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The Arms Trade - dealing in death

"Tens of millions of people have been killed in wars since 1945. By the end of the 1990s nearly 90% of war-victims were non-combatants and at least half of these were children. The arms trade fuels these wars, wasting life, natural resources and vast sums of money. Despite this, the UK government uses arms exports as a tool of foreign and military policy and places this policy above both human and real economic costs."

- Campaign Against Arms Trade, An Introductory Briefing

The trade in arms, weapons and munitions is a major cause of global human rights abuses, with some governments spending more on the sale of arms than on social development, communications infrastructures and healthcare combined. The United Kingdom is the second largest exporter of arms in the world, after the US, exporting over £4.4 billion worth of arms in 2000 alone. Between the group of eight (G8) countries, they account for more than 85% of world arms sales.

The West sells many of these arms to military dictatorships, to human rights violators, to corrupt governments and despots often in secrecy and with training in these arms offered. The arms sales and training provisions mainly become tools to control and prevent democracies or more egalitarian political structure emerging. Sales from the west however, are made ironically in the name of preserving or creating democracy!

One of the most shocking facts about the UK arms trade is that the government has for decades had a policy of actively promoting arms exports. Brokering arms deals by the government's newly created arms sales unit, Defence Export Services Organisation (DESO),

5 things to know about Small Arms

- 1 Small arms worth an estimated \$3 billion are shipped across international borders every year
- 2 Just \$50 million (the price of a single jet fighter) can equip a small army with 200,000 assault rifles
- 3 Lightweight small arms increase the ability of children to participate in armed conflict: an estimated 250,000 worldwide are now soldiers
- 4 70 million Kalashnikov assault rifles - most of which are still functioning - have been produced in 100 different versions since 1947
- 5 There are 250,000 licensed firearms dealers in the US - 20 times the number of McDonald's restaurants in the country

WorldWatch Institute, State of the World 1998



Tripod blockades road leading to EXCEL conference centre as they set up the DSEI Arms Fair

with other countries on behalf of UK companies and at a cost to the taxpayer is not available to any UK civil industry. The trade in arms instills a carnality that blinds and disregards the human cost of war and exacerbates the perpetuation of conflict. For example, many UK arms customers are situated in areas of potential or actual conflict rather than buying for a protective or preventative measure. Where more than one country is involved, the UK is has played a part in arming all sides, India and Pakistan; China and Taiwan; Uganda, Angola and the Congo; Israel and its neighbours. Many of these countries have massive development needs and the majority of the population lives in abject poverty some subject to huge crisis like Aids epidemics. The ability, by oft-times corrupt governments and dictators, to procure arms and the UK government's support for arms sales encourages a criminal wastage of money deprived from the mouths of people in some of the world's poorest nations. When UK manufactured arms are sold to explicit and appalling human right violators such as Indonesia the governments is assisting (however indirectly) the repression and abuse of civilians in these countries.

A study by Oxfam (Small arms, wrong hands, April 1998) has shown that Britain is a key player in the world's small arms business, exporting sub-machine guns, mortars, landmines, grenades and light missiles to over 100 countries since 1995. In Africa alone, 71 per cent of countries in

receipt of UK small arms were suffering political violence or conflict. Currently the UK does not have an ethical regulation of arms exports, which may prohibit many of these sales.

The trade in arms exploits a specific loophole within trade sanctions that is particular to the arms industry. Governments such as the UK are able to exploit a 'security exemption', which is drawn into every trade agreement and allows governments to be exempt from WTO free trade rules when it comes to national security, this obviously include arms deals. So in world trade, arms are a commodity that cannot be regulated to prevent exploiting poorer countries and is favoured by government subsidies when world trade rules prevent developing countries subsidising their own food markets.

In the UK the body responsible for issuing export licenses for "strategic goods" is the government's export control agency, which is part of the DTI (department of trade and industry) who then consult with the MoD before granting these licenses. The other main organisation is the Defence Exports Services Organisation (DESO), a secretive organisation headed by an arms industry businessman Alan Garwood, formerly a top Middle East missile salesman for BAE Systems, the country's largest arms firm. A recent Guardian article (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/armstrade/story/0,10674,97659,00.html>) highlighted that the DESO officially authorises what

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it calls "special commissions" paid by arms firms. This means that the DESO used methods of bribery, special gift incentives and promises of official secrecy in sales. DESO "salesmen" collude with or even bypassed governments to broker deals for arms purchases and these dealers are motivated by significant economic gains, Transparency International (UK) estimates that the official arms trade accounts for 50% of all corrupt international transactions. A conservative estimate of the level of commissions paid is 10%, in an industry worth \$40bn a year. The middlemen utilised in these deals are often shown to be those with flagrant disregard for government or human ethics. DESO's dealings remained official secrets for over 30 years till the newspaper uncovered them.

After these damning observations were made public and with post-9/11 apprehensiveness on terrorism, a new law was passed that outlaws corrupt payments to foreign public officials. Transparency International (UK) Chairman, Laurence Cockcroft, says, "It is clear that corruption plays a significant role in influencing arms procurement, but despite repeated scandals this situation has been largely ignored by governments, NGOs and academics." In fact often when PR departments of many western governments say their leaders are going on humanitarian or peace missions to urge some nations not to go to war, they are also selling arms at the same time, often to both parties. This is classic "divide and conquer" still at work, while economically, this proves beneficial to the armament firms, particularly if leaders of recipient governments are only too happy to collude.

