

A SHAMEFUL RELATIONSHIP

UK COMPLICITY IN SAUDI STATE VIOLENCE



CONTENTS

Summary	5
1 Introduction	7
2 Saudi state violence at home and abroad	9
Yemen – complicity in indiscriminate killing	
Bahrain – crushing the ‘Arab Spring’	
Domestic repression – the extremist state	
3 The UK-Saudi relationship	14
Background	
Al Yamamah	
Al Salam	
MODSAP & SANGCOM	
UK government promotion of the arms trade	
How the government handles questions of corruption	
4 Major deals and overall trends	21
Major deals	
Mapping Saudi’s suppliers	
5 UK export controls	25
Unlawful exports	
Facilitating internal repression	
6 A poor deal all-round	28
Undermining democracy	
Undermining security	
Ignoring better economic alternatives	
7 Conclusion	31
Abbreviations	33

“While an arms embargo is needed now, it was clear long before the intervention in Yemen that arms sales to the Saudi regime were dangerous and immoral. There can be no justification for arming a regime as violent and oppressive as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.”

SUMMARY

One year into the intervention in the civil conflict in Yemen by a Saudi-led military coalition, 6,400 people have been killed, half of them civilians, including 900 children, and more than 30,000 people have been injured. The large majority of these casualties have been caused by Coalition air strikes in a campaign where combat aircraft supplied by the United Kingdom have played a significant role. Leading human rights organisations have documented a pattern of violations against international law committed by the Coalition. The UK government has not only ignored or denied this evidence, but has continued unrelentingly to supply arms, including weaponry to be used in Yemen.

This is the most egregious, but only the latest, example of the damaging effects of UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia. In 2011, UK-trained Saudi troops travelling in UK-supplied armoured vehicles moved into Bahrain to assist the violent crushing of pro-democracy protests. In Saudi Arabia itself, political parties are banned, the death penalty is used extensively, women and religious minorities suffer harsh discrimination and peaceful dissent is treated as ‘terrorism’. Despite this, and despite its own export controls, the UK sells arms to the regime which are capable of being used in internal repression. Arms sales are also a political expression of approval of the recipient regime and their value, together with the overall importance to the UK government of the alliance with Saudi Arabia, mutes any criticism of the regime’s behaviour.

Saudi Arabia is the UK’s leading strategic ally and arms customer in the Middle East, in an official relationship that goes back several decades. In the 1960s, the 1980s and the 2000s, the UK government signed enormous arms export deals with the Saudis for fleets of combat aircraft, together with supporting infrastructure, and for the ongoing provision of maintenance, components and ammunition. Some of these deals have been the subject of corruption investigations in the UK and US. In 2006, the UK government forced the Serious Fraud Office to abandon its investigation into bribery, helping to smooth the path to the latest of those major contracts. In contrast, the US Department of Justice continued its investigations and imposed a record criminal fine on BAE Systems.

UK arms sales and military cooperation with the Saudi regime is entrenched through personal networks, contacts and organisational structures. Saudi-funded units of UK military and civil personnel handle the ongoing management of the major aircraft deals. Those contracts are signed following multiple diplomatic visits to Riyadh up to secretary of state and prime ministerial level, even including the Prince of Wales. Government departments such as the UK Trade & Investment Defence & Security Organisation (UKTI DSO) and UK Export Finance work to promote and subsidise an arms export industry which is heavily reliant on government support.

Over the past ten years, the Saudi regime has been by far the leading customer of the UK arms industry, and the UK has been the regime's number two supplier, not far behind the United States. BAE Systems has been the dominant supplier of arms from the UK, providing the combat aircraft, but a plethora of other companies regularly apply for, and are granted, arms export licences to Saudi Arabia.

UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia are certainly immoral, and should be illegal. The government's own export controls prohibit sales where the arms could be used in internal repression, would aggravate existing conflicts or could be used in serious violations of international humanitarian law. By any commonsense definition, UK arms exports to Saudi Arabia violate these criteria.

The UK alliance with Saudi Arabia in general, and arms sales to the regime in particular, are a bad deal for the people of Saudi Arabia and the wider Middle East, but also for those of the UK. They undermine democracy in the UK through the corrupt, secretive nature of the relationship. They constitute a threat to security, as Saudi Arabia's aggressive and reckless behaviour in the region contributes to the dynamics that fuel extremist violence in the Middle East and worldwide. Arms sales are also a bad deal in economic terms. The people of the UK would benefit from the huge state support enjoyed by the arms industry, and the skills and expertise of the people who work there, being diverted to better and more productive alternatives. If those resources were committed instead to the development of renewable energy and low-carbon technologies, this would safeguard and create jobs and address the real security threat that climate change poses to the UK and internationally.

The Saudi regime's serial violations of international law in Yemen are the latest example of the cost of arming Saudi Arabia. Calls on the UK to suspend arms sales to Saudi Arabia have been made by the UN Secretary-General, Save the Children, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the House of Commons' International Development Committee, the Labour Party, the Scottish National Party, the Liberal Democrats,¹ and MPs from the Green Party, Plaid Cymru, and the SDLP.² While an arms embargo is needed now, it was clear long before the intervention in Yemen that arms sales to the Saudi regime were dangerous and immoral. There can be no justification for arming a regime as violent and oppressive as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The UK government must terminate its support for the Saudi military, and end the UK's complicity in Saudi state violence against citizens in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Middle East.

¹ Herald Scotland, 'SNP demand end to UK arms sales helping Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen', 24.1.2016 <http://bit.ly/1U7FCLs>; Liberal Democrats, 'Saudi Arabia', 14.1.2016 <http://bit.ly/1qOREN7>

² Hansard, 1.3.2016 <http://bit.ly/1pj3AGb>

1 INTRODUCTION

UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia play a key role in enabling the regime's abuse of human rights and repression of dissidents at home, and its military aggression and commission of serious violations of international law abroad. It is becoming increasingly clear that the UK-Saudi alliance needs to be placed under much greater public scrutiny and fundamentally changed. The purpose of this briefing is to explain the background and nature of UK arms sales to, and military cooperation with, Saudi Arabia.

Section two sets out the way in which the Saudi state uses its military capability and means of internal repression. The most egregious example of this in recent years is Saudi conduct in the war in Yemen. The section will also look at the Saudi role in crushing a peaceful, pro-democracy movement in Bahrain in the spring of 2011, as well as the regime's own domestic human rights abuses.

The third section examines the background to the UK-Saudi relationship, detailing the series of enormous arms deals that have been signed over the years, the corruption investigations surrounding these deals, and the active role of the British state at a number of levels in facilitating the trade.

The fourth section sets out UK arms exports to Saudi Arabia over the past decade, and provides details on the Saudi's UK-based arms suppliers. The following section looks at the UK's arms export control regime, routinely lauded by ministers as "the most rigorous" in the world, but effectively worthless in practice, as the arms exports to Saudi Arabia themselves demonstrate.

Finally, the costs to the UK of this shameful relationship will be laid out, as well as the better alternatives that exist in terms of jobs and the use of the UK's capacity for high-technology manufacturing.



