


# fanning the flames

## How UK arms sales fuel conflict



Each day we can turn on the news and hear about awful conflicts that are taking place around the world, from Algeria in North Africa, to Colombia in South America. TV footage repeatedly shows makeshift camps bursting with refugees fleeing from conflict zones. Sunday supplements carry photo-articles on small children left maimed by weapons of war, whilst through our letter boxes we receive pleas from development agencies trying to deal with the humanitarian and economic consequences of conflict. Often we feel pretty impotent in the face of these images feeling too far away to be able to do anything other than to sympathise with the victims and, if we are able, to donate to charities trying to alleviate the suffering.

Yet there is something that we could do as a nation which could make a real difference to the numerous conflicts that are currently taking place around the globe: end the promotion and the export of weapons and military equipment, particularly to countries engaged in conflict.

**Contrary to the constant assurances from the government, the UK continues to export arms and military equipment to countries engaged in conflict. According to CAAT's research the UK is exporting arms and military equipment to 20 countries engaged in serious conflicts around the world. Whilst these may be the worst example of the UK's proliferation of weaponry around the globe, unfortunately it is just the tip of the iceberg.**

CAAT's new campaign, Fanning the Flames, aims to build agreement around the idea that we can make a real difference in the world by stopping the promotion of arms, particularly to countries engaged in conflict. We are convinced that the closure of the Defence Services Export Organisation (DESO), the government agency that promotes arms exports, will make a real difference.

## Fuelling war

Armed conflict, fuelled by the international arms trade, has had, and continues to have, a terrible impact on the world. Whilst some people argue that war is inevitable and there is little that can be done to prevent it, there is growing evidence of the direct connection between the proliferation of weaponry through the arms trade and the likelihood of political and economic disputes breaking out into armed conflict. Recent detailed academic studies of arms transfers over a number of years shows that the arms trade is a significant element in the likelihood of a country sliding into war. In one study into arms transfers to sub-Saharan Africa, the authors concluded that “arms imports are one of the essential ‘ingredients’ in the recipe that produces and sustains political violence in sub-Saharan Africa (and elsewhere).”<sup>1</sup>

## The human cost

In a major report issued at the end of 2002, the World Health Organisation estimates that around 191 million people lost their lives because of armed conflict in the 20th century. Yet unfortunately war is not a thing of the past. The WHO goes on to estimate that currently around 35 people are killed each hour as a direct result of armed conflict.<sup>2</sup>

Harrowing as these figures are, there are other, perhaps less obvious costs, including the enormous numbers of people forced to become refugees because of conflict.

**“Around 35 people are killed each hour as a direct result of armed conflict.”**

World Health Organisation, 2002

## Refugees

Modern warfare has led to a dramatic increase in the number of people fleeing their homes and becoming internally displaced or refugees. The number of refugees have risen from 2.5m in 1970, to 11m in 1983 to 23m in the late

1990s.<sup>3</sup> In addition there are around 22m people internally displaced within their own borders.<sup>4</sup> A large proportion of this increase can be attributed to the way that modern conflict is fought, with whole countries or indeed regions becoming battlegrounds whereas in the past fighting tended to be limited to a relatively small area.

There has been something akin to hysteria about the number of refugees coming to western Europe, yet the vast majority of refugees are in Africa (75%), with only round 10% of the worlds refugee population is in Europe. Nevertheless evidence tends to suggest that most asylum seekers come to Europe because of war and repression rather than to seek greater wealth as some would claim. According to the Refugee Studies Centre at Oxford University, for example, “out of the 10 countries that are sending the most refugees to Europe, 7 experienced war in the decade up to 2000, while the other 3 have a history of repressing minorities.”<sup>5</sup>

In June 2002, in a major speech on the links between conflict and refugees, the International Development Secretary, Clare Short MP, argued that whilst it was important to care for those who flee from conflicts, effort must also

be spent on trying to bring current conflicts to an end and to prevent future conflicts from breaking out. In response to a question about the arms trade, she suggested that “whilst successive governments have promoted arms sales, I think that it belongs in a world of

**“Whilst successive governments have promoted arms sales, I think that it belongs in a world of the past.”**

Clare Short, Minister for International Development

the past.”<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately it is not a thing of the past. CAAT would agree with the Secretary of State that government promotion of arms exports merely increases insecurity and leads to conflict.

