

The role of the arms trade in bilateral and multilateral ties with the MENA region: A Franco-German perspective

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The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is a key market for Western and Central European arms suppliers. MENA countries accounted for 31% of total European arms exports in the previous decade (2012-2021). Within Europe, the largest arms exporters include France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Spain.¹ This paper focuses on France and Germany to evaluate the role that transfers of major conventional weapon systems play in their ties to the MENA region. From the perspective of the supplying state, arms sales are often considered as an instrument of foreign policy.² However, the literature has shown that while that is true to some extent for the largest arms exporter which is the United States, it is less so when it comes to middle powers.³ The key factor here is that, given the more limited size of the domestic market, arms sales are often seen as an imperative to financially sustain the domestic arms industry, inter alia through economies of scale.⁴ Hence, while arms sales could still be used as a tool of foreign policy, middle powers like European states also face domestic economic constraints that prompt them to promote arms exports, in turn lessening their effectiveness as a diplomatic tool. Indeed, the necessity to sell also provides leverage from the buyers' perspective. The bargaining power lies increasingly on the buyers' side.⁵

Although one may argue that one of the goals of foreign policy is to promote domestic firms' interests and gain market shares, arms exports are also considered as contributing to defence diplomacy, broadly defined as 'a component of public diplomacy that seeks (...) to secure peace, maintain the territorial integrity of the state, and cooperate in the

1 Source for arms transfers data: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, March 2022 update <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>. For definition of Western Europe, Central Europe, Middle East, North Africa, see SIPRI Regional Coverage. <https://www.sipri.org/databases/regional-coverage>.

2 Krause, K., *Arms and the State. Patterns of Military Production and Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1992.

3 Although France and Germany rank amongst the world's top largest arms exporters, they can be labelled as middle powers when it comes to military capabilities and diplomatic clout when compared to the United States. See also here: Giegerich, B. et. al., 'Military capability and international status', IISS Military Balance blog, 4 July 2018, <https://www.iiss.org/en/online-analysis/military-balance/2018/07/military-capability-and-international-status/>.

4 The economic argument for sustaining arms exports has been debated largely elsewhere. For more in-depth discussion of this topic, please see, among others: Martin, S., 'The subsidy savings from reducing UK arms exports'; *Journal of Economic Studies*, Vol. 26 No. 1, pp. 15-37; Smith, R., Humm, A., Fontanel, J., 'The Economics of Exporting Arms', *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Sep., 1985), pp. 239-247.

5 Soubrier, E., 'La place de la France à l'international au prisme de ses partenariats stratégiques : les cas du Qatar et des Emirats Arabes Unis (EAU), *Les Champs de Mars*, vol.30, no.1, pp.181-190.



international tasks aimed at avoiding the emergence of conflict'. One of the means of defence diplomacy is to generate trust between armed forces of different countries.⁶

What have France and Germany gained from their arms exports to the Middle East that could be seen as contributing to defence diplomacy? The causal mechanisms are of course difficult to trace. Elements that could demonstrate such gains cannot be easily found in open source and may not be so direct. The absence of proof thus does not necessarily mean there is an absence of relationship between arms sale and the potential defence diplomacy/foreign policy benefits. To be able to get as close as possible to these elements of evidence, this paper explores specific case studies: French exports of 36 Rafale combat aircraft to Qatar and German exports of four submarines to Egypt.

The two case studies will first look for the interest in the recipient states in acquiring this capability and then look for reasons why the supplier states would be interested in propping up these capabilities – taking the economic and industrial interests for granted in both instances. The question we seek to answer is whether there is indeed something more than just company and industrial interests for the supplier states in approving these exports. Since a lot of research has already been done on this topic – the following does not bring to light new data/information but rather relies on existing work.