2 SAUDI STATE VIOLENCE AT HOME AND ABROAD

Yemen – complicity in indiscriminate killing

The intervention in the war in Yemen has been by far the most shocking demonstration of the costs of the UK's supply of arms and military support to Saudi Arabia. A year into the conflict, 6,400 people have been killed, half of them civilians, including 900 children, and more than 30,000 have been injured.³ The large majority of these casualties have been caused by Coalition air strikes. This military campaign has claimed more lives than the Israeli assault on Gaza in 2014 and exacerbated a humanitarian emergency comparable in scale to that in Syria, and the UK has been complicit throughout.

The Saudi Arabia-led “Coalition” intervened in the conflict in Yemen on 26 March 2015. Its aim was to restore President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi, who had been ousted by the northern Houthi rebel movement and forces loyal to former dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh. UK government officials frequently point to UN Security Council Resolution 2216 which approved the intervention, and refer to Hadi's administration as the ‘legitimate government’, but the moral legitimacy of the intervention is far from clear. Hadi, formerly Saleh's deputy, was elected unopposed for a two-year transitional term in a 2012 election in which he was the only candidate, as part of a deal brokered by the Gulf monarchies.⁴ Leading scholars on Yemen have condemned the Saudi-led intervention, not only for its humanitarian cost but also for deepening Yemen's societal divisions and making a peaceful, political settlement to the country's problems more difficult.⁵

Documented violations and UK support

All sides in the conflict have been accused of committing serious violations of international humanitarian law. Amnesty International reported Coalition violations on the first day of the intervention, when at least six children under the age of 10 were among a total of 25 killed in Coalition airstrikes on a residential neighbourhood.⁶ Four days later, 29 civilians, including children, were killed in airstrikes on a camp for internally displaced persons, eliciting condemnation from UNICEF and Médecins Sans Frontières, with Amnesty International accusing the Coalition of “turning a blind eye to civilian deaths and suffering”.⁷

The UK strongly supported the Coalition from the beginning. Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond remarked that the UK has “a significant

³ UN News Centre, ‘Terrible year’ in war-torn Yemen leaves majority of country's people in need of aid – UN’, 22 March 2016 <http://bit.ly/228r8du>; UNICEF, ‘Children On The Brink: The Impact of Violence and Conflict on Yemen and its Children’, 29.3.2016 <http://uni.cf/1RZ2F13>

⁴ G.Achcar, ‘The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising’, 2013, London: Saqi Books, pp189-195

⁵ R.Burrowes et al, ‘Open Letter from Yemen Scholars Protesting War’, Middle East Research and Information Project, 16.4.2015 <http://bit.ly/1nOor37>; The Guardian, ‘Time to stop bombing and make peace in Syria and Yemen’, 25.9.2015 <http://bit.ly/1pu5xAm>; See also, S.Carapico, ‘Two Resolutions, a Draft Constitution and Late Developments’, Middle East Research and Information Project, 17.4.2015 <http://bit.ly/254k9X9>

⁶ Amnesty International, ‘Yemen: Six children among dozens killed in Saudi Arabian-led airstrikes’, 26.3.2015 <http://bit.ly/240VyBX>

⁷ Amnesty International, ‘Yemen: At least six civilians burn to death in further airstrikes overnight’, 31.3.2015 <http://bit.ly/1QUFam5>

⁸ The Daily Telegraph, 'UK 'will support Saudi-led assault on Yemeni rebels - but not engaging in combat'', 27.3.2015 <http://bit.ly/1F75r4f>

⁹ Agence France Press, 'British Technical Support for Saudi Op in Yemen', 27.3.2015 <http://yhoo.it/1QbzNVM>

¹⁰ The Guardian, 'British and US military 'in command room' for Saudi strikes on Yemen', 15.1.2016 <http://bit.ly/1nokb1I>

¹¹ Human Rights Watch, 'Q & A on The Conflict in Yemen and International Law', 6.4.2015 <http://bit.ly/1CUkmKC>

¹² Amnesty International, 'Yemen: Relentless airstrikes that have left hundreds of civilians dead must be investigated', 24.4.2015 <http://bit.ly/1QwkiYX>

¹³ Oxfam International, 'Oxfam condemns coalition bombing of a warehouse containing vital humanitarian aid', 19.4.2015 <http://bit.ly/1QwljQQ>

¹⁴ CAAT, UK Arms Export Licences – Saudi Arabia <http://bit.ly/1QwHhYH>

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch, 'Targeting Saada: Unlawful Coalition Airstrikes on Saada City in Yemen', 30.6.2015 <http://bit.ly/1PRg0ix>

¹⁶ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, '2016 Humanitarian Needs Overview' (Yemen), 22.11.2015 <http://bit.ly/24193lb>

¹⁷ The Independent, 'Yemen crisis: UN declares a 'Level 3' humanitarian emergency as situation worsens', 2.7.2015 <http://ind.pn/1ldylhj>

¹⁸ CAAT, UK Arms Export Licences – Saudi Arabia <http://bit.ly/1QUFqLI>

¹⁹ Amnesty International, 'The ugly truths of Yemen's war must not stay buried in the rubble', 25 September 2015 <http://bit.ly/1KTLgev>

²⁰ Amnesty International, 'Nowhere safe for civilians' - Airstrikes and Ground Attacks in Yemen', 17 August 2015 <http://bit.ly/1HTv1kH>

²¹ Amnesty International, 'Yemen: 'Bombs Fall From the Sky Day and Night' - Civilians Under Fire in Northern Yemen', 6 October 2015 <http://bit.ly/1Gy5rJH>

infrastructure supporting the Saudi air force generally and if we are requested to provide them with enhanced support – spare parts, maintenance, technical advice, resupply – we will seek to do so... We'll support the Saudis in every practical way short of engaging in combat".⁸ Agence France Press quoted Hammond saying that the UK was supplying "logistical and technical support" to the Saudi-led operation.⁹ As this support has come under greater scrutiny, the government has downplayed the UK role, denying that it is directly involved in Saudi operations, despite UK military personnel being in the Coalition command room and having access to the list of targets.¹⁰ Legally, direct participation could render UK forces jointly responsible for laws-of-war violations by the Coalition.¹¹

Within a month, Amnesty International was calling for "urgent investigations" into "the killing of hundreds of civilians, including scores of children", by "relentless" Coalition airstrikes that were forcing "millions of people... to live in a state of utter terror".¹² On 19 April 2015, the Coalition bombed an Oxfam warehouse containing humanitarian aid.¹³ Unperturbed, the UK government approved a £1.7bn arms export licence for Saudi Arabia on 14 May 2015, covering combat aircraft and related components.¹⁴

On 30 June, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said it had identified several further Coalition airstrikes that appeared to violate the laws of war, including attacks on civilian homes, markets, a dairy factory and a school. It condemned the Coalition's announcement that the entire city of Saada would be considered a military target, noting that threats of violence that terrorise civilians are prohibited by international law.¹⁵ At the start of July 2015, the UN placed Yemen in its highest category of humanitarian emergency, stating that more than 21.1 million people (82 percent of the entire population¹⁶) were in need of aid, while 13 million faced "a food security crisis" and 9.4 million had little or no access to water.¹⁷ This emergency, in an already desperately poor country, had been exacerbated both by the war and by a Coalition-imposed aerial and naval blockade. Later that month, the UK government approved arms export licences for Saudi Arabia to a value of £1bn.¹⁸

"Mohamed had just lost his eight-year-old son Sami in a Saudi-led coalition forces airstrike an hour before I arrived on the scene. His 14-year-old daughter Sheikha and six-year-old son Hamoodi were still alive at the time, but trapped under the rubble ... Six men were struggling to budge a huge fallen roof slab, under which Sheikha and Hamoodi were pinned. They were calling out their names in vain. I felt utterly helpless at my inability to do anything to help. I was overwhelmed and wished I could be superwoman, whilst the father sobbed in the background and the house crumbled over our heads. I could hear Coalition planes still circling above, almost tauntingly triumphant. At whose expense? Those poor children who were eventually dug out, lifeless, 15 hours later. It had been too late."