Other costs that are not taken into account when the “success” of yet another arms deal is announced includes the diversion of resources away from productive economic expenditure which undermines development, the damage done by corruption which is seemingly endemic in the arms industry, and the enormous cost of recovering land for productive use once a conflict ends. The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation estimates, for example, that \$4.3bn of food production is lost each year because of armed conflict.

## Conduct unbecoming

A few weeks after it came to power in May 1997, the Blair government announced a new arms export licensing policy, including a set of criteria against which applications to export arms would be judged. A year later whilst it held the European presidency, the government successfully introduced the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Sales. These criteria, which have been combined, are now used to judge most arms exports.

# How Tony Blair supports arms sales

## 'If we don't sell them others will'

Asked at a press conference in July 2002 by the *Daily Mirror* why the UK wouldn't stop supplying arms to Israel, Tony Blair replied: *"What would actually happen if we did that is not that the parts wouldn't be supplied, but you would find every other defence industry in the world rushing in to take the place that we have vacated."*

## Pledged to support

Writing in BAE's internal magazine just before the 1997 General Election Tony Blair wrote: *"Winning exports is vital to the long-term success of Britain's defence industry. A Labour government will work with the industry to win export orders."*

## A little word in your ear...

Tony Blair's record on lobbying other governments on behalf of BAE Systems is extraordinary:

- He wrote to the Czech Government urging them to buy the BAe/SAAB Gripen (Nov 2001).
- He lobbied the Czech PM again during an EU Summit (April 02).
- During a "peace mission" to India in Jan 2002, he lobbied the Indian Government to buy BAe Hawk aircraft.
- He supported the sale by BAe of an air defence system to Tanzania, despite World Bank, NGO and Cabinet disapproval (Dec 2001).
- He lobbied the South African government in support of BAe's bid to sell Hawk jets (Jan 1999).
- He took time to promote the Eurofighter in a meeting with the South Korean PM (Dec 01).

Two of the eight criteria refer specifically to conflict. Number three states: "The Government will not issue licences for exports which would provoke or prolong armed conflicts or aggravate existing tensions or conflicts in the country of final destination"; whilst criterion four states "The Government will not issue an export licence if there is a clear risk that the intended recipient would use the proposed export aggressively against another country, or to assert by force a territorial claim."

Against these fine words has to be set the actual record of the past few years. On page 4 CAAT publishes a list of exports to countries currently engaged in conflict. Whilst space forbids a detailed examination it is worth examining three cases in a little more detail.

### Hawk spare parts for Zimbabwe

In August 1998 Zimbabwe military forces intervened in the awful conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Whilst the Government

announced that it would not licence equipment to Zimbabwe which could be used for "aggressive ends," in February 2000 it did grant BAE Systems seven licences to export spare parts to keep the Zimbabwean Hawk aircraft in action.

Pressed by MPs as to why the licences had been granted, the government suggested that BAe Systems reputation as a reliable supplier of spare parts would have been damaged. Following worsening violence within Zimbabwe, a full arms embargo was finally put in place in May 2000.