France's 36 Rafale combat aircraft to Qatar

According to SIPRI, the MENA region accounted for 41% of France's total arms deliveries between 2012 and 2021. Based on SIPRI figures, Qatar was France's 2nd largest arms recipient.⁷ This was mainly due to the contract of 36 Rafale combat aircraft, 24 ordered in 2015 and 12 more in 2017.⁸

Qatar's interest in purchasing new combat aircraft was manifold. The 2010 decade saw a rise of airborne threats in the MENA region, with the spread of missile and UAVs. Furthermore, as in the West, the use of air power was seen to reduce the need to send 'boots on the ground', as Gulf countries' defence policies were becoming more assertive. These developments prompted regional states to improve their air combat capabilities.⁹

Furthermore, when Qatar initially requested proposals from leading Western defence manufacturers in 2010,¹⁰ it operated an ageing fleet of 12 Mirage-2000-5 delivered in 1997-99, a relatively small air force compared to its neighbours.¹¹ By the end of 2010, the UAE, a diplomatic rival of Qatar, operated 142 ground-attack fighter aircraft, a mix of F-16 and

6 Cheyre, J.E., '20. Defence Diplomacy', in Cooper, A., et. al., (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) pp.369-382, p. 376, 2013.

7 Wezeman, P.D., et. al., 'Trends in International Arms Transfers', SIPRI Fact Sheet, March 2022, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/fs_2203_at_2021.pdf.

8 Dassault Aviation, 'The exercise by Qatar of the option for 12 additional Rafale becomes effective', Press Release, 27 Mar. 2018, <https://www.dassault-aviation.com/en/group/press/press-kits/exercise-qatar-option-12-additional-rafale-becomes-effective/>.

9 IISS, 'The Defence Policy and Economics of the Middle East and North Africa', Research Paper, 1st June 2022, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/research-paper/2022/05/the-defence-policy-and-economics-of-the-middle-east-and-north-africa>, p.16, p.20, p.22.

10 Chuter, A., 'Qatar Seeks Up to 40 Fighter Jets', *Defense News*, 19 July 2010 [Paper archives, SIPRI]

11 International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), 'Middle East and North Africa', *The Military Balance* (London: Routledge), pp.321-324, 2018.



Mirage-2000-9 fleet.¹² Thus the first contract awarded to Dassault Aviation for 24 Rafale combat aircraft, for which negotiations had been initiated in 2010, most likely responded to a modernization and upgrade process for the Qatar Emiri Air Forces in parallel to a broader increase in the country's military standing.¹³ This despite the fact that Qatar remains one of the smallest air forces in the region in personnel numbers, ahead of just Lebanon and Bahrain.¹⁴

However, the second contract, signed in December 2017, could respond more to a broader geopolitical strategy on the part of Doha. Indeed, this contract for an additional 12 Rafale combat aircraft, came alongside similar orders for 36 Boeing F-15QA Advanced Eagles, and 24 'Tranche 4' Eurofighter Typhoons. This split order – despite the training, operational and logistical costs that three different combat aircraft types entail – points to the fact that Qatar was more looking to cement defence partnerships with Western countries rather than directly filling in a capability gap.¹⁵ This could be all the more true since Qatar was undergoing tense relations with its neighbours, following a first political rift in 2013/2014,¹⁶ which burst out in a full-fledged diplomatic crisis later in 2017, although the combat aircraft deals were already in the pipeline. This crisis had some military aspects, according to Al Jazeera which presents the Qatari perspective. Qatar accused a military aircraft from the UAE of violating its airspace,¹⁷ and accused Saudi Arabia and the UAE of intending to invade.¹⁸ Again according to Al Jazeera, Bahrain also threatened to revive the territorial dispute with Qatar.¹⁹

Conversely, what was the French interest in assisting Qatar in upgrading and expanding the Qatari Air Force? France has long been a key provider of weapons for the Qatari Armed

12 IISS, 'Middle East and North Africa', *The Military Balance*, (London: Routledge), p.334, 2011.

13 Lake, J., 'The story behind Qatar's Dassault Rafale DQ/EQ fleet', *Key Aero*, 11 May 2021, <https://www.key.aero/article/story-behind-qatars-dassault-rafale-dqeq-fleet>.

