



[Italy Permanently Blocks Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates](#)

This past week, Italy's Foreign Ministry announced that it would be permanently blocking the sale of thousands of arms to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates over the two nations' involvement in the devastating conflict in Yemen. Back in 2019, Italy was one of several European countries to freeze arms sales to Saudi Arabia and this most recent move makes the previously temporary suspension permanent. The action also follows the decision undertaken by the new Biden administration in the United States to suspend arms shipments to both Gulf countries while a review of the exports is conducted. Rights groups and activists have praised the significance of this latest series of moves which help set an important precedent for others to follow. The regimes in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are major culprits in the perpetuation of the ongoing conflict in Yemen, which has had a calamitous effect on the country's civilian population, resulting in an estimated 80% of them in need of humanitarian aid and assistance.

As of 2019, when the suspension of weapons sales was first put into place, the data showed that Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates ranked 10th and 11th respectively on the list of the largest markets for Italian arms exports. In total, the sales to Saudi Arabia were worth around \$128 million while those to the United Arab Emirates were worth approximately \$110 million. The recent decision by Italy to make the temporary suspension permanent is especially a noteworthy development considering that the country was one of the top 10 exporters of arms to the two Gulf nations. Furthermore, the Italian Peace and Disarmament Network – a coalition of organizations campaigning against Italy's weapons sales – contends that the move will stop the supply of nearly 13,000 bombs. In past investigations, these types of weapons have been found to be used by the belligerent forces of the Yemeni conflict during attacks which indiscriminately devastate both civilian and non-civilian targets alike.

The latest action to permanently freeze arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates came in the wake of major controversy regarding former Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi's video appearance with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Despite widespread and largescale concerns over Saudi Arabia's alarming human rights record, Renzi commented that it "could be the place of a new Renaissance for the future." His participation in the virtual event drew condemnation in Italy, prompting officials to cement the enduring status of the temporary suspension of weapons sales which was already in place. In his remarks announcing the move, Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio stated that "This is an act that we considered due, a clear message of peace coming from our country. For us, respect for human rights is an unbreakable commitment."

Rights activists have expressed optimism that Italy's decision will set an important precedent for other European countries who continue to sell weapons to the regimes in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The hope is that focus and pressure will now be shifted to these other nations to follow suit and by doing so, help to alleviate one of the most damaging factors which has exacerbated the ongoing conflict in Yemen.