### Kashmir: Arming India and Pakistan

In Spring 2002 there were numerous outbreaks of violence between Indian and Pakistani militants and armed forces over the disputed region of Kashmir. Serious tension developed between the two nuclear powers and world leaders, including Tony Blair, urged both sides to step back from military confrontation. Despite this,



Photo: Frits Meys/Panos Pictures

the UK continued to grant licences to arms companies to export weapons and military equipment to both sides, although there was some attempt to disguise this fact. For example the Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, stood up and told the House of Commons that he had not approved any arms exports to India and Pakistan in the previous two months. He

## Examples of UK military equipment supplied to countries in conflict

Country	Brief description of conflict	Selection of weapons licences granted from 1997–2001
Algeria	Since it cancelled the first multiparty election in 1992 to prevent a near-certain victory of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), the military-backed regime has fought Islamic groups seeking state control on both military and political fronts. The level of violence dropped after 2000 following the amnesty provided by President Bouteflika. However, two Islamic guerilla groups, the GIA and the GSPC, rejected the amnesty and vowed to continue fighting. An estimated 100,000 people have been killed during the past 9 years.	1998 Armoured vehicle, body armour, military explosives, combat helmets
		1999 Military helmets, communications equipment, general navel vessel components
		2000 Military communications equipment, cryptographic software
		2001 Military communications equipment components, chaff equipment, military electronic equipment
Colombia	Colombian armed forces are engaged in an on-going armed conflict with two Marxist inspired groups as well as a right-wing paramilitary group. However, they rarely engage each other directly, preferring to try to weaken each other's support by attacking civilians thought to sympathetic to one group or the other. Over the past decade the conflict is estimated to have caused 35,000 deaths. Human Rights Watch estimate that of the 4,000 annual political killings, three quarters had been carried out by paramilitarists and that there is credible evidence that the army had been working closely with right-wing paramilitaries.	1997 Ammunition components, smoke grenades
		1998 Communications equipment, rifle components, semiautomatic pistols, heavy machine guns, military explosives, surveillance systems
		1999 Communications equipment, components for heavy machine guns
		2000 Rifle components, military communications equipment, stun grenades
Kenya	Since 1991 more than 4,600 people have died and some 400,000 displaced as a result of political violence in Kenya. A 2002 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report details the role of ruling-party officials in stoking the violence. For example in September 2002, members of the Borana tribe raided a Turkana community, killing ten people and displacing hundreds of families. Although the police initially dismissed the conflict as a traditional cattle-rustling incident, they later claimed that powerful people, including a local MP, had incited tribal violence. "The spread of small arms and the manipulation of ethnic tensions are an explosive mix," said Lisa Misol, author of the HRW report.	1997 Communications equipment, pistols, assault rifles
		1998 Small arms ammunition; communications equipment; components for combat aircraft; sub-machine gun components; components for tank; rifles
		1999 General purpose machine guns, rifles, semiautomatic pistols, small arms ammunition, sub-machine gun
		2000 Components for general purpose machine gun, components for rifle, semi-automatic pistol, small arms ammunition, stun grenades
Nepal	Multi-party democracy in Nepal as well as a new constitution, was established in 1990 leading to hopes of increased human rights protections, stability and development. In 1996 the "People's war" was declared by the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) (Maoist) against the Nepalese Government with the main goal of establishing a republican state. Human rights violations by both the government police force and CPN members are reported on a daily basis. In 2001 a State of Emergency is declared as the government vows to crush the rebels. More than 3,500 people have died in clashes since the mid-nineties.	2001 Components for assault rifles, small arms ammunition thunderflashes, weapon sights
		1998 Assault rifle; communication equipment; components for assault rifle; components for sub-machine gun; semiautomatic pistols; telescopic sight; weapon day sight; weapon night sight
		1999 Components for sniper rifle, rifle, sniper rifles, telescopic sight, gun-mountings, weapon night sight
		2000 Components for semi-automatic pistol, military communications equipment, military cryptographic equipment, 320 semi-automatic pistols, weapon sights
Philippines	With the economy in crisis – ousted President Joseph Estrade has been charged with plundering the economy for his own benefit – the new President Gloria Arroyo elected in 2001, faces a number of challenges including on-going conflict with armed groups fighting for an independent Islamic state. In addition a resurgence by the Communist NPA resulted in clashes that were the worst battles between the NPA and the government for over a decade. Over 150,000 people have been killed since fighting erupted in the 1970's with 1000 people estimated to have lost their lives in 2001.	1998 6780 assault rifles, components for assault rifles, semi-automatic pistols equipment, sniper rifle equipment, sub-machine guns equipment, 10 semi-automatic pistol, weapon sights
		1997 Sub-machine guns, pistols, sniper rifles, communications equip, aircraft spares
		1998 Small arms ammunition, communications equipment, Sub-machine guns, semiautomatic pistols
		1998 Assault rifles, semiautomatic pistols, gun silencer, small arms ammunition, weapons sights
		2000 400 semiautomatic pistols, weapon sights
2001 100 assault rifles, components for assault rifles, components for sniper rifles, 100 Sub-machine guns general purpose machine guns		