14 IISS, *The Military Balance 2023*, (London: Routledge), 2023.

15 Roberts, D.B., 'The Gulf Monarchies' Armed Forces at the Crossroads', *Etudes de l'IFRI/Focus stratégique*, Vol. 80, May 2018, https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/fs80_roberts_gulf_monarchies.pdf, p.33; IISS, 'The Defence Policy and Economics of the Middle East and North Africa', *Research Paper*, 1st June 2022, p.28, p.97, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/research-paper/2022/05/the-defence-policy-and-economics-of-the-middle-east-and-north-africa>.

16 Mc Dowall, A., Westall, S., 'Qatar rift is pivotal test for disunited Gulf families', *Reuters*, 6 March 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/qatar-gulf-idUKL6NoM238G20140306>; McDowall A., Bakr, A., 'Three Gulf Arab states recall envoys in rift with Qatar', *Reuters*, 5 Mar. 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/gulf-qatar-ambassadors-saudi-uae-bahrain-idINDEEA2407T20140305>; Soubrier, E., 'Air Power Procurement in the Gulf: From Sparkling Mirages to Strategic Ambitions', *Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington*, 6 Dec. 2019, <https://agsiw.org/air-power-procurement-in-the-gulf-from-sparkling-mirages-to-strategic-ambitions/>

17 Qatar files UN complaints as 'UAE jets breach airspace', *Al Jazeera*, 13 Jan. 2018, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/01/qatar-files-complaints-uae-jets-breach-airspace-180113125621814.html>.

18 'Defence minister: Saudi, UAE intended to invade Qatar', *Al Jazeera*, 3 Feb. 2018, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/02/defence-minister-saudi-uae-intended-invade-qatar-180203091422735.html>.

19 'Bahrain re-opens border dispute with Qatar', *Al Jazeera*, 5 Nov. 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/11/5/bahrain-re-opens-border-dispute-with-qatar>.



Forces.²⁰ France and Qatar signed two defence-related agreements in the 1990s.²¹ Qatari and French interests further aligned to some extent in the wake of the Arab Spring. Qatar contributed to mobilizing the Arab League to approve the military intervention in Libya.²² Qatar contributed to enforcing the no-fly zone over Libya and provided anti-Gaddafi militias with logistical support and training. Qatar also contributed to French military operations in the Sahel region. And French military personnel were deployed to the US-base in Qatar, Al-Udeid, where the coalition against ISIS was operating. The latter enabled the French Armed Forces to coordinate French aerospace operations for maritime surveillance in the Gulf and evacuations from Afghanistan.²³

However, French and Qatari interests do not always align. Although Qatar has assisted France in Libya and the Sahel region, and supported the anti-ISIS coalition, Qatar has also been accused of financing Islamist groups, which would run contrary to French counterterrorism efforts.²⁴ Furthermore, French diplomacy has adopted a hard stance in the JCPOA negotiations with Iran, whereas Qatar is reportedly closest to Iran among GCC countries. Finally, France is also militarily supporting the United Arab Emirates (UAE), as evidenced by a more recent Rafale combat aircraft contract with Abu Dhabi, whereas Qatar and the UAE are regional rivals. This rivalry however is expressed on the diplomatic stage rather than the military one, which questions why weapons appear to play a key role in this competition.

French interest in assisting Qatar extends beyond the strategic realm. At the aggregated level, French imports from Qatar remain relatively limited²⁵ – although this may change post-war in Ukraine due to the increased importance of Qatar's natural gas reserves. Nonetheless, the market is key for some of France's largest companies. TotalEnergies has been a long-term partner for Qatari oil fields exploitation,²⁶ and Qatar Airways operates a sizable fleet of Airbus aircraft.²⁷ Furthermore, even though the first Rafale contract was signed under the presidency of Francois Hollande, negotiations started during Nicolas Sarkozy's term. During the latter's mandate, the Franco-Qatari relationship expanded to new areas, including Qatari investments in leading French companies, looking for cash in

20 Soubrier, E., 'La place de la France à l'international au prisme de ses partenariats stratégiques : les cas du Qatar et des Emirats Arabes Unis (EAU), Les Champs de Mars, vol.30, no.1, pp.181-190.

