revised downwards substantially, by 15% and 18% respectively, due to double counting and other errors, according to the new data release. Thus, the previously reported figure for 2023 of £14.5 billion, a record, has been revised to £11.9 billion, and the 2022 figure of £9.7 billion down to £8.5 billion. This is more than a minor revision, and represents serious errors in methodology in previous years. It can only be hoped that the current figures are more accurate.

The revisions rather changes the picture previously reported in e.g. CAAT's 2023 annual report, which suggested a generally rising trend in this measure of UK arms exports. While there is a clear increase in 2024, the long-term trend (see figure 5) shows that the 5-year average peaked around 2015-19 at around £11.8b a year in 2024 prices, about 50% higher than the trough of 2001-2005, but has subsequently fallen, and is now roughly at the same level in real terms as the period 1995-1999, during the brief post-Cold War "peace dividend". However, there has been a clear increase over the past 3 years, and the provisional figure of "over £20 billion" released by the MOD in December suggests this is continuing.

Regional distribution

The UK Defence Export Statistics do not break the figures down by recipient country, but they do by region: Africa, Asia & Pacific, Europe, Latin America, Middle East, North America (US & Canada), and "Mixed or unknown", where companies have provided aggregated figures not broken down by region, or including contracts to customers in multiple regions.

For the first time, a clear majority, 54% or £7.1 billion of the contracts were to recipients in Europe. This is 59% higher than the figure for 2023, and *five times* higher than the £1.4b sold to Europe in 2022. This is the result of massive European rearmament since the outbreak of the Ukraine war, which is still accelerating. The figures presumably do not even include a large proportion of UK arms supplies to Ukraine, as much of these supplies were donations by the MOD rather than contracts won by UK companies, although it would include supplies of new arms paid for by the UK government but produced and sold by UK arms companies.

The Middle East, traditionally the largest recipient region, accounted for 24.8% of the sales, or £3.3b, while £1.7 billion, or 12.9%, went to North America. Over the longer period of 2015-2024, however (see figure 6), the Middle East remained the largest customer for UK arms sales, at 42.6%, followed by Europe (24.6%), North America (16.5%), and Mixed/Unknown (9.5%). Just 6% went to Asia & the Pacific, and less than 1% to Africa and Latin America combined.

Contracts vs licences

In previous reports, CAAT has estimated, based on a long-term comparison of the value of arms export contracts with the value of Single Individual Export Licences reported in government export licensing statistics (see the main 2024 annual report), that roughly half of UK arms exports are conducted using 'open' licences, which allow unlimited deliveries and do not have a financial value attached. This is based on the fact that, over a long period (say 10 years), the value of contracts has tended to be roughly double – sometimes more, sometimes less – the value of single licences. The figures for contracts are higher because they include sales regardless of what type of licence might eventually be used to export the goods.

Based on the new figures, with the major downward revision for 2022-23, it may be appropriate to revise this estimate. Over the period 2015-24, the value of contracts was roughly 65% higher than the value of single licences. This is not a like-for-like comparison, in that some export licences issued during the period will be for contracts signed before 2015, while some contracts signed during 2015-24 will not have export licences issued till after 2024. However, by measuring over a 10-year period it allows at least a reasonable estimate of the relationship between the two measures. Based on this, we may now estimate that, currently and in recent years, **roughly 40% of UK arms exports are conducted using open licences.**

Figure 5: UK arms export contracts 1999-2024

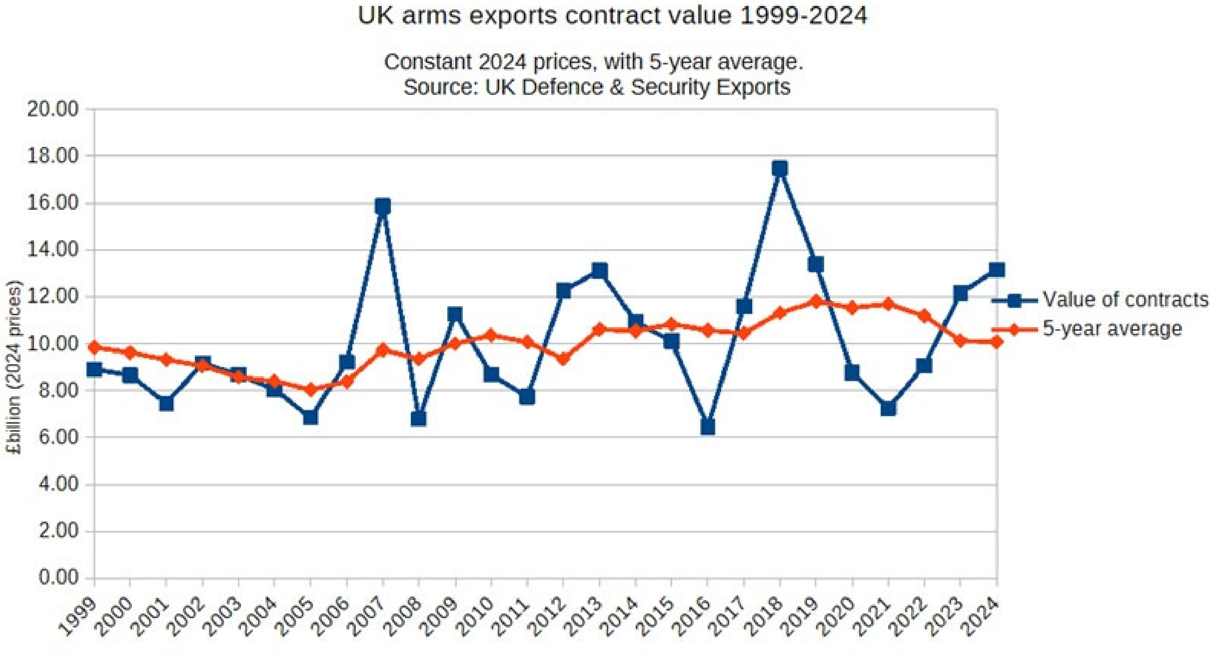

Figure 6: UK arms export contracts by region 2015-24