*Rasha Mohamed, Yemen Researcher for Amnesty International*¹⁹

In August 2015, Amnesty International called on the international community to "halt arms transfers to any parties to the conflict where there is a risk that they could be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of human rights or international humanitarian law".²⁰ The call was repeated in a subsequent report in October 2015, addressed explicitly to the UK and the United States.²¹ That second report investigated and identified specific "serious violations of international humanitarian law, including war crimes", and more

This harsh, violent treatment of those peacefully seeking basic human rights suggests a reality that contrasts sharply with UK Foreign Minister Ellwood's recent claim that the Saudi regime "is on the liberal wing of a very conservative country"

broadly, "a clear pattern of serious violations... over a period of several months". Such strikes were responsible for the majority of civilian deaths in the war. This call echoed a previous demand made by Amnesty International in August 2010, when it assessed that UK-supplied Tornado fighter jets were "extremely likely" to have been used by Saudi forces during bombing raids on Yemen in 2009 that had left scores of Yemeni civilians dead, and demanded that such arms exports be suspended pending an investigation.²²

Later in October 2015, Coalition aircraft dropped half a dozen bombs on a Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) hospital, despite having been provided with the hospital's coordinates and despite the MSF logo and name being painted on its roof.²³ In November 2015, Amnesty International and HRW investigators found remnants of a UK-made cruise missile in the rubble of a civilian factory struck by the Coalition.²⁴ HRW joined Amnesty International's call for an end to UK arms supplies to the Coalition. In December 2015, Save the Children also called for a cessation of UK arms supplies, noting that in the second quarter of 2015, nearly three-quarters of child casualties were caused by Coalition bombing.²⁵ In one incident, several infants died after their ventilators cut out when a paediatric hospital was damaged in an airstrike. Save the Children reported that "hundreds of thousands of Yemeni children are suffering from high levels of distress" as a result of the war.²⁶

Denying the evidence

Concern at the indiscriminate nature of Coalition airstrikes has been expressed by an ever-widening array of voices, including the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights,²⁷ the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator,²⁸ the European Parliament²⁹ and the International Committee of the Red Cross.³⁰ In spite of this, UK government ministers allowed the flow of arms to continue.

In the House of Commons on 22 October 2015, Foreign Office Minister Tobias Ellwood simply denied the evidence documented up to that point. "If there are human rights violations", he said, "they must absolutely be looked into, but I am not aware of any such evidence at the moment. We need to be careful about hearsay. If NGOs have evidence, they must bring it forward".³¹ This echoed a previous written statement submitted to Parliament on 20 July 2015, where Ellwood said "We have not seen any credible evidence that

²² The Guardian, 'Amnesty links British jets to Saudi attacks in Yemen', 24.8.2010 <http://bit.ly/1VT9Lh2>

²³ Human Rights Watch, 'Yemen: Coalition Airstrikes Hit Hospital', 27.10.2015 <http://bit.ly/1Mh1pqK>

²⁴ Human Rights Watch, 'Yemen: Coalition Used UK Cruise Missile in Unlawful Airstrike', 25.11.2015 <http://bit.ly/1SksUo6>

²⁵ Save the Children, 'Explosive weapons killing Yemeni children', 2.12.2015 <http://bit.ly/21uFqaC>

²⁶ Save the Children, 'Nowhere Safe for Yemen's Children: The deadly impact of explosive weapons in Yemen', November 2015 <http://bit.ly/1PRxbkF>

²⁷ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'Opening Statement to the 29th Session of the Human Rights Council by the High Commissioner for Human Rights', 15.6.2015 <http://bit.ly/1MEmlL4>

²⁸ Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O'Brien 'Statement to the Security Council on Yemen', United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 19.8.2015 <http://bit.ly/1SLWXcq>

²⁹ European Parliament, 'Joint motion for a resolution on the situation in Yemen', 27.7.2015 <http://bit.ly/1TOKd9T>

³⁰ International Committee of the Red Cross, 'Yemen: Two volunteers of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement killed in airstrike', 30.9.2015 <http://bit.ly/1WAA76e>

³¹ Hansard, 22.10.2015 <http://bit.ly/1TX8FzJ>

³² Hansard, 20.7.2015 <http://bit.ly/20sJwNj>

³³ Human Rights Watch, 'Dispatches: Britain Backtracks on Justice for Yemen', 1.10.2015, <http://bit.ly/1N7wPpz>

³⁴ The Guardian, 'UN report into Saudi-led strikes in Yemen raises questions over UK role', 27.1.2016 <http://bit.ly/1PjaNjq>

³⁵ J. Corbyn & H. Benn, Letter to Prime Minister David Cameron, 27.1.2016 <http://bit.ly/1SpuQ20>

³⁶ S. Twigg, Letter to Secretary of State, Department for International Development, 2.2.2016 <http://bit.ly/1WkMiD5>

³⁷ Hansard, 1.3.2016 <http://bit.ly/1pj3AGb>

³⁸ Hansard, 12.2.2016 <http://bit.ly/1R9N3iD>

³⁹ The Guardian, 'Ban Ki-moon adds to pressure on UK to stop arms sales to Saudis', 5.2.2016 <http://bit.ly/1PY1XDx>

⁴⁰ Hansard, 19.10.2015 <http://bit.ly/22aygWN>. See also Hansard, 14.7.2015 <http://bit.ly/1WaxTMj>

⁴¹ Human Rights Watch, 'Targets of Retribution: Attacks against Medics, Injured Protesters, and Health Facilities', 18.7.2011 <http://bit.ly/1WkQBOQ>

⁴² Jane's Defence Weekly, 'Saudi-led force arrives in Bahrain to quell protests', 23.3.2011

⁴³ The Daily Telegraph, 'Saudi troops sent to crush Bahrain protests 'had British training'', 26.5.2011 <http://bit.ly/1SOkbyv>

⁴⁴ Hansard, 18.6.2013 <http://bit.ly/1RBUcZC>

suggests that the coalition has breached the law".³² HRW's UK Director, David Mepham, accused ministers and officials of "shamelessly and disingenuously" adopting the pretence that there was an absence of evidence.³³