21 'Que dit le Livre Blanc sur les accords de défense?', 2008, <http://archives.livreblancdefenseetsecurite.gouv.fr/2008/IMG/pdf/06.2-QueditleLBSurlesaccordsdedefense.pdf>.

22 Bauchard, D., 'Le jeu de la France dans le Golfe : entre continuité et ruptures', Confluences Méditerranée, vol. 97, no.2, pp.117-129, 2016.

23 Quentin, D., 'Rapport autorisant l'approbation de l'accord entre le Gouvernement de la République française et le Gouvernement de l'État du Qatar relatif au statut de leurs forces', Assemblée Nationale, Commission des Affaires Étrangères, 1 Dec. 2021, https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/rapports/cion_afetr/15b4755_rapport-fond#_Toc256000010; Cadic, O., 'Projet de loi autorisant l'approbation de l'accord entre le Gouvernement de la République française et le Gouvernement de l'État du Qatar établissant un partenariat relatif à la sécurité de la Coupe du Monde de football de 2022', Rapport n° 462 (2021-2022) Sénat, 9 Feb. 2022, <https://www.senat.fr/rap/121-462/121-4622.html>.

24 Barthe, B., Biseau, G., 'France-Qatar, une amitié pleine de ressource', Le Monde, 11 Nov. 2022, https://www.lemonde.fr/m-le-mag/article/2022/11/11/france-qatar-une-amitie-pleine-de-ressource_6149417_4500055.html.

25 France, Ministry of Economy and Finance, Direction générale du Trésor, Service économique de Doha, 'Relation commerciale bilatérale entre la France et le Qatar', 28 Feb. 2022, <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/PagesInternationales/Pages/5ac1f72a-2f7a-4cff-af5b-fe07b883a812/files/bco71ed4-ad73-49d9-bed5-66fd0c39decc>.



the aftermath of the financial crisis;²⁸ including investments in French real estate following a special tax exemption regulation in 2008, and in one of the leading French football clubs.²⁹

Overall, the Franco-Qatari relationship thus appears to be built on wider ties than the sole military component. From a strategic perspective it goes beyond arms procurement, as Qatar and France appear to share some interests regarding key strategic issues in the region. Even though there are clearly industrial interests, Dassault Aviation's but also other leading French firms such as TotalEnergies and Airbus, they appear as one element in a broader picture, where arms transfers do appear to play a role in France's defence diplomacy vis-à-vis Qatar.

Germany's four submarines to Egypt

According to SIPRI, the Middle East and North Africa region accounted for 22% of Germany's total arms deliveries over the past decade (2012-2021). In the MENA region, Egypt was one of Germany's top 3 recipients, with Turkey and Israel. This was mainly due to the contract of 4 submarines delivered during that period.³⁰

Although the first contract was only approved by German authorities at the end of 2011, there had been long-going discussions between Egypt and Germany on the acquisition of submarines. Egypt considered purchasing German submarines since at least January 2005 – initially second-hand Type 206A submarines.³¹ These would have been an upgrade on Egypt's Chinese Type-033 submarines delivered in the early 1980s, which Egypt was only one of two countries in the world still operating.³² These initial negotiations did not appear to lead to any tangible outcomes. It could be that the negotiations were dropped with the start of the Arab Spring in 2011 which led to the toppling of Hosni Mubarak in February that year. Germany for a while stopped all arms export licenses to Egypt.³³

26 Total Energies, Total in Qatar Activities, <https://corporate.totalenergies.qa/en/total-qatar/total>; Barthe, B., Biseau, G., 'France-Qatar, une amitié pleine de ressource', Le Monde, 11 Nov. 2022, https://www.lemonde.fr/m-le-mag/article/2022/11/11/france-qatar-une-amitie-pleine-de-ressource_6149417_4500055.html.