\* Since 1997, when the Labour Government was elected, the UK has licensed arms and military equipment to 20 countries engaged in serious conflict. The countries are Algeria, Angola, Burundi, Colombia, India, Indonesia, Israel, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Russia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Uganda and Zimbabwe. This table contains details of five conflicts and examples of arms licensed since 1997.

later admitted in a letter the he meant that he had not personally approved any licences, but the government had in fact granted over 160 licences for arms shipments in those two months to India and Pakistan.

In addition throughout the period British Ministers and officials from DESO continued to lobby Indian officials to buy 60 Hawk aircraft from BAE Systems.

### Arming Israel

Despite tremendous loss of life in the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine, the Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, announced in July 2002 that the UK was allowing BAE Systems to export vital military components to be incorporated into US produced F16 aircraft destined for Israel. F16 aircraft have already been used by Israel in attacks on Palestinian civilians which Jack Straw himself had condemned.

In addition, according to the most recent government report on UK arms exports, issued in July 2002, UK arms exports to Israel almost doubled since the previous year, from J12.5m to J22.5m. Since the outbreak of the latest Intifada in September 2000, more than 1,300 Palestinian civilians and over 300 Israeli civilians have been killed, with more than 23,000 people injured. Many of the victims on both sides have been children. Export of military equipment to Israel would appear to be in clear breach of the government's policy on arms exports.

### A Failed Policy

Exporting military equipment to countries at war has been something of a litmus test for the Labour Government. Despite codes of conduct and pledges to be "ethical", the UK is still exporting massive amounts of arms and military equipment even to countries engaged in conflict. Much of



**On target: Alan Garwood, newly appointed Head of DESO**

this is down to Tony Blair's hi-profile sales missions as well as the behind-the-scenes, day-to-day arms promotion work of the little known government agency, DESO.

### DESO: The Pusher

The Defence Export Services Organisation (DESO) is the government agency responsible for the promotion of UK arms exports. Its current mission statement says that its role is "to maximise legitimate UK defence exports in co-ordination with industry." Another important part of DESO's function is to co-ordinate support for military exports within the MoD and Whitehall.<sup>7</sup>

DESO was set up in 1966 by the then Defence Secretary Denis Healy and was originally called the Defence Sales Organisation. In its early days, "daily morning 'surgeries' were set up in Whitehall to advise businessmen on selling their products overseas".<sup>1</sup> Almost 40 years later it has around 600 military and civilian staff, most of whom work in its new headquarters in central London, whilst others work in offices attached to UK Embassies overseas.

In recent years the Head of DESO has always been appointed directly from one of the UK's main arms companies – and almost

always goes straight back to the industry (with a Knighthood) after the posting has been completed, raising lots of conflict of interest and other ethical questions. In addition, the Defence Industries Council, a forum for senior executives from defence companies and trade associations, "tops up" the salary of the Head of DESO, as the civil services salary of J165,000 pa (plus J15,000 performance bonus pa) isn't seen as enough. The current head of DESO, Alan Garwood took up the post in September 2002. For the past 25 years he has worked for BAE Systems or one of its key subsidiaries.