In January 2016, a report by a UN panel investigating the Saudi-led bombing campaign, leaked to the Guardian, confirmed a pattern of "widespread and systematic" attacks on civilian targets, specifically documenting "119 coalition sorties relating to violations of international humanitarian law. ... [including] three alleged cases of civilians fleeing residential bombings and being chased and shot at by helicopters".³⁴ Following the leak, Labour called on the government to launch an immediate and full review into arms sales to Saudi Arabia and to suspend sales until that review was completed.³⁵ This demand was echoed a few days later by the House of Commons all-party International Development Committee,³⁶ and by MPs representing the Scottish National Party, the Liberal Democrats, the Green Party, Plaid Cymru and the SDLP in subsequent weeks.³⁷ Despite the UN report, the government maintains that "there has not been a breach of IHL [international humanitarian law] by the coalition".³⁸

On a visit to London in February 2016, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon condemned the Coalition's conduct, and delivered a thinly-veiled rebuke to the UK and other states: "We need states that are party to [the] arms trade treaty to set an example in fulfilling one of the treaty's main purposes – controlling arms flows to actors that may use them in ways that breach international humanitarian law".³⁹

While the UK government has denied all the evidence of breaches of international humanitarian law, it did not deny, and perhaps did not want to deny, that UK-supplied arms were being used in the attacks. A parliamentary answer in October 2015 stated that "Munitions are supplied to the Saudi Air Force under pre-existing contractual arrangements. UK companies are providing precision guided Paveway weapons. The Royal Saudi Air Force is flying British built aircraft in the campaign over Yemen".⁴⁰

Bahrain – crushing the 'Arab Spring'

In early 2011, a large and overwhelmingly peaceful, broad-based pro-democracy movement emerged in Bahrain, a small Gulf state neighbouring and closely allied to Saudi Arabia. A Saudi-led intervention force subsequently entered Bahrain to protect key state installations and infrastructure while Bahraini forces moved in to violently crush the protests.⁴¹ Those Saudi forces had entered the country in Tactical internal security vehicles sold by UK weapons supplier BAE Systems.⁴² The UK government later admitted that additionally, "[i]t is possible that some members of the Saudi Arabian National Guard who were deployed in Bahrain may have undertaken some training provided by the UK military mission".⁴³

As in the case of Yemen, the government's approach was one of denial. According to then Foreign Office Minister Alistair Burt, there was "no connection" between the UK-trained Saudi troops arriving in UK-made security vehicles and the violent crackdown then carried out by Bahraini forces. This was because irrespective of the Saudi role, the Bahraini forces could have "[done] their job" without abusing human rights.⁴⁴ The "job" Burt refers to is unclear, but appears to mean cracking down on the protests. Whilst this might be true at a theoretical level, objectively the suggestion

lacks credibility. The Bahraini regime has an extensive, decades-long record of violent repression and torture, and the methods it would use to crackdown on peaceful pro-democracy demonstrators were entirely predictable. The intervening Saudi forces directly facilitated that crackdown, and selling arms which will be used for "internal repression" is a violation of the UK's own export controls.

"The arrival of the Saudi troops resulted in what everyone expected: a harsher crackdown. There were numerous extra-judicial killings and mass arrests that were followed by systematic torture resulting in the death of four people in detention. Those arrested were subjected to enforced disappearance and military trials. Since then, the human rights situation has continued to deteriorate, largely due to Saudi's intervention, and UK support."

Maryam al-Khawaja – Co-Director, Gulf Center for Human Rights

Domestic repression – the extremist state

Aside from its behaviour outside its own borders, the Saudi regime practises particularly cruel and austere forms of repression domestically, justified by reference to 'Wahhabism', an extreme, minority interpretation of Islam.

Under Saudi rule, all political parties, trade unions, human rights groups and public political demonstrations are banned. Recent legislation has extended the definition of 'terrorism' to cover peaceful expressions of dissent, such as those "harming the reputation of the state or its standing", or "calling for atheist thought".⁴⁵ The term 'terrorism' would be more accurately applied to the way the Saudi regime treats non-violent dissidents, such as the blogger Raif Badawi, sentenced to ten years in jail and 1,000 lashes for criticising religious leaders and establishing a website promoting political debate, or Mikhlif bin Daham al-Shammari, sentenced to two years in jail and 200 lashes for "violating the rulers' instructions by holding a private gathering and tweeting".⁴⁶ Silencing opponents through judicial violence, doubtless with the intention of intimidating others into acquiescence, is a key component of Saudi rule.

Torture in the Saudi penal system is rife, and confessions extracted through torture form the basis of judicial convictions, including those leading to the death penalty, often carried out through public beheading. Capital offences include adultery, drug offences and "sorcery".⁴⁷ In January 2016, 47 people convicted under anti-terror laws were executed in a single day, including prominent Shi'a Muslim cleric Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr, which Amnesty International described as a sign that the regime was "using the death penalty in the name of counter-terror to settle scores and crush dissidents".⁴⁸ Saudi Arabia's Shia community have long been subject to severe discrimination. Women and girls continue to be treated extremely harshly, and placed in a subordinate status under the law. Women campaigning for the right to drive have been harassed and intimidated by the authorities – two have had terrorism-related charges brought against them for defying the prohibition.⁴⁹ This harsh, violent treatment of those peacefully seeking basic human rights suggests a reality that contrasts sharply with UK Foreign Minister Ellwood's recent claim that the Saudi regime "is on the liberal wing of a very conservative country".⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Amnesty International, 'Amnesty International Report 2014/15: The State of the World's Human Rights', February 2015 <http://bit.ly/1BQs9i4>

⁴⁶ Amnesty International Report 2014/15 <http://bit.ly/1BQs9i4>

⁴⁷ Amnesty International Report 2014/15 <http://bit.ly/1BQs9i4>

⁴⁸ Amnesty International, 'Shia cleric among 47 executed by Saudi Arabia in a single day', 2.1.2016 <http://bit.ly/1QFIVDT>

⁴⁹ Amnesty International Report 2014/15 <http://bit.ly/1BQs9i4>

⁵⁰ Hansard, 28.1.2016 <http://bit.ly/2474FRK>

3 THE UK-SAUDI RELATIONSHIP

Background

The modern state of Saudi Arabia came into being in the early part of the twentieth century, as fundamentalist forces allied to the al-Saud family conquered the territory of which the country now comprises and subjected its diverse population to their austere and draconian rule. The first Anglo-Saudi treaty was entered into in 1915, with a new treaty signed in 1927 after the seizure of Mecca and Medina, and UK military supplies and assistance helped the regime establish itself in this early period.⁵¹ From the Second World War onwards, the US became the Saudis' principal great power ally. However, in the 1960s London moved to revive and deepen its own ties with Riyadh. The UK sold what amounted to an entire military air system to the Saudis, comprising 40 Lightning combat aircraft, 25 trainers (Jet Provost), and 9 radar stations,⁵² and it was from this point on that the military relationship really began to take shape.

