The Active Protections of the Iron Fist on the Swedish CV90 Tank: why it also concerns Ariete, Dardo, and future Armored Vehicles

Published on 07/01/2026

Elbit Systems will supply BAE Systems Hägglunds a new batch of the **Iron Fist** system (approximately **150 million dollars**) intended for **CV90** in service with European NATO countries. The announcement comes after a "live-fire" demonstration in Europe (September 2025) where the system showed capabilities even against **kinetic energy (KE) threats**. The Iron Fist is an advanced APS **(Active Protection System)**, which is a set of sensors and countermeasures that **detects** an anti-tank threat in real-time and **neutralizes** it before impact, creating a protective "bubble" around the vehicle. It can be **soft-kill** (deception/disruption) or **hard-kill** (physical interception), and is designed to increase survivability against missiles, rockets, drones, and loitering munitions.

Why Iron Fist on CV90 is a strategic signal (not just commercial)

The news confirms that, in Europe, APS is increasingly becoming a “basic” requirement for high-intensity deployment. Specifically, Iron Fist is described as a system capable of **360° protection** against a range of anti-tank threats: rockets, guided missiles, drones, loitering munitions, and even KE rounds.

The key point for European armies is that today threats do not only come “frontally”: they come from above, in swarms, with complex profiles and reduced engagement times. APS thus becomes the difference between suffering the opponent's initiative and maintaining freedom of maneuver.

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Impact “today” on Italy: Ariete and Dardo

For Italy, the message is direct: if Europe integrates APS on modern IFVs, older vehicles risk suffering an increasing gap precisely on the most important front, which is survivability.

Ariete C2 (operational bridge, but with a known limit)

In the modernization path, the **Ariete C2** significantly improves engine and onboard components, reaching (according to industry analysis) **1,500 hp**. However, it is also highlighted that **neither the AMV configuration nor the C2 have planned an increase in protection level**: the mass varies little and the increase in protection remains entrusted to kits/add-ons. In

this context, an APS is one of the few levers capable of rapidly increasing survivability without redesigning the entire vehicle; moreover, the same source emphasizes that the new **“open” vetronic architecture** would facilitate the integration of additional protection solutions.

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Dardo (risk reduction while awaiting replacement)

For a previous generation IFV, the APS can function as an “operational insurance”: it does not make the vehicle new, but it can **drastically reduce vulnerability** against ATGMs and threats from above, protecting crews and infantry while transitioning to the new family of vehicles.

Impact “tomorrow”: A2CS and new MBT with Rheinmetall (and Leonardo)

The most important dimension, however, is prospective: Italy is building its next generation of heavy vehicles with the **Leonardo-Rheinmetall** joint venture.

A **first contract** for **21 vehicles** of the **A2CS** program (5 **Lynx KF-41** with **Lance** turret followed by 16 vehicles in configuration with **Hitfist 30 mm** turret) has already been announced, within an overall program aiming for **1,050 vehicles**. Simultaneously, the joint venture is indicated as the industrial entity for the development and subsequent commercialization of the **new MBT** and the entire A2CS family.

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Here, the APS should not be an “optional” considered later, but a requirement **to be designed in baseline**: electrical and cooling arrangements, wiring, sensor/effector positioning, integration with vehicle self-protection and sensor suites. Doing it ex-post costs more and forces compromises.

Conclusion

The Iron Fist contract on CV90 is a very concrete reminder: **active protection is becoming an integral part of the modern armored concept**. For Italy, it means thinking in two phases: **immediately** (mitigating risk on Ariete and Dardo, if they are to remain operational for a long time) and **structurally** (making APS “native” on A2CS and on the future MBT italo-Rheinmetall-Leonardo).

News link: https://www.defensenews.com/global/mideast-africa/2026/01/06/elbit-sells-new-batch-of-iron-fist-protective-kit-for-cv90-vehicles/