27 Qatar Airways, 'Our fleet', <https://www.qatarairways.com/en/fleet.html>.

28 Soubrier, E., 'La place de la France à l'international au prisme de ses partenariats stratégiques : les cas du Qatar et des Emirats Arabes Unis (EAU), Les Champs de Mars, vol.30, no.1, pp.181-190.

29 Leser, E., 'Comment le Qatar a acheté la France (et s'est payé sa classe politique)', Slate, 6 June 2011, <https://www.slate.fr/story/39077/qatar-france>; Kayali, L., et. al., 'EU's Qatar corruption scandal brings French links under scrutiny', Politico Europe, 14 Dec. 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-yannick-jadotqatar-eu-france-corruption-scandal-doha/>; Qatar Embassy in France, 'Relations France-Qatar', <https://paris.embassy.qa/fr/r%C3%A9publique-fran%C3%A7aise/rerelations-france-qatar>; Barthe, B., Biseau, G., 'France-Qatar, une amitié pleine de ressource', Le Monde, 11 Nov. 2022, https://www.lemonde.fr/m-le-mag/article/2022/11/11/france-qatar-une-amitie-pleine-de-ressource_6149417_4500055.html.

30 SIPRI, International Arms Transfers Database, Trade Registers (Feb. 2023), https://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/trade_register.php.

31 Egypt considers German Navy submarine buys, Jane's Defence Weekly, 12 Jan. 2005 [SIPRI Paper archives].

32 IISS, 'The Defence Policy and Economics of the Middle East and North Africa', Research Paper, 1st June 2022, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/research-paper/2022/05/the-defence-policy-and-economics-of-the-middle-east-and-north-africa>, p.115.



Egypt's interest in modernizing its Navy intensified since 2009/2010, when exploration of gas fields in the Eastern Mediterranean intensified.³⁴ Discoveries of new gas fields exacerbated rivalries in the subregion and thus likely prompted Egypt to ramp up investments in its maritime capabilities, to protect economic interests.³⁵ It is unclear when the negotiations between Germany and Egypt resumed on the submarine deal, but as it was approved late 2011,³⁶ by then the potential for new gas fields must have been on the mind of Egyptian policymakers.

From Cairo's perspective, the security situation also deteriorated in the Red Sea due to the worsening conflict in Yemen in the years after the Arab Spring.³⁷ Information is lacking as to when negotiations for an additional pair of Type 209/1400 submarines started, but Egypt decided to 'take the option' for additional units in 2015 which was then approved by Germany.³⁸ This additional expansion for the Egyptian Navy thus seems to match a timeline of heightened threat perceptions.³⁹

As the Type 209/1400 submarines operate primarily in shallow coastal waters, they would appear as a good fit for Egypt's operations in the Red Sea.⁴⁰ It has also been described as a well-suited ship for surveillance and intelligence gathering missions, and special forces operations, which would correspond to Egypt's requirements in both the Eastern Mediterranean and the Red Sea given the challenges it considers to be facing.⁴¹ The enhanced submarine capability can further contribute to the monitoring and protection of submarine cables.⁴² Additionally, the introduction of new naval equipment was accompanied by a change in military posture, with the Egyptian Navy divided in two fleets,

33 'Egypt unrest raises questions over German arms trade', Business Recorder, 8 Feb. 2011, <https://www.brecorder.com/news/3844120>; 'Germany freezes arms exports to Egypt', Egypt Independent, 4 Feb. 2011, <https://egyptindependent.com/germany-freezes-arms-exports-egypt/>.

34 Shin, S.Y., Kim, T., 'Eastern Mediterranean Gas Discoveries: Local and Global Impact', Middle East Policy, vol. 28, no. 1, pp.135-146, 2021. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/mepo.12546>.

35 Trosi, F., 'Egypt and the development of its national Navy: how Cairo is responding to the new challenges of the Mediterranean and the Red Sea', Centro Studi Internazionali, 14 Apr. 2021, <https://www.cesi-italia.org/en/articles/egypt-and-the-development-of-its-national-navy-how-cairo-is-responding-to-the-new-challenges-of-the-mediterranean-and-the-red-sea>; Karagiannis, E., 'The Coming Naval Arms Race in the Eastern Mediterranean', RUSI Commentary, 22 July 2021, <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/coming-naval-arms-race-eastern-mediterranean>; IISS, *The Military Balance 2021*, (London: Routledge), 2021.