The British Military Mission providing training to the Saudi Arabian National Guard began in 1964 and continues to this day. As historian Mark Curtis notes, the National Guard is "specifically designed to defend the royal family from social unrest and military coups from the regular forces".⁵³ For a time, the Saudi oil minister was guarded by a team of former SAS personnel.⁵⁴ By the 1970s the UK was providing training and assistance to the Saudi police and security services and to the SAS-trained Saudi Special Forces.⁵⁵ The question was never purely one of lucrative arms deals (though this was a major interest), but was also about ensuring the strength and survival of an allied regime in a region strategically vital to UK (and Western) power due to the size of its energy reserves and their importance to the global economy.

⁵¹ G. Troeller, 'The Birth of Saudi Arabia: Britain and the Rise of the House of Sa'ud', 1976, London: Frank Cass & Co Ltd; D. Silverfarb, 'Great Britain, Iraq and Saudi Arabia: The Revolt of the Ikhwan, 1927-1930', *The International History Review*, 4:2, 1982, p222-248; Aburish, S.K., 'The Rise, Corruption and Coming Fall of the House of Saud', 2005, 2nd ed. London: Bloomsbury

⁵² N. Gilby, 'Deception in High Places: A History of Bribery in Britain's Arms Trade', 2014, London: Pluto Press; see also M. Phythian, 'The Politics of British Arms Sales since 1964', 2000, Manchester: Manchester University Press

⁵³ M. Curtis, 'Web of Deceit: Britain's Real Role in the World', 2003, London: Vintage

⁵⁴ M. Curtis, 'Secret Affairs', 2010, London: Serpent's Tail

⁵⁵ N. Gilby, 'Deception in High Places: A History of Bribery in Britain's Arms Trade', 2014, London: Pluto Press

⁵⁶ N. Gilby, 'Deception in High Places: A History of Bribery in Britain's Arms Trade', 2014, London: Pluto Press

⁵⁷ Memorandum of Understanding for the Provision of Equipment and Services for the Royal Saudi Air Force, 1985. Available at <http://bit.ly/1ScwDVD>

⁵⁸ S. Williams, 'The BAE/Saudi Al Yamamah Contracts: Implications in Law and Public Procurement', *The International Comparative Law Quarterly*, 57:1, 2008, p200-209

⁵⁹ M. Curtis, 'The Great Deception: Anglo-American Power and World Order', 1998, London: Pluto Press; M. Phythian, 'The Politics of British Arms Sales since 1964', 2000, Manchester: Manchester University Press

⁶⁰ CAAT, 'Al Yamamah documents', <http://bit.ly/1MblF3N>

⁶¹ P. Boateng, letter to Minister for International Trade & Investment, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 29.5.2002 <http://bit.ly/1TzIQ9v>

⁶² CAAT, 'BAE terminates Government insurance for controversial Saudi arms deals', 29.5.2009 <http://bit.ly/1Vu6qo6>

Al Yamamah

From the mid-1970s onwards, the value of UK arms sales to the Saudi kingdom was comparable to that of sales from the United States. The commercial military air deal entered into in the 1960s became a formal part of the relationship between the two governments in a 1973 Memorandum of Understanding, which provided for the maintenance of the Lightning jets into the 1980s.⁵⁶ The real landmark contract was the giant 'Al Yamamah' deal brokered by Margaret Thatcher, involving the sale of many aircraft that are flying operations over Yemen today. The deal, signed in 1985, committed the Saudis to the purchasing of 48 Tornado IDS (interdictor/strike) aircraft, 24 Tornado ADV (Air Defence Variant) aircraft, 30 Hawk aircraft trainers, and 30 PC-9 training aircraft, together with associated support, services and ammunition, at an initial cost of between £3 and £4 billion. Additionally, the UK agreed to make available all future developments of the aircraft, systems and weapons.⁵⁷ The contract was entered into between the UK government and the Saudi government, with BAE [Systems, then British Aerospace,] acting as the main contractor.⁵⁸

This was not purely about the sale of combat aircraft, and it was not purely, or even primarily, about UK jobs (the gain repeatedly emphasised by politicians and arms industry executives). Al Yamamah involved equipping the Saudi regime with a modern air force and aerial defence system, including not only combat aircraft but improvements to airbases as well as spare parts and access to maintenance personnel. Al Yamamah II, signed in 1988, was an even larger deal, including more Tornados and Hawks, plus 50 helicopters, 4 minesweepers and the building of an airbase. The true significance of the deals was strategic. It allowed for the establishment of close relationships and cooperation at several levels of the UK and Saudi states, and it gave a major boost to the domestic arms industry that the UK wanted to maintain in order to hang on to its status as a global military power.⁵⁹

Al Yamamah was originally designed as a barter agreement with Saudi Arabia paying in oil. However, an oil price crash in the mid-1980s meant that the UK government had to use its Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD), now UK Export Finance, to underwrite the deal for £1 billion. The Bank of England and the Treasury had doubts about these arrangements⁶⁰ and concern about the risk to UK taxpayers continued through the decades. In 2002, for instance, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury wrote: "I remain concerned about ECGD taking on liabilities for £1 billion for a single transaction which... if called would lead to ECGD having to pay a claim for the full £1 billion in one fell swoop."⁶¹

The cover did not end until 2008, when BAE stopped it just before the release of a highly critical report from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development regarding corruption allegations.⁶²

Al Salam

Under New Labour, 2005 saw the official announcement of a pre-contract Memorandum of Understanding heralding a new, giant arms deal with the Saudis. The key component of the contract was the sale of 72 Typhoons for a reported £10bn to replace older aircraft, including Tornados sold under Al Yamamah. The biggest commercial beneficiary would be BAE, with its 37 per cent share in the Eurofighter consortium. The Independent reported that "In addition to the aircraft, ... the deal includes a full package of training, through life support, spares and technology transfer, which will at least double the

value of the deal and perhaps increase its value by 150 per cent”. The Ministry of Defence said the agreement’s full details would remain confidential, and that it “intended to establish a greater partnership in modernising the Saudi Arabian armed forces and developing close service-to-service contacts, especially through joint training exercises”.⁶³

The controversy over the Serious Fraud Office’s investigation into corruption surrounding the Al Yamamah deal, and the Saudis’ response to the investigation, (covered below) delayed the final agreement. When the deal was concluded, in September 2007, it was described in the press at the time as “the world’s biggest defence deal”.⁶⁴ The contract, named Al Salam (meaning ‘peace’), was effectively the successor to Al Yamamah, and was described by Jane’s Defence Weekly as signalling “the start of an enhanced strategic alliance” between the UK and Saudi Arabia.⁶⁵ The value of the entire package to the wider Eurofighter consortium, including munitions and ongoing maintenance and upgrades, was estimated to amount to £40bn. Meanwhile, the Tornado Sustainment Programme ensured that the main aircraft sold under Al Yamamah would be upgraded and continue to be viable.⁶⁶

MODSAP & SANGCOM

For many years, several large contracts between UK companies and Saudi Arabia have been overseen by the UK Ministry of Defence. The Ministry of Defence Saudi Armed Forces Project (MODSAP) covers the Saudi British Defence Co-operation Programme (a rebranding of the Al Yamamah deal, which also included the Tornado Sustainment Programme) and the Al Salam programme (the later sale of Eurofighter Typhoons). The Saudi Arabia National Guard Communications Project (SANGCOM) looks after the eponymous communications project. In each of these cases the Ministry of Defence has signed one or more Memoranda of Understanding with the Saudi Arabian Government. The Ministry of Defence then places contracts with UK prime contractors to fulfil the UK’s obligations.