In spite of all this, some positive work is being done with groups like Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT) and other arms and government monitoring groups campaigning long and hard to effect changes in the corruption of the arms industry. It also takes the civil population though, to wake up to that fact that swallowing a mediated myths of "foreign enemies" and installing "new undemocratically voted leaders" may in reality mean the subjection of entire peoples to murder, torture, genocide, oppression, and continue a cycle of devastating human conflict with only fat-cat wallets winning the battles.

Training the arms that kill

The Salvadoran death squads did exactly what they were supposed to do: they decapitated the trade unions and mass organisations that seemed in danger of setting off an urban insurrection at the beginning of the decade... [The army] learnt its tricks at American counter insurgency schools in Panama and the United States. "We learnt from you," a death squad member once told an American reporter, "we learnt from you the methods, like blowtorches in the armpits, shots in the balls. - **Ambrose Evans-Pritchard in The Spectator, May 10, 1986**

We hear much about the horrific practices used in torture techniques and the tactics of instilling fear and demoralising entire populations. Often we think this cruelty is endemic to the cultural specific or that is a phenomenon of war itself ^ this helps us rationalise our disgust at the abject level of human rights abuses emerging from conflict, it raises our level of cultural and democratic superiority and often can justify our state "interventions". However, many of the practices and tools of torture, cultural suppression, or counterinsurgency are taught and exported by our governments along with small arms and other weapons of destruction. This training can exacerbate the human condition for the implementation of armed conflict and trains human rights violators.

The School of Americas (SOA) has been mentioned in the past years as playing a particularly active role in selective training and export of human weapons. The school is a military training facility originally in Panama, now in Georgia, USA, set up and run by USA. The Centre for Defense Information describes how the School of the Americas, has trained many of the

worst human rights violators and dictators in many Latin American countries including Haiti, Uruguay, Peru and Colombia. Roberto D'Aubuisson, the leader of El Salvador's death squads was a graduate as well as Manuel Noriega. SOA, frequently dubbed the "School of Assassins," has left a trail of blood and suffering in every country where its graduates have returned. Last year, Human Rights Watch revealed that seven former pupils are running paramilitary groups in Columbia and this link to arms sales and deals is clear.

A setback for the school occurred in July 1999, where the US House of Representatives unexpectedly voted to withdraw funding from the notorious school. While this did not result in the school being closed, it did show that pressure from human rights groups and others, could pay off. On January 17, 2001 the SOA was replaced by the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHISC) but still trains and exports skills to Latin American soldiers in combat, counter-insurgency, and counter-narcotics.

A recent report by Amnesty International ("Unmatched Power, Unmet Principles: The Human Rights Dimensions of US Training of Foreign Military and Police Forces") called for a suspension of training at the SOA/WHINSEC, and an independent commission of inquiry to investigate the school. Amnesty refuted the claim that the WHINSEC is a new institution, stating "WHINSEC is essentially the same school as SOA, with the same primary mission ^ conveying military skills to members of Latin American armed forces."

Just as arms trading is a multi-billion \$/£ business, the exporting of particular

dynamics of wars are manipulated to support this business and control the investments in these counties/conflicts. Arms deals sustain conflict, which often follow "benevolent" foreign policy interventions, which collude with maintaining a situation of control. According to SOA Watch (independent organisation that seeks to close the US Army School of the Americas), the Pentagon recently told Congress that SOA training supports US policy towards Latin America. This training "seeks to develop stable, free market democracies throughout the region." The mission of the US Army's Southern Command (encompassing the SOA) includes "...protecting the supply of strategic natural resources and access to markets." Sale of arms often precede then protects these new markets.

One of the conferences at this years DSEI (Defence Systems and Equipment International) is: 'Achieving operational effectiveness through training' is the third conference sponsored by Military Training & Simulation News.

"A new focus for DSEI 2003 is a dedicated training and simulation area. This area will provide suppliers with an excellent platform from which they can present their latest offerings not only to a highly targeted training and simulation industry audience within aerospace, land and marine, but also users and international defence procurement visitors interested in other aspects of the defence industry."

For more information see:

SOA Watch - <http://www.soaw.org>

Human Rights Watch - www.hrw.org

Amnesty International - www.amnesty.org

Centre for Defense Information's - www.cdi.org

Consequences of the Arms Trade Business

Human Rights Watch argue that in the pursuit of military policies which include selling arms or providing assistance to other countries, the U.S. have "expressed minimal concern about the potential side effects". That is, the increase in militarism itself is risking both the restriction of people's rights, and the entrenching of power of those who violate human rights.

Heavy militarisation of a region greatly increases the risk of oppression on local people. Consequently reactions and uprisings from those oppressed may also be violent. The Middle East is a current example, while Latin America is an example from previous decades, where in both cases, democracies or popular regimes have been overthrown with foreign assistance, and replaced with corrupt dictators or monarchs.

The Arms Trade is Big Business by Anup Shah

www.globalissues.org/Geopolitics/ArmsTrade/BigBusiness.asp

The Financial Times in UK reported (February 27, 2002), that "While the international community calls for

restraint on the Indo- Pakistan border, governments led by the UK and the US are jockeying as never before for a bigger slice of India's growing arms budget." Further, they also reported that, "Industry officials were unabashed in admitting that the current regional tension between the nuclear-armed neighbours is a unique selling opportunity."

In 1988, Saddam's forces attacked Kurdish civilians with poisonous gas from Iraqi helicopters and planes. U.S. intelligence sources told The LA Times in 1991, they "believe that the American-built helicopters were among those dropping the deadly bombs." In response to the gassing, sweeping sanctions were unanimously passed by the US Senate that would have denied Iraq access to most US technology. The measure was killed by the White House.

Jeremy Scahill, The Saddam in Rumsfeld's Closet, CommonDreams.org News Centre, August 2, 2002