36 Von Hammerstein, K., et. al., 'How the Merkel Doctrine Is Changing Berlin Policy', Spiegel International, 3 Dec. 2012, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/german-weapons-exports-on-the-rise-as-merkel-doctrine-takes-hold-a-870596.html>.

37 Dunne, C. W., 'The Complicated Nature of Red Sea Geopolitics', Arab Center Washington DC, 27 Oct. 2021, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-complicated-nature-of-red-sea-geopolitics/>.

38 Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems, 'Naming and launching of fourth Egyptian submarine', 29 Sep. 2020, <https://www.thyssenkrupp-marinesystems.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/press-detail-page/naming-and-launching-of-fourth-egyptian-submarine-88518>.

39 Trosi, F., 'Egypt and the development of its national Navy: how Cairo is responding to the new challenges of the Mediterranean and the Red Sea', Centro Studi Internazionali, 14 Apr. 2021, <https://www.cesi-italia.org/en/articles/egypt-and-the-development-of-its-national-navy-how-cairo-is-responding-to-the-new-challenges-of-the-mediterranean-and-the-red-sea>.

40 Hebestreit, S. 'Deutsche U-Boote für Ägypten', Frankfurter Rundschau, 19 Jan. 2019, <https://www.fr.de/politik/deutsche-u-boote-aegypten-11333979.html>.

41 Emam, A., 'Egypt Boosts Navy with New German Submarine', Insider Over, 11 Apr. 2020, <https://www.insideover.com/war/egypt-boosts-navy-with-new-german-submarine.html>.

and the opening of new naval bases, one in the Mediterranean and one in the Red Sea.⁴³ This confirms that the purchase of submarines was from Egypt's perspective a move to enhance its capabilities in terms of deterrence, power projection, and protection of economic interests.

Germany's interest in supporting the Egyptian Navy appears quite strong, since besides the submarines, German shipbuilder ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems also signed a contract to supply Egypt's Navy with four frigates.⁴⁴ Hermes, the export credit lender, supported the deal, providing the loans for part of the contracts.⁴⁵ However, are there any indications that these exports responded to more than purely industrial interests?

The negotiations for the initial pair of submarines seem to correspond to a period when the German government was more willing to export arms for strategic considerations.⁴⁶ This corresponds to what weekly *Der Spiegel* labelled 'the Merkel doctrine', based on then-Chancellor Angela Merkel's statements: 'The EU and NATO are dependent on other countries, especially emerging nations, taking more responsibility in the future, (.). "[She is] convinced that it is in our interest to enable partners to effectively participate in upholding or re-establishing security and peace in their regions.'⁴⁷ This doctrine was upheld during the time of Merkel's CDU-CSU party in coalition with the FDP between 2009 and 2013, which would have been during the time that the first two submarines for Egypt were negotiated and approved. Besides this indication of Germany's growing interest in using arms exports as a strategic tool, one could argue that Germany had an interest in protecting trade in the Red Sea. Germany itself is a large exporting nation which relies on safe trading routes for its economic prosperity and security.

However, besides this, there is little evidence of what the partnership with Egypt would contribute to Germany's wider strategic considerations. There are indications that cooperation in terms of counterterrorism and illegal migration flows are also part of the

42 Trosi, F., 'Egypt and the development of its national Navy: how Cairo is responding to the new challenges of the Mediterranean and the Red Sea', *Centro Studi Internazionali*, 14 Apr. 2021, <https://www.cesi-italia.org/en/articles/egypt-and-the-development-of-its-national-navy-how-cairo-is-responding-to-the-new-challenges-of-the-mediterranean-and-the-red-sea>.

43 IISS, 'The Defence Policy and Economics of the Middle East and North Africa', Research Paper, 1st June 2022, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/research-paper/2022/05/the-defence-policy-and-economics-of-the-middle-east-and-north-africa>, p.117.