MODSAP

Although its staff are UK civil servants and military personnel, Saudi Arabia pays for MODSAP. Explaining this, former Defence Secretary Des Browne MP said: “Aside from salary and salary related costs, the project’s operating expenditure includes the costs of office and domestic accommodation, personnel travel and subsistence, IT and telecommunications, training and professional fees and utilities. The project’s operating expenditure is covered in full by a management fee received from the Saudi Arabian Government, but details of the fee are confidential between the two Governments.”⁶⁷ According to Defense News, MODSAP recruited a new Air Vice Marshall to head-up the unit in 2012, after the previous incumbent had left following “personality clashes” with the Saudis – an indication that those who pay make the decisions.⁶⁸

In 2014/15, MODSAP cost £55.01 million. Around 200 staff work for MODSAP. As at 1 April 2015, this included 71 civilians based in the UK and 33 in Saudi Arabia, 35 military personnel based in the UK and 61 based in Saudi Arabia.⁶⁹

SANGCOM

In a similar way, the costs of SANGCOM are paid for by the UK MoD in the first instance and then recouped from the Saudi Arabian government. The UK government has not been willing to reveal these costs. As at 1 April 2015, two MoD civil servants based in the UK worked on SANGCOM, as did 20 UK military personnel and 34 UK MoD civil servants in Saudi Arabia.⁷⁰

⁶³ The Independent, ‘Britain secures £10bn contract from Saudis for Eurofighter’, 22.12.2005 <http://ind.pn/1SQAquW>

⁶⁴ The Observer, ‘BAE lands Saudi plane deal’, 16.9.2007 <http://bit.ly/1LrChy5>

⁶⁵ Jane’s Defence Weekly, ‘Typhoon: deal of the decade’, 26.9.2007; The Observer, ‘BAE lands Saudi plane deal’, 16.9.2007 <http://bit.ly/1LrChy5>

⁶⁶ Flight Global, ‘Saudi Arabia reveals progress of Tornado upgrade’, 18.9.2007 <http://bit.ly/1Sczeiq>; see also Defense Industry Daily, ‘Saudi TSP: Tornado Upgrades, incl. Storm Shadow’s Stealth Strike’, 26.12.2013 <http://bit.ly/1Ux4coR>

⁶⁷ Hansard, 27.6.2007 <http://bit.ly/1o18Yww>

⁶⁸ Defense News, 4.11.2012

⁶⁹ Email from MODSAP, 21.7.2015

⁷⁰ Hansard, 17.9.2015 <http://bit.ly/1RuXxof>

UK government promotion of the arms trade

UKTI DSO

Saudi Arabia is a “priority market” for the Government’s arms sales agency, the UK Trade & Investment Defence and Security Organisation. This body employs 140 civil servants⁷¹ and has its own embedded specialist military officers and an army demonstration team staffed by regular officers and soldiers.⁷² In addition to UKTI DSO, UK Defence Attachés and diplomatic staff also act as a state-supplied marketing department for UK arms manufacturers.⁷³

UKTI DSO’s role is the promotion of arms and security industry exports and coordination of government support in this. In day-to-day terms it:

- provides constant liaison with the companies it is promoting sales for
- builds relationships with government and military officials from overseas countries
- encourages political intervention in support of arms sales: “Delivering Whitehall”
- ensures that the UK armed forces are on hand to help arms companies in their sales efforts. Its military staff help coordinate the support of the wider armed forces and their equipment for arms export campaigns
- invites and chaperones military delegations to arms fairs in the UK, and organises VIP delegations to arms fairs around the world.⁷⁴

Saudi Arabia is a regular on UKTI DSO’s invitation lists for the major arms fairs that take place in the UK. The largest of these is Defence & Security Equipment International (DSEI). Saudi delegations have been ever-present at DSEI, including in September 2015 while its military was bombing Yemen.⁷⁵ In addition, Saudi delegations frequently attend the combined arms fair and civil aerospace exhibition at Farnborough⁷⁶ and the annual ‘Security & Policing’ exhibition.⁷⁷

⁷¹ Hansard, 10.12.2015 <http://bit.ly/1ZLDGYI>

⁷² UKTI DSO, ‘Defence and security exporting: event and exhibition support’, 18.3.2016 <http://bit.ly/1CBh8Sa>

⁷³ N.Cooper, ‘The Business of Death: Britain’s Arms Trade at Home and Abroad’, 1997, London: I.B.Taurus

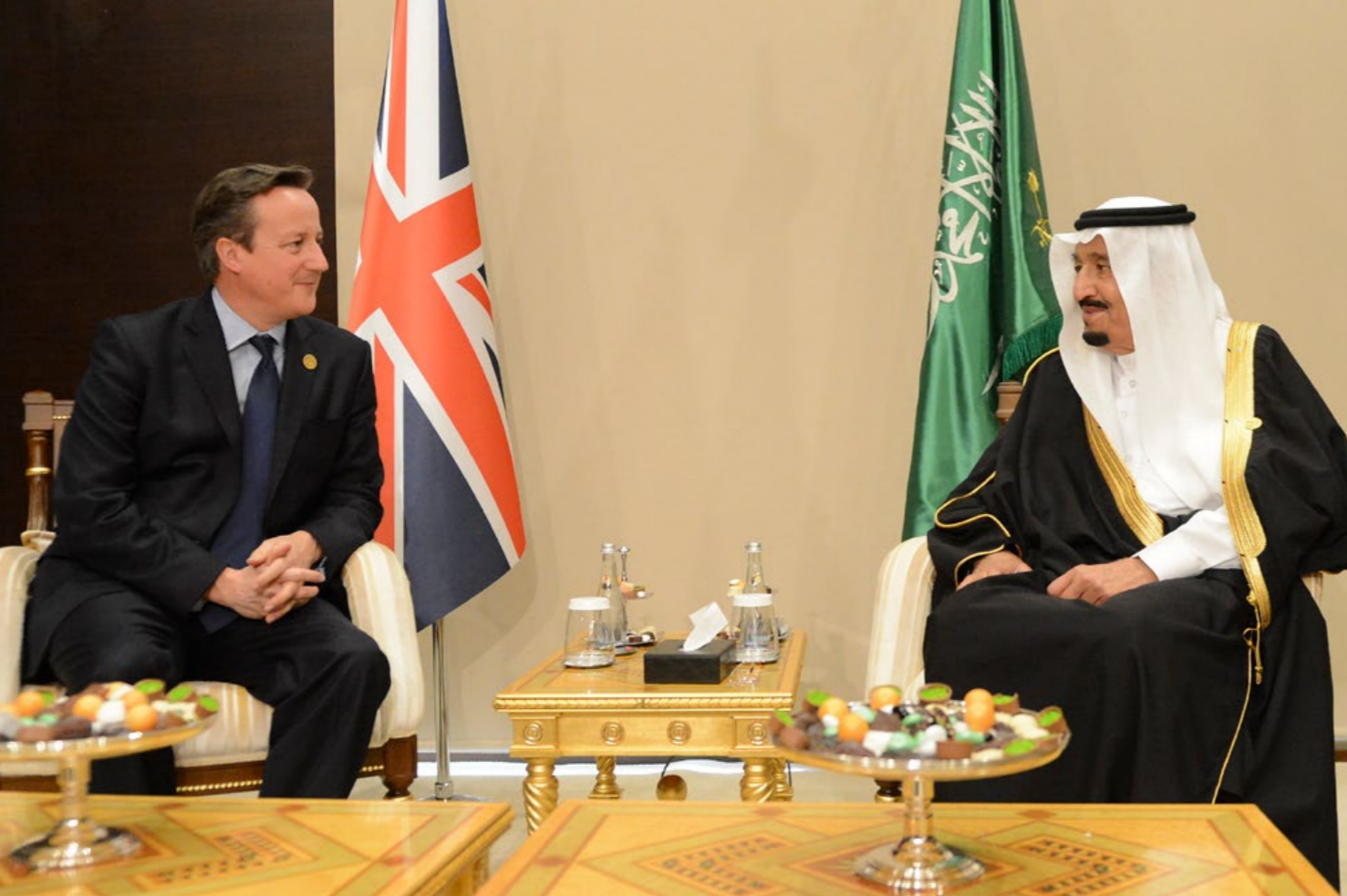
⁷⁴ See CAAT, ‘Private Gain, Public Pain: The case for ending the Government’s arms selling’, May 2010 for more information on each of these areas <http://bit.ly/1Vcrxx2>

