Kalashnikov Helps Boost Russia’s Prestige on the International Stage

Internationally, Russia has traditionally been seen as one of the leading suppliers of technology, especially in such areas as the arms and military hardware markets. Many countries, all over the world, purchase Russian-made military equipment, including anti-aircraft missile systems, fighter jets, battleships, etc. But, globally, the most widely sold and well-known Russian weapon is the Kalashnikov automatic rifle, known as AK, with its various modifications. More than 100 million of these guns have been sold to customers around the world.

This iconic automatic rifle has been copied, both under license and illegally, in many countries, including both China and the USA, the Russian-made ones are still considered the best, and Russia remains the main supplier.

The various Russian companies involved in the manufacture of these guns have now merged to form the Kalashnikov Concern.

In addition to firearms, the Kalashnikov Concern now manufactures a range of other items. These include military boats, unmanned aerial vehicles, rocket systems and missiles and a wide range of civilian goods. But, naturally, Kalashnikov automatic rifles remain the Concern’s most well-known products.

In modern business practice, one of the most effective ways for a company to extend its international presence is through licensing production in the customer’s country. This helps to minimize transportation costs, allows the manufacturer to supply goods to its customers an attractive price, and establish a long-term position in the customer’s market. Among other manufacturers, the Kalashnikov Concern has adopted this approach.

For example, back in 2011 the licensed manufacture of AK-74M guns began in Azerbaijan. By the middle of 2019, more than 100,000 units had been made in the country.
And in 2018 a licensing agreement was signed with India for the local production of Kalashnikov automatic rifles.

In terms of arms sales, India is known to be Russia’s most important trading partner. It has been purchasing Russian-made military hardware for its armed forces for many years. But for many years rifles - first British-made, and then Indian-made - were the weapon of choice for the Indian soldier. But by the 2010s the Indian army leadership decided that these weapons were outmoded and in 2016 it decided to replace them en masse. The Russian Kalashnikov was seen as the best option.

March 2019 saw the formal opening of Indo-Russian Rifles Private Limited, a Russian and Indian joint venture licensed to manufacture AK 200-series automatic rifles, starting with the AK-203.

But production did not begin immediately, as the two countries had not yet agreed on the terms of the license.

And then in June 2020 a plant licensed to manufacture Kalashnikov automatic rifles (model AK-103) was officially opened in Armenia.

In December 2021 Russian President Vladimir Putin, together with Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu made an official visit to India. During the visit they discussed a wide range of issues relating to cooperation between the two countries and their shared interests. The visit also resulted in the conclusion of a new agreement between Russia and India on military and technical cooperation until 2031. And it was also during that visit that the Indian Ministry of Defense finally signed an agreement with Indo-Russian Rifles Private Limited for the supply of more than 500,000 Indian-manufactured AK-203 rifles. So, after a long wait, it appears that production of Kalashnikov automatic rifles will begin in India later this year.

But, in addition to organizing the manufacture of its rifles under license abroad, the Kalashnikov Concern is still exporting its Russian-made rifles, and its exports in 2021 were 70% greater than in 2020. These exports were primarily of small arms, including the AK-100 and AK-200, as well as rifles forming part of the Ratnik combat system.

Naturally, as a partially state-owned concern (25% of its shares are owned by the Russian State Corporation Rostec), Kalashnikov prioritizes government orders for the Russian Armed Forces, and under its commitments to the Russian Ministry of Defense it supplied tens of thousands of the latest AK-12 to the Russian Army in 2021. In 2021 Kalashnikov also supplied the Russian Armed Forces with ZUR 9M333 anti-aircraft guided missile systems able to destroy various different types of airborne target at a range of up to 5,000 km in any weather conditions.

2022 also promises to be a good year for the Concern, with reports of good international sales figures in the first two months of this year.

In January 2022 the Concern announced that it is ready to export its new KUB-E drone, which is, in effect, a guided bomb (or, in modern parlance, a kamikaze drone). The KUB-E flies silently and can reach a speed of up to 130 km/hour. It has undergone all the necessary tests, and, according to Kalashnikov, has already been used in combat situations. Now an official export permit has been issued for the system.

In February 2022 it was reported in the media that under an agreement between Rosoboronexport and a foreign customer in the Asia-Pacific region, the Concern has manufactured and supplied a large consignment of automatic rifles at short notice. The identity of the customer has not yet been revealed.

Also in February, it was announced that in 2022 Kazakhstan’s Tynys Arms Plant will begin manufacturing Kalashnikov AK-12 and AK-15 rifles under license. Both models form part of the latest version of the Ratnik combat system.

In conclusion, it is clear that the Kalashnikov brand is in great demand all over the world, just as it was several decades ago. The Concern currently exports its products to 27 different countries - and there is every likelihood that this list will continue to grow. In addition to the significant revenue that they bring to the Russian state budget, these sales are also important at a political level, reinforcing the high esteem with which Russian technology is held in dozens of countries around the world and further strengthening Russia’s prestige and reputation in the international community.

It is also worth remembering that the AK automatic rifles for which the Concern is best known have long been something of a cultural or even civilization icon. Ever since the USSR began to supply AK automatic rifles to regimes and movements fighting for independence from the Western imperialist yoke, this weapon, with its universally recognized silhouette (it is even depicted on a number of national flags and crests) has become a symbol of the
struggle for freedom and of resistance to the unipolar world order that the USA and its allies have been trying to impose for well over half a century. And that symbol is closely connected to Russia. That level of renown is worth a great deal and it is still too early to assess its present and future value to Russia in her relations with the rest of the world.

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