

Making A Killing

Opening The Books On Canadian Arms Sales



by Patricia Elliott

Anything can start a war. But to keep it going, you need weapons. The flow of warplanes, landmines, guns and other military equipment from western democracies to the world's conflict zones has long been a dirty little not-so-secret in international development circles, and critics point to the United States' relentless war-profiteering as one of that country's more appalling international transgressions. But the United States isn't the only developed nation turning a profit on third world carnage — involvement in the arms trade is the rule rather than the exception for the world's industrialized countries. So how does Canada rate as a purveyor of arms?

"Small potatoes," according to Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) spokesperson Oussamah Tamim.

"Significant — about seventh in the world," counters Ken Epps of Project Ploughshares, a Canadian peace organization based in Waterloo.

Who's right? Always a murky business, the global arms trade is lately falling under increased public scrutiny. But Epps has discovered the "transparency" is dealt out in layers. Peel one sheet back, there's another underneath.

First layer: the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms notes that Canadian sold four armoured vehicles to Saudi Arabia and eight surplus howitzers to Brazil in 2000.

In other words, small potatoes.

But only seven major weapons classes, such as tanks and naval vessels, are reported to the UN.

"Most of what Canada exports — components, subsystems, transport helicopters, small arms — don't fall into the reported categories," Epps said in a recent *prairie dog* interview. On to the next layer.

The Export of Military Goods in Canada annual report will be tabled in Parliament at the end of January, Ottawa spokesperson Tamim told the *dog*. It lists military export permits for many items not reported to the United Nations.

While the UN Register shows 26

military vehicles were sold in 1999 — and one warship was donated to the Artificial Reef Society — the DFAIT report adds to the list: \$50,000 worth of aircraft parts shipped to Indonesia, \$27,000 in small arms to Argentina, \$4.9 million worth of rockets to Malaysia, \$270,976 in simulator parts to Morocco, \$21,400 worth of missile parts to Egypt, eventually reaching a total of \$434 million in sales to 50 countries.

"Canada has already shown great leadership in developing the 1999 Land Mines Convention. We should expand on this role." — Lori Latta

Nearer to the tally, says Epps — but not there yet.

"They don't count sales to the US, which add up to more than all the other countries combined. It's a huge gap in the information."

Free trade arrangements protect the US from those annoying, paper-trailing Canadian export permits. As long as permits aren't required, it's "not possible" to track exports to the US, explains Tamim. Canada reports more than most countries do and sets an admirable example for the world, he adds.

Taking up the "not possible" challenge, Epps combs through industry newsletters, news reports and records of the Canadian Commercial Corporation. Ironically, US records are often the best source of information about Canadian military exports.

"The US has a far more open process for reviewing exports," Epps says.

The State Department must testify before Congress while Canada quietly tables the information every year with no



HEALTH CARE? EDUCATION? NAH, JUST GIVE ME AN UZI. Most weapons are sold to developing nations.

fanfare and little debate. There's no committee of oversight and export permit hearings are closed.

The DFAIT report will likely list about \$400-500 million in sales. Yet single Canadian companies alone reached this mark in 2000, according to Ploughshares data. General Motors of Canada sold \$794 million worth of military goods, Bombardier \$481 million, CAE Inc. \$410 million.

The Ploughshares tally for 2000 is \$1.6 billion, quadruple the last reported government tally. And that's just a partial sum. Many companies don't report contract values. Some sales remain silent because components — especially aircraft parts — are classed civilian even if they're to be re-fitted for military use.

Another Cog In The Wheel Of War?

Monitoring where exports end up is an equally tough job.

"When we ship a component to the US, the US decides where the finished products are exported. Canada has no control," Epps says.

"Legally it's theirs to do with what they want," agrees Tamim. "They don't need our permission."

That's how 40 Canadian CH-135 Huey II Helicopters ended up being re-fitted with machine guns capable of firing 50 rounds a second, then handed off to the First Counter-Narcotics Division of the Colombian Army.

"We have sufficient concern that they will be used in human rights abuses," says Epps.

In addition to their record of dropping cluster bombs over hamlets and then firing on fleeing civilians, the First Division works with paramilitary forces known for beatings, torture and massacres. No distinction is made between narcotics traders and political insurgents in a country where more than 35,000 people have succumbed to political violence in

the past decade.

The helicopters were an exception, DFAIT's Tamim claims, stating that Canada is "reasonably comfortable" that exports don't meet nefarious ends. Export controls prevent this sort of thing, he explains. The countries Canada deals with, including the US, have comparable controls.

Indeed, the Export and Imports Permits Act prohibits sales to countries where hostilities are "imminent." Yet eight countries on Canada's 1999 sales list were red-flagged by the UN as being on war footing.

The Act also bans sales to governments with a poor human rights records. Yet sales to Indonesia occurred while violent oppression was being carried out in East Timor, and to Malaysia in 1999, when journalists and opposition figures were being rounded up on charges of sedition.

Given our own record, it may be

continued on page 10

International Development Week continued from page 9

naïve to assume the countries we sell to are more careful.

Seventy per cent of the world's weapons are bought by developing nations — countries which are often mired in conflicts exacerbated by the policies of weapons-producing industrialized countries.

In fact, it would be surprising if components *didn't* find their way to theatres more volatile than, say, Denmark or France. Seventy per cent of the world's weapons are bought by developing nations — countries which are often mired in conflicts exacerbated by the policies of weapons-producing industrialized countries.

It's a matter of growing concern to development agencies.

"Militarization is one of the major obstacles to development in much of the world," says Lori Latta, Saskatchewan Council for International Cooperation (SCIC) coordinator. SCIC wants Canada to play a stronger role in ending the weapons trade, rather than exporting weapons and rushing to join US military actions.

"Canada has already shown great leadership in developing the 1999 Land Mines Convention. We should expand on this role."

Controls and peace-building create space for people to improve their lives, Latta says.

"People can take care of their own social, political and economic development. But they can't do it when they're surrounded by tanks and landmines."

Compare Notes: The Export of Military Goods from Canada Report 2000 will be posted on the web at the end of January. www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/~eich Click on the Military and Technology tab. Project Ploughshares 2000 military exports summaries are at www.ploughshares.ca

How Much Is That War In The Window?

- Human war death toll since WWII = 28 million
- Cost to rebuild the Balkans = \$20-30 billion
- World military spending = \$800 billion/year
- Average portion of government budgets = +10 per cent
- Average national spending in developing countries = Health 1% of GNP, Education 3%, Military 4%
- Amount spent annually by poor countries on weapons imports = \$25 billion
- Biggest beneficiaries of sales = France and the US
- Number of Afghans now unable to feed themselves = 5.5 million
- Amount needed to meet the UN's goals to adequately feed, educate and provide safe water to the world's children = \$30-40 billion, or 5% of the world's military expenditures

Source: United Nations statistics