44 Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems, 'Major ceremony in Bremerhaven; Egyptian Navy accepts first frigate from thyssenkrupp Marine Systems', 14 Oct. 2022, <https://www.thyssenkrupp-marinesystems.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/press-detail-page/major-ceremony-in-bremerhaven--egyptian-navy-accepts-first-frigate-from-thyssenkrupp-marine-systems-162043>.

45 See for instance, *Hermesdeckungen, Exportkredigarantien der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 2015 Annual Report, p. 66 <https://d-nb.info/1145078141/34> ; Deutscher Bundestag, *Schriftliche Fragen mit den in der Woche vom 2. September 2013 eingegangenen Antworten der Bundesregierung*, Drucksache 17/14712, 6 Sep. 2013, <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/17/147/1714712.pdf>, p.49.

46 Duquet, N. (ed.), 'Business as usual? Assessing the impact of the Arab Spring on European arms export control policies', *Flemish Peace Research Institute*, Mar. 2014, https://vlaamsvredesinstituut.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Report-business-as-usual_web-1.pdf.

47 Von Hammersetein, K., 'How the Merkel Doctrine is Changing Berlin Policy', *Spiegel International*, 3 Dec. 2021, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/german-weapons-exports-on-the-rise-as-merkel-doctrine-takes-hold-a-870596.html>.

relationship between the two countries. It is however not possible to evaluate how close and effective Egypt's contributions are in this domain for Germany's interests.⁴⁸

Even assuming that the counter-terrorism partnership was successful, at the same time, the deals even appear to contradict some of Germany's key foreign policy stances which is supporting Israel. One specificity of Germany's foreign policy towards the Middle East is its strong support for Israel.⁴⁹ In 2008, Angela Merkel summarized this relationship, in the German view, in a speech at Knesset: for her, Germany holds a special responsibility for Israel's security, and this is part of Germany's 'raison d'être'.⁵⁰ Similarly, former foreign minister Heiko Maas in 2021 stated that 'solidarity with Israel is a cornerstone of our policy'.⁵¹ Hence the submarine deal with Egypt put Germany in a difficult position vis-à-vis one of its key regional partners. This was evident as Israel even protested against the submarine deal after the election of Muhamad Morsi from the Muslim Brotherhood.⁵² This contradiction however applied only during the time of the Muslim Brotherhood held power in Cairo. As was the case before the Arab Spring, and after Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's accession to power, the Israel-Egypt relationship was otherwise crucial for regional security arrangements.⁵³

This also highlights that the argument of Egypt as a stability anchor in the region did not hold up to scrutiny at the time of the contract negotiations. The first contract was signed in November 2011, a few months after the revolution which toppled Hosni Mubarak, and the second contract in 2015, which means that the negotiations must have taken place in 2013-2014 not long after al-Sisi gained power through a coup. German authorities themselves recognised this instability since Germany decided to suspend the examination of export licenses in February 2011, and again in mid-August 2013.⁵⁴

As argued elsewhere, Germany's foreign policy goals appear less focused on defence and military issues than France.⁵⁵ The case of the submarine deal with Egypt seems to support

48 Bosen, R., 'Deutsche Nahost-Politik: Zwischen Markt und Moral', Qantara.de, 20 Sep. 2021, <https://de.qantara.de/inhalt/deutschland-und-die-arabische-welt-deutsche-nahost-politik-zwischen-markt-und-moral>; Kandil, A. M., 'How Egyptian-German relations recovered during Sisi's rule', Egypt Today, 28 Oct. 2018, <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/59608/How-Egyptian-German-relations-recovered-during-Sisi-s-rule>.

49 Kausch, K., Enabling or evading? Germany in the Middle East, FRIDE Policy Brief, no. 191, Jan. 2015, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/187451/Germany_in_the_Middle_East.pdf.

50 Israel, Knesset, 'Speech by Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel to the Knesset in Jerusalem', 18 Mar. 2008, <https://m.knesset.gov.il/EN/activity/Documents/SpeechPdf/merkel.pdf>.

