

Turkish Armor Makers in Talks to Produce 1,000 Vehicles for Qatar

By: Burak Ege Bekdil, December 29, 2016 (Photo Credit: Copyleft via Wikimedia Commons)

ANKARA, Turkey — A new multinational venture featuring Turkish, German and Malaysian manufacturers is in talks with Qatar to produce 1,000 armored vehicles — just one component of an aggressive marketing strategy that targets Gulf, Middle Eastern and Middle Asian markets.

In August, Turkish manufacturer BMC, Germany's Rheinmetal and Malaysia's Etika Strategi joined forces to launch a Turkish subsidiary. RBSS, the new joint venture, will offer armored solutions to the Turkish and other militaries. The companies say the joint venture would focus on wheeled and tracked armored vehicles.

Company officials said that RBSS — through BMC — recently launched contract negotiations with the Qatari government for the potential sale of up to 1,000 armored vehicles of various types and configurations. They did not disclose the product line under discussion. A Qatari fund owns a 50 percent stake at BMC, RBSS' Turkish partner.

Meanwhile BMC has been awarded a contract by the Turkish government to deliver 35 Amazon armored vehicles. Potential international customers are Pakistan and Turkmenistan, company officials said. They put the price tag for the batch of 35 Amazons at $480 million.

BMC first launched the Amazon at the 2016 Doha International Maritime Defence Exhibition and Conference in Qatar. The vehicle, according to company officials, is ideal for both police and military use in urban operations. The Amazon can accommodate up to seven personnel. It comes with extra armor and remote gun-station system options.

BMC also has a contract to sell 329 Kirpis to the Turkish military in 2017. The Kirpi is a mine-resistant, ambush-protected vehicle developed and manufactured by BMC. It features a 375 PS engine; a 4-wheel drive configuration; a fully automatic transmission; a transport capacity of up to 15 fully armed personnel; protection against mine, ballistic and improvised explosive device threats; a manual

turret/remote-controlled weapon station; a central tire inflation system; and an automatic fire extinguishing system. It can run on flat tires.

BMC is in talks with Turkmenistan for the sale of 10 ambulance versions of the Kirpi. That's in addition to nearly 300 Kirpis to foreign governments.

"Our next targets include the Middle East, Middle Asia, South Africa and Europe," a senior company executive said.

Locally, BMC and its partners also have an eye on a multibillion-dollar Turkish contract for the serial production of an eventual batch of 1,000 new-generation main battle tanks. The Altay will be Turkey's first indigenous battle tank.

The Altay's prototype was built by Otokar, a rival Turkish armored vehicles producer. In January, Otokar submitted its best offer for serial production, but procurement authorities asked the company to also submit its "best and final offer." That was submitted in September..

Now the Turkish authorities will decide whether to award the contract to Otokar on a solo-bidder basis or launch competition, which, then, will include BMC or RBSS. Most defense bureaucracy expect competition rather than single-source purchase.

"RBSS is trying to create an armor powerhouse with sustainability. There are many reasons why they can and many why they cannot," one London-based Turkey specialist observed.