⁷⁵ CAAT, ‘It starts here - Saudi Arabia & DSEI 2015’, 11.9.2015 <http://bit.ly/1mFeKDq>

⁷⁶ CAAT, ‘Farnborough’, 20.5.2015 <http://bit.ly/1PYsQka>

⁷⁷ CAAT, ‘Security & Policing’, 20.10.2015 <http://bit.ly/1PNDR38>

Saudi Arabia is a regular on UKTI DSO’s invitation lists for the major arms fairs that take place in the UK. The largest of these is Defence & Security Equipment International (DSEI). Saudi delegations have been ever-present at DSEI, including in September 2015 while its military was bombing Yemen.



David Cameron and King Salman at the G20 Summit, 16 November 2015
Credit: Georgina Coupe & Crown Copyright / Licence: CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

The personal touch

Relations with Saudi Arabia, particularly in terms of arms sales, are kept warm by regular ministerial, Prime Ministerial and royal visits. Such visits helped pave the way for the Al Yamamah, Al Yamamah II⁷⁸ and Al Salam deals.⁷⁹ The last of these deals was reportedly preceded by a series of secret meetings between then Prime Minister Tony Blair, his Defence Secretary John Reid, and leading Saudi regime figures. Prime Minister David Cameron visited the kingdom in January and November 2012⁸⁰ and in January 2015. The third of these trips, to pay respects following the death of Saudi King Abdullah, cost the UK taxpayer £100,000.⁸¹ A trip planned for January 2016 was postponed in apparent embarrassment at bad publicity over the London-Riyadh relationship, following the mass execution in Saudi Arabia earlier that month.⁸²

Prince Charles has visited the kingdom thirteen times, most recently in February 2014 and February 2015.⁸³ On the 2014 visit, the Prince donned Saudi dress and participated in a traditional ‘sword dance’ with his al-Saud counterparts. The festival at which the ‘sword dance’ was performed was supported by BAE, which received an honour from the Saudi Crown Prince in gratitude for that support.⁸⁴ Shortly after the visit, it was announced that a definite price had finally been agreed for the sale of the 72 Eurofighter Typhoons covered by the Al Salam contract.⁸⁵ Despite official denials, there seems little doubt that Charles’ visit was carefully timed to facilitate the conclusion of BAE’s weapons deal with Saudi Arabia.

A little below this level, a revolving door appears to operate between the UK diplomatic and military establishment and the arms industry for those who have played a role in building and maintaining the UK-Saudi relationship. These figures move seamlessly between prominent positions on the public and private side of the fence, to the point where any separation of interests between the state and the weapons exporters begins to break down. There is

more than a hint of senior government officials being unofficially rewarded for their services to UK arms exports with top jobs in the industry after their time in government has ended. The industry also gains from appointing executives with inside knowledge of the government’s approach to arms sales. This revolving door serves to create a self-reinforcing network at the intersection of the state, the military and the arms industry, all dedicated to the continuation of this business.

A prime example is Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, the former UK ambassador to Riyadh who pressured the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) to drop its investigation into the Al Yamamah contract. Sir Sherard was subsequently hired by BAE Systems, the main subject of the SFO enquiry, as its international business development director, focusing on the Middle East.⁸⁶ Other figures crossing to the arms industry include MODSAP personnel: Phil Heard, a former Head of Air Programmes moved to a job with Raytheon UK,⁸⁷ while Peter Ruddock a former director of MODSAP, became UK chief executive of Lockheed Martin UK.⁸⁸

In a different demonstration of the impact of Saudi interests on UK political accountability, Sir William Patey, another former ambassador to the Saudi court, was given the role of Specialist Adviser on the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee’s inquiry into the UK’s relationship with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. As Sir William had been closely involved with implementing Government policy with regards to Saudi Arabia, it is hard to see how he could be expected to approach the inquiry in a disinterested and questioning manner. He had also previously appeared as a witness at an Information Tribunal hearing opposing the release of information on UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia.⁸⁹ The Committee’s report was a whitewash, though it is impossible to know the extent of Sir William’s role in this.⁹⁰

How the government handles questions of corruption

Rumours of corruption around the Al Yamamah deal with Saudi Arabia started almost as soon as the first contract was signed in 1985.⁹¹ These became more tangible in 2001 when the Serious Fraud Office wrote to the Ministry of Defence regarding an alleged ‘slush fund’ run by BAE to bribe Saudi officials. The MoD permanent secretary Sir Kevin Tebbit tipped off BAE about the confidential letter and then sat on the material for two years without investigating.⁹²

Detailed allegations about the slush fund were published and broadcast by the Guardian and BBC in 2004⁹³ and that year the SFO started a formal investigation into the deal. However, in December 2006 this was called off after the SFO came under intense pressure from the Prime Minister, the Foreign and Defence Secretaries, the UK’s ambassador to Riyadh and the Saudi regime itself, as well as an energetic lobbying campaign from BAE.⁹⁴

The year after the SFO investigation had been called off, The Guardian published further allegations that put the slush fund in the shade. According to “insider legal sources”, the SFO had found that BAE had secretly paid a Saudi prince more than £1bn in association with the Al Yamamah deal - £30m every quarter for at least ten years. This was done, according to the paper, “with the knowledge and authorisation of Ministry of Defence officials under the Blair government and its predecessors”.⁹⁵ The payments were alleged to continue beyond 2002 when the UK belatedly outlawed corrupt payments to overseas officials.