### Internal structure

DESO has Four "Regional Marketing Directorates" which specifically target sales to particular regions of the globe. Regional Marketing Directorate 1 focuses on the Middle East (including the Gulf States) and North Africa, and has offices in Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE. Regional Marketing Directorate 2 focuses on the Indian Sub-Continent, North East Asia, Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa and has offices in New Delhi, Seoul and Pretoria. Regional Marketing Directorate 3 focuses on the ASEAN countries

and Australasia and has offices in Canberra, Kuala Lumpur, Brunei and Manila. Regional Marketing Directorate 4 focus on the US and Canada, Europe and Mediterranean regions and has offices in Ankara, Paris, Bonn, Athens and Washington DC.

In addition, other departments provide specific advice for arms companies, such as marketing analysis and research work; advice about financing and offsets; parliamentary, policy and public relations strategy; management of UK armed forces support to DESO and industry and co-ordination of exhibitions and visits by overseas visitors to purchase military equipment. The agency also has Project Offices which manage specific government-to-government deals such as the massive deal with Saudi Arabia.

According to a memo prepared by DESO for the House of Commons Defence Committee in 1998, staff working for DESO are distributed in the following way:<sup>8</sup>

<i>Marketing Support</i>	22%
<i>Arranging demonstrations and exhibitions</i>	17%
<i>Export Licensing work</i>	7%
<i>Disposal of MoD equipment</i>	14%
<i>Project offices (supporting specific deals)</i>	40%

Since 1995 DESO has had a strategic plan which helps it to co-ordinate “campaign planning” with the UK arms industry. Whilst the current DESO strategic plan itself is confidential, bits of it have leaked out over the years. One key element of the plan is that DESO should focus its arms selling on “the top 20 or so markets in priority order and the top priority export campaigns in each of those markets.”<sup>9</sup> The names of these top 20 countries remain secret but in 2000, an official of the Defence Manufacturers’ Association, angry

## Conclusion

The UK is one of the largest producers and exporters of arms and military equipment in the world. As such it has to take a large measure of responsibility for fanning the flames of conflict around the globe.

Despite promises to the contrary, the Labour government continues to support the proliferation of weaponry, even to countries actively engaged in armed conflict.

Whilst there is a large and growing public antipathy towards arms exports – some polls putting opposition as high as 85% – government support for arms exports remains very high, with the Prime Minister himself actively engaged in promoting specific deals.

The Defence Export Services Organisation (DESO) plays a key role in the UK arms trade, not just passively supporting UK arms companies, but actively co-ordinating the sales push to specific targeted countries. The activities of DESO can clearly be seen to undermine the non-proliferation work of the FCO and the development work of the Department for International Development.

at the temporary suspension of sales to Pakistan, told parliament that both India and Pakistan “have been identified by DESO as highly valuable priority markets for the United Kingdom industry to target.”<sup>10</sup> No doubt that is partly why even though the two countries were on the brink of nuclear war at the beginning of 2002, Tony Blair continued to promote BAE’s J1 billion Hawk deal to India. *Private Eye* names other “priority markets” as Brunei, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Malaysia, Singapore, Turkey, and South Korea.

DESO’s strategic plan also urges “a pro-active, rather than reactive approach”, in other words the government and the companies will push arms sales to specifically identified countries rather than merely react to requests for military supplies.

## Footnotes

- 1 Cassady Craft & Joseph Smaldone, ‘Arms imports in Sub-Saharan Africa: Predicting Conflict Involvement’ in *Defence and Peace Economics*, 2003, Vol 14, p37
- 2 *World Report on Violence and Health*, World Health Organisation, 2002, p217
- 3 *World Report on Violence and Health*, WHO, 2002, p225
- 4 Janie Hampton, *Internally Displaced People: A Global Survey*, Earthscan, 1998
- 5 Quoted in Martin Bright, ‘Refugees not chasing money’, *The Observer*, 26 May 2002
- 6 Clare Short, ‘Refugees and Conflict’ speech to Royal Geographical Society, 20th June 2002
- 7 DESO website [www.deso.mod.uk](http://www.deso.mod.uk)
- 8 Hansard 1/7/02 col 32w
- 9 MoD memorandum to the House of Commons Defence Committee, Dec 1998
- 10 *Private Eye*, Jan 11th 2002

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