

Pakistani Military Equipment Could End Up in Israel Instead of Ukraine

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Pakistani caretaker prime minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar has denied reports that his country sold weapons to Ukraine for use in its war with Russia, saying that such allegations are "confusion." Although Kakar's comment was made in response to recent reports on Pakistan's support for Ukraine, such claims have existed since the early stages of the war in 2022 – meaning well before he became caretaker prime minister on August 14, 2023. He denies the sales to absolve himself of embarrassment in case these weapons end up in Israel instead of Ukraine.

"We will investigate if it [Pakistan arms] has ended up somewhere else. But, as far as Pakistan is concerned our arms were not at all destined for either Ukraine or any other place for that matter," Kakar said in an interview with VOA.

"We are just exploring that how this entire confusion has been created and what are the reasons behind those confusions," Kakar said, claiming his government was already discussing this issue "on different diplomatic channels with the concerned authorities" in Washington.

Kakar's comments came after BBC Urdu reported on November 13 details about Pakistan's purported ammunition sales worth \$364 million to American companies supplying arms to Ukraine. According to the report, Pakistan had signed the arms sales contracts in August 2022 to supply two private US military companies, Global Military and Northrop Grumman, with 155-mm ammunition.

Although Pakistan has often reiterated that it is completely "neutral" in the war between Ukraine and Russia, the South Asian country has not ruled out the possibility of these weapons reaching Kiev's forces from the black market.

Speculation about Pakistan's support for Ukraine was galvanised further by a purported official document of the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI) on the \$364 million ammunition sales. It also cannot be overlooked that Pakistan's overall arms exports skyrocketed to \$415 million in 2022-23, over 30 times the \$13 million in 2021-22, which would account for the sales to Ukraine.

The BBC Urdu revealed that the arms were supplied using a British military cargo plane from Pakistan Air Force Base Nur Khan in Rawalpindi to the British military base in Akrotiri, Cyprus. From Cyprus, the weapons were then taken to Romania and onwards to Ukraine. This reportedly occurred five times.

Kakar's denial was made a day after Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mumtaz Zahra Baloch also denied the allegation at a weekly briefing in the capital Islamabad.

"First of all, I reaffirm what we have said in the past that Pakistan has not sold weapons to Ukraine or to Russia as we have adopted a policy of strict neutrality in this conflict," she said. "Pakistan's export of weaponry to countries is accompanied by end-user certificates and we expect the parties that import Pakistani weapons to respect those end-user commitments."

However, Pakistan has not adopted "a policy of strict neutrality" since the ousting of Imran Khan, as Baloch claims. It is recalled that in January 2023, the Economic Times reported that the Pakistan Ordnance Factories (POF), a state-owned defence industrial enterprise, was sending 159 containers of 155mm artillery shells, M4A2 propelling bag charges, M82 primers, and PDM fuses to Ukraine via Poland. Economic Times then again reported in July 2023 that a merchant vessel with nearly 200 containers of defence stores by Pakistan Ordnance Factories delivered military equipment to Ukraine via Karachi and Gdansk ports.

It is recalled that during a visit to Pakistan in July, amid that round of accusations, Ukrainian foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba rejected reports that Pakistan was supplying arms to Ukraine to support its military. Kuleba, over the course of the war, has been proven not to be credible, and therefore, his refutation cannot be taken as truth.

Rather, due to the catastrophic economic situation, partially fuelled by unapologetic support of jihadi groups, Pakistan is seeking to find economic relief, including from Western institutions such as the IMF. These come with many conditions, though, including support for Ukraine.

Imran Khan's support for Russia saw him quickly ousted by the US-friendly military elite in Pakistan, thus demonstrating that the country is held ransom to the interests of Washington. The former prime minister arrived in Moscow on February 24, 2022 – the same day that Russia launched its special military operation. He was ousted for visiting Putin and not condemning Moscow's actions, something which his US-planted successor, Shehbaz Sharif, was quick to reverse.

Pakistan is not a neutral country like Kakar and Baloch claim, as demonstrated by the ousting of Imran Khan due to his pivot towards friendly relations with Moscow and the sale of weapons to Ukraine.

Nonetheless, as some experts have highlighted, there could be a situation where Pakistani ammunition and weapons bought by the US and bound for Ukraine could now end up being

directed to Israel to fight Hamas and other Palestinian extremist groups. This would be highly ironic considering Islamabad does not recognise Israel as a state and supports, at least in rhetoric, the Palestine cause.

Kakar and Baloch are obviously trying to cover the fact that they are selling weapons and ammunition to US companies with the intention they end up in Ukraine but do not want to take responsibility for this, especially if it is exposed that they instead ended up in Israeli hands. This is a very real possibility since Washington's attention is increasingly being turned towards the Middle East and away from Eastern Europe.

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