51 Germany, Federal Foreign Office, 'Interview by Foreign Minister Heiko Maas with the "Jüdische Allgemeine" newspaper on his recent visit to the Middle East', 27 May 2021, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/maas-juedische-allgemeine/2463340>.

52 Oni, A., 'Why did Israel withdraw objections to German submarines for Egypt?', Globes, 6 Nov. 2017, <https://en.globes.co.il/en/article-why-did-israel-remove-objections-to-german-submarines-for-egypt-1001210690>; 'Berlin Silent on Report of U-Boat Sale to Egypt', Spiegel International, 3 Sep. 2021, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/germany-declines-comment-on-report-of-submarine-sale-to-egypt-a-853667.html>.

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this argument, as no evident German strategic interests could be linked to the expansion of the Egyptian Navy. As German interests in maintaining good relations with Egypt in the strategic domain relate mostly to counterterrorism and prevention of illegal migration flows, the support to Egypt's Navy is less obvious since the upgrade of the submarine fleet does not directly contribute to these efforts. The connection between arms industry, arms exports and state sovereignty is not present in the overall conceptualization and rationale for arms sales. The arms industry is an economic, industrial issue, not a strategic or foreign policy one, and defence companies themselves are seen above all as an economic actor, not a security actor.⁵⁶

Conclusion

In both instances it is difficult to trace the link between the sale and the benefits for the supplier's foreign policy and diplomatic interests. The contribution of the Rafale combat aircraft to French defence diplomacy vis-à-vis Qatar might be more evident, since France overall has more military presence and interest in the Middle East; whereas Germany's arms sale would appear to respond to a more classic economic logic.⁵⁷ Indeed, although ethical debates about arms exports are stronger in the German debate, with leading voices calling for a restrictive stance, the outcome of this policy nonetheless places Germany as one of the world's top leading exporters. Additionally, in both cases, arms deals appear as only one dimension of the relationship and not necessarily the only one – it has repercussions mostly for military cooperation, which is more developed in the French-Qatari case. As France was in the past more militarily active, with more operations and interventions, it is more in need of securing allies and partners in the region. As Germany's geopolitical stance is likely to evolve, will arms exports also be increasingly perceived (and used?) as a tool of foreign policy? However, as explained by Elias Yousif in his related piece, and in previous publications, the arms for influence argument has some intrinsic contradictions which policymakers could reflect upon.⁵⁸

Answering the question of arms trade and diplomatic relations also needs to be looked at from the perception of the recipient and end-user of the weapon systems. Further research would be required through interviews with domestic policymakers and those who were on the buying-side of the negotiations to better understand the role these arms deals play in the broader relationship with the supplying states.

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PRISME

Pathways to Renewed and Inclusive
Security in the Middle East



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PRISME

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PRISME Initiative

PRISME aims to redefine the conception of “security” in the Middle East and North Africa, as the starting point for strategic relations between MENA countries and their European and North American partners. It does so in pursuit of effective, collaborative approaches to ensuring a more peaceful and stable future. To this end, PRISME sponsors dialogue and debate between foreign policy professionals across diverse backgrounds and perspectives. These include individuals in governments, thinktanks and academic institutions located in the MENA region, Europe and North America, with a specific focus on engaging young and emerging thinkers and practitioners. Its goal is to re-define security in the Middle East, broadening the definitions of what it looks like, for whom, how it can be achieved, and how outside actors can contribute to it.

SALAM Project

SALAM (Sustaining Alternative Links beyond Arms and the Military) proposes to rethink the centrality of the arms trade in international relations with and among Middle East & North Africa (MENA) countries.

It fosters and amplifies ideas from a network of scholars and practitioners working in and with the Middle East. Issues they will address include the arms trade’s advertised role in cementing bilateral and multilateral ties between North America, Europe and the MENA region; the opportunity costs of over- or sole reliance on weaponry as security; and alternative modes of engagement that might redefine a shared strategic agenda.