



This series of bulletins explores many aspects of the global arms trade, including its participants, its promotion, its victims, and some of the lessons of history. The information is very relevant to Canberra and its identity. Despite very welcome recent additions to the advertisements at Canberra Airport that promote some positive features of our beautiful city, significant weapons advertisements remain

Bulletin 3 - October 2016

Who's profiting in the Middle East?

There is currently a huge build-up, in numbers and sophistication, of weapons in the Middle East. As a result millions of people are suffering, mostly civilians, including unprecedented numbers of refugees with nowhere safe to call home.

Among many weapons pouring into the region are jet fighters, missiles, armoured vehicles, drones, attack helicopters, artillery, small arms and ammunition. Saudi Arabia is the world's second largest importer of major weapons systems.¹

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute [reports](#) that *"Mainly with arms from the USA and Europe, the Gulf Cooperation Council states [such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar] have rapidly expanded and modernised their militaries"*.

As Western nations sell unprecedented levels of weaponry to the Middle East, Russia's share of weapons supplies to the region has also increased, due in large part to its support of Syrian President Assad. Russia is also increasing sales to the Gulf States' biggest rival, Iran².

Political instability good for business

In the US, weapons sales to the Middle East are an important part of plans to increase exports as a percentage of total sales. In April 2015, the New York Times [described](#) the militarisation of the region as *"a boom for American defense contractors looking for foreign business in an era of shrinking Pentagon budgets..."*, and reported: *"To wage war in Yemen, Saudi Arabia is using F-15 fighter jets bought from Boeing. Pilots from the United Arab Emirates are flying Lockheed Martin's F-16 to bomb both Yemen and Syria..."*

"As the Middle East descends into proxy wars, sectarian conflicts and battles against terrorist networks.....the result is a boom for American defense contractors looking for foreign business in an era of shrinking Pentagon budgets"

New York Times, 18 April 2015

In January 2015, Lockheed Martin CEO Marillyn Hewson suggested to investors that continued *"volatility"* in the Middle East and Asia made the regions *"growth areas"* for the firm. Thomas Kennedy, CEO of Raytheon, with its large trade in missiles and missile defence systems across the Middle East, recently said, *"Our international pipeline has never been so strong"*.

¹ SIPRI Year book 2015.

<https://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2015/10>

² P Beaumont. The \$18bn arms race helping to fuel Middle East conflict. The Guardian. 23 April 2015.



by Simon Kneebone

The British government also has worked closely with arms companies to maximise sales to Saudi Arabia, despite ongoing severe human rights abuses by the Saudi government. The Al Yamamah deal between the two governments, principally involving BAE Systems and its predecessor British Aerospace, is described as “*the largest and most corrupt weapons transaction in history*”³. The UK-Saudi relationship helps fuel instability and repression⁴.

Where does IS get its weapons?

A 2015 report by Amnesty International stated that “*the bulk of the arms and ammunition currently in the possession of IS has been seized from or has leaked out of Iraqi military stocks.*” The report referred to “*decades of irresponsible arms transfers to Iraq and multiple failures by the US-led occupation administration to manage arms deliveries and stocks securely, as well as endemic corruption in Iraq itself.*” Hundreds of thousands of small arms and ammunition have gone missing from the armoury of the Iraqi armed forces. The US Government Accountability Office has repeatedly identified shortcomings in controlling the use of US weapons in Iraq and Afghanistan⁵. ISIS gained many US Humvee armoured vehicles when it overran Mosul in June 2014⁶.

³ A Feinstein. *The Shadow World: Inside the Global Arms Trade*. Penguin Books 2012. P 173.

⁴ <https://sustainablesecurity.org/2016/08/02/challenging-uk-arms-sales-to-saudi-arabia-in-the-courts/>

⁵ <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/10/06/where-does-the-islamic-state-get-its-weapons/>

⁶ <http://www.ibtimes.com/isis-has-1b-worth-us-humvee-armored-vehicles-one-was-used-mondays-suicide-bombing-1946521>

“The quantity and range of IS stocks of arms and ammunition ultimately reflect decades of irresponsible arms transfers to Iraq..”

Taking stock: The Arming of Islamic State. Amnesty International, December 2015

While many weapons change hands on the battlefield, oil sales also provide significant income with which IS can purchase weapons.

Saddam Hussein, whose appalling human rights abuses provided a pretext for the catastrophic and destabilising 2003 invasion of Iraq, was heavily supplied with weaponry - approximately \$48 billion worth - during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s⁷. Most of it was from the US, the USSR, the UK, France and China, and many of the companies involved armed both sides in that war.

As the Middle East is torn apart by aerial bombing, missile strikes, small arms fire and other terrifying attacks, the weapons makers and their investors in far flung places reap the rewards.

The No Airport Arms Ads campaign was formed because weapons advertisements are inappropriate at a major gateway to our national capital. They help to normalise warfare by presenting sanitised images of weaponry, and they sell short our city by presenting it as a place focussed on preparing for war. New advertising panels in mid-2016 celebrating Canberra’s 100% renewable energy target and our excellent educational institutions are extremely welcome. However significant weapons ads remain, and we look forward to their replacement also by more welcoming signage.

⁷ P C Warnke. Putting an end to business as usual. Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security. Winter 1991 / 1992