

US Defence Industry Struggles to Manufacture Basic Artillery for Ukraine

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The United States arms industry is not producing the basic ammunition required to sustain support for Ukraine and Israel, Bloomberg reported on June 8. This is an extraordinary situation since Russia's armed industry is booming despite facing major Western sanctions.

According to the outlet, the US defence industry gave priority to the manufacture of high-tech ammunition and halted the production of basic artillery such as 155-millimetre ammunition, the most used in the wars that are being fought today. The US is also facing a shortage of basic products, such as gunpowder or trinitrotoluene (TNT), to produce these munitions and have had to turn to other countries, such as Poland and Turkey, to obtain supplies.

At some point an attempt was made to replace the 155-millimetre ammunition with higher-tech projectiles on the battlefield in Ukraine, but the effort failed because the new weaponry was neutralised by the Russian military.

“Higher-tech shells that were intended to replace the traditional 155mm munitions failed an early test in Ukraine, when their targeting systems were thwarted by Russia,” Bloomberg reported. “The prospect that future wars could resemble the grinding combat taking place there has stirred fears that the US arsenal could someday be stretched to the breaking point.”

“The writing has been on the wall for a while,” Stacie Pettyjohn, a senior fellow and director of the defense program at the independent and bipartisan Center for a New American Security, told Bloomberg. “It has just taken the war in Ukraine to really shock Pentagon officials and members of Congress out of their complacency.”

Since the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, the Pentagon has divested or neglected facilities once used to manufacture everything from projectiles to gunpowder, focusing instead on transforming warfare with high-tech weaponry.

“What’s left is crumbling infrastructure, outdated machinery and a tiny workforce that can’t keep up with growing international demand,” the outlet highlights.

Before the special military operation in Ukraine, American production was 14,400 shells per month. Now, the US is spending more than \$5 billion to overhaul aging factories across the country with the goal of producing 100,000 155mm shells a month by the end of next year.

As the agency stresses, it is a mobilisation that, due to its speed and breadth, is unlike anything since World War II.

As part of this effort, Congress has appropriated \$650 million for a TNT production plant that will take two years to build, according to Doug Bush, the Army’s top weapons buyer. And Washington will have to finance purchases of whatever the renovated facilities produce, possibly for many years.

But, as Bloomberg noted, getting the money may also be the easiest obstacle to overcome.

“The US must bring old buildings up to snuff, build new ones, buy updated machinery and hire and train workers. Environmental regulations stand in the way. And the Pentagon will need to ensure that plants can be run safely — munitions-making is prone to fires, explosions and other accidents,” the outlet noted.

Bloomberg concludes,

“Boosting munition production is a costly and time-consuming business, and the US is playing catch-up at a time of growing tension in Europe, the Middle East and the Pacific region.”

Washington naively believed that the sweeping sanctions against Moscow would collapse the Russian economy and therefore its military operation against the Kiev regime. Instead, Russia not only overcame the sanctions but is now producing artillery shells at a rate that the West cannot keep up with.

It is recalled that Estonian Defence Minister Hanno Pevkur admitted in November 2023 that Russia was firing 70,000 rounds a day, meaning that an equivalent of a year’s worth of European production at the time was fired by the Russian military every 10 days. The crippling shortage of artillery was also referred to by Ukrainian Defence Minister Rustem Umerov in January, who revealed that Ukraine was unable to fire more than 2,000 shells per day.

Due to a severe worldwide shortage of artillery shells, Western analysts admit Ukraine will likely be outgunned by Russia for at least the remainder of the year, but even with Kiev’s allies ramping up production, realistically Russia will hold the advantage for the duration of the war.

Even though Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said recently there were no reports of artillery shortages, in an interview on May 21 with [Reuters](#), he called on Western allies to speed up aid, saying every decision they’ve made on military support for Ukraine has been

“late by around one year.” Even in this most desperate stage of the war, from Kiev’s perspective, Zelensky cannot but be ungrateful and entitled, even when the West struggles to overcome its industrial failures, particularly since Russia’s military industry is a resounding success despite the sanctions.

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