World Defense Show 2026: Italy Signs Record Contracts in Saudi Arabia

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The third edition of the World Defense Show 2026 in Riyadh concluded with a positive outcome for the Italian defense industry, consolidating the “Made in Italy” in the global market and strengthening ties with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

At the center of attention once again was **Leonardo**, which formalized the sale of **four C-27J in Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) configuration** to the Saudi Navy, with deliveries expected to start in 2029.

This is the first time this version of the C-27J has been purchased with the integration of naval weapon systems, capable of supporting maritime surveillance, anti-submarine, and anti-surface missions, in addition to traditional SAR, transport, and airdrop activities.

The agreement represents a step forward compared to the 2025 order, when Saudi Arabia had already acquired two C-27J for firefighting, medical evacuation, and logistical transport activities. According to specialized sources, this new version of the platform includes an

advanced sensor suite for the detection, identification, and tracking of surface and underwater threats, as well as the possibility of modular armament depending on the missions.

The awarding of the contract strengthens Italy's position in the maritime surveillance sector in the Gulf, an area characterized by dynamic threats to the security of trade routes through the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf.

On an industrial level, the agreement is part of a growth phase for Leonardo, which has seen a positive performance also on international financial markets, with potential employment and technological impacts for the national plant.

Wass Submarine Systems the largest contract in the company's history

Alongside the aeronautical orders, another major player at the World Defense Show was **Wass Submarine Systems**, a subsidiary of Fincantieri. The company signed a contract with the Saudi Ministry of Defense worth **over 200 million euros** for the supply of MU90 lightweight torpedoes, deployable on helicopters, aircraft, and naval units.

WASS Submarine Systems, effectors, sonar, and countermeasures. Source *Luca Peruzzi* (edrmagazine).

This is the **largest contract in Wass's history**, active for over a century in the production of high-tech underwater systems and now at the center of Italian naval export.

The supply program, managed by the Livorno plants, foresees deliveries between 2029 and 2030 and accompanies the growing Saudi demand for anti-submarine systems to counter the

expansion of naval capabilities in the region.

According to industry analysts, the order not only ensures a significant flow of orders for the Italian supply chain but also signals a concrete interest from Riyadh in advanced underwater defense solutions.

Highlighting the importance of these results was also the comment from the Italian Defense Minister Guido Crosetto, who described the political and cooperation relations between Rome and Riyadh as “excellent.”

Geopolitical context and future prospects

The recent Italian agreements signed at the World Defense Show 2026 are not mere commercial operations but are part of a broader framework of strategic cooperation and modernization of Saudi forces.

Between 2023 and 2024, Italian military exports to the Kingdom exceeded **458 million euros**, with growing numbers thanks to orders like those of the C-27J and MU90.

Italian Air Force Alenia C-27J Spartan. Source Planespotters.net.

In a geopolitical key, the Saudi choice to focus on Italian platforms for maritime surveillance and anti-submarine defense reflects the desire to diversify supply sources and independently enhance military capabilities, with an eye on the stability of energy routes and the protection of critical infrastructures.

Future prospects see, in addition to the full implementation of ongoing contracts, potential further collaborations in areas such as drone countermeasures, cyber defense, and the space sector.

In conclusion, the outcome of the World Defense Show 2026 represents not only an economic success for the Italian defense industry but also a turning point in strategic cooperation with a key Middle Eastern partner.

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