⁷⁸ The Guardian, ‘Rifkind tries to rescue Saudi deal’, 19.9.1992

⁷⁹ The Guardian, ‘Blair in secret Saudi mission’, 27.9.2005 <http://bit.ly/1QiRJEj>

⁸⁰ BBC News, David Cameron in talks with Saudi king, 13.1.2012 <http://bbc.in/20XSSGv>; The Daily Telegraph, ‘David Cameron defends arms deals with Gulf states’, 5.11.2012 <http://bit.ly/1EGRvS9>

⁸¹ The Guardian, ‘Anger at Cameron’s £100,000 trip to honour dead Saudi king’, 24.10.2015 <http://bit.ly/1OZAO6r>

⁸² The Independent, ‘Saudi Arabia executions: David Cameron delays planned visit to Riyadh’, 5.1.2016 <http://ind.pn/1RoPb5G>

⁸³ The Daily Telegraph, ‘Prince Charles meets members of the Saudi royal family’, 10.2.2015 <http://bit.ly/1RJwF8Z>

⁸⁴ Arab News, ‘Crown Prince Honours BAE’, 22.2.2014 <http://bit.ly/1ozFpCH>

⁸⁵ The Guardian, ‘The future British king, Saudi princes, and a secret arms deal’, 24.2.2014, <http://bit.ly/1h889LH>

⁸⁶ The Guardian, ‘BAE Systems hires Britain’s former envoy to Saudi Arabia’, 18.2.2011 <http://bit.ly/1QjqHGw>; The Telegraph, ‘Revelations in BAE Saudi case prompt inquiry call’, 12.3.2011 <http://bit.ly/20s8qOA>; R v Director of the Serious Fraud Office, [2008] UKHL 60, 30.7.2008 <http://bit.ly/1Nh9NgQ>

⁸⁷ LinkedIn, Phil Heard <http://bit.ly/1okviBK>

⁸⁸ Lockheed Martin UK, ‘Lockheed Martin appoints new UK Chief Executive’, 18.11.2015 <http://lmt.co/1VjC5Xf>

⁸⁹ CAAT, ‘Foreign Affairs Committee inquiry’, 22.11.2013 <http://bit.ly/1UEqqGb>; The Guardian, ‘Sparing Saudi Blushes’, 10.3.2008 <http://bit.ly/25y4NKJ>

⁹⁰ CAAT, ‘Saudi-Bahrain report is a whitewash’, 22.11.2013 <http://bit.ly/23moqXy>

⁹¹ See ‘Doubts and Problems’, in CAAT, ‘The Arabian Connection: The UK Arms Trade to Saudi Arabia’, 2000 <http://bit.ly/1Smwmgn>

⁹² The Guardian, ‘MoD chief in fraud cover-up row’, 13 October 2003 <http://bit.ly/1pKqqGS>

⁹³ The Guardian, ‘Arms firm’s £60m slush fund’, 4.5.2004 <http://bit.ly/1Sm5Rau>; The Guardian, ‘BAE chief linked to slush fund’, 5.10.2004 <http://bit.ly/1qzJjNu>; BBC News, ‘BBC lifts the lid on secret BAE slush fund’, 5.10.2004 <http://bbc.in/1YkYgt>

⁹⁴ CAAT, ‘New documents reveal BAE pressurised Government to halt corruption investigation’, 14.2.2008 <http://bit.ly/1Mj4r4b>; The Guardian, ‘The BAE Files: Nobbling the Police’ <http://bit.ly/1Mj4yN5>; Hansard, 14.12.2006 <http://bit.ly/1omVpJ9>; The Financial Times, ‘SFO drops probe into BAE bribe allegations’, 15.12.2006

⁹⁵ The Guardian, ‘BAE accused of secretly paying £1bn to Saudi prince’, 7.6.2007 <http://bit.ly/1SvoPRt>

4 MAJOR DEALS & OVERALL TRENDS

⁹⁶ The Daily Telegraph, 'We bribed Saudis, says ex-minister', 17.6.2006 <http://bit.ly/1KnzBH2>

⁹⁷ The Observer, 'Risk to British lives ended Saudi jet probe', 17.12.2006 <http://bit.ly/1WpDwnt>

⁹⁸ The Guardian, 'MI6 and Blair at odds over Saudi deals', 16.1.2007 <http://bit.ly/1OehSwl>

⁹⁹ The Times, 'Court told of Blair's pressure on SFO over Saudi inquiry', 15.2. 2008

¹⁰⁰ Department of Justice, 'BAE Systems PLC Pleads Guilty and Ordered to Pay \$400 Million Criminal Fine', 1.3.2010 <http://1.usa.gov/1T5j4K5>

¹⁰¹ BBC News, 'BAE Systems handed £286m criminal fines in UK and US', 5.2.2010 <http://bbc.in/25wliqE>

¹⁰² CAAT, 'MODSAP and SANGCOM', <http://bit.ly/1KTF4p3>

¹⁰³ Full details of the nature of the UK's arms exports to Saudi Arabia are set out in Nicholas Gilby's recent book, 'Deception in High Places: A History of Bribery in Britain's Arms Trade', 2014, London: Pluto Press. Text from some of the key documents can be found on the book's accompanying website: <https://deceptioninhighplaces.com/>

In 2006, the former UK Defence Secretary Ian Gilmour told the BBC unequivocally: "You either got the business and bribed, or you didn't bribe and didn't get the business. You either went along with how the Saudis behaved, or what they wanted, or you let the US and France have all the business".⁹⁶ However, what is perhaps more interesting is the ways in which the UK state has handled these investigations and what this tells us about the relationship with Saudi Arabia.

It was frequently reported at the time that the Saudis had threatened to cut off anti-terror intelligence sharing with London if the SFO probe had continued, thus effectively putting UK lives at risk.⁹⁷ However, subsequent reports contradicted this. Whitehall sources told the Guardian that the heads of the intelligence agencies had specifically not endorsed the concern, coming from the government, that intelligence sharing would be cut off.⁹⁸ A High Court judge presiding over a legal challenge to the abandonment of the inquiry noted that "I have seen nothing to suggest that anyone did anything but roll over" to the pressure coming from the Saudi side.⁹⁹ Although the High Court found in favour of the challenge, that decision was later overturned by the Law Lords.

In contrast to the SFO capitulation, the US Department of Justice (DOJ) continued its investigations. In 2010 BAE was sentenced "to pay a \$400 million criminal fine, one of the largest criminal fines in the history of DOJ's ongoing effort to combat overseas corruption in international business and enforce U.S. export control laws".¹⁰⁰ The fine covered arms deals with Saudi Arabia, the Czech Republic and Hungary. Although BAE only had to admit to making false statements in regulatory filings, the DOJ was quoted as saying that BAE "made hundreds of millions of dollars in payments to third parties, while knowing of a high probability that money would be passed on to foreign government decision-makers to favour BAE in the award of defence contracts".¹⁰¹

Following allegations by whistleblowers, in August 2012 the SFO began a criminal investigation into GPT Special Projects (an Airbus subsidiary) and its role in SANGCOM. In October 2014, clearly fearing the worst, Transparency International UK, Global Witness and Corruption Watch UK wrote to the Attorney General urging no interference in the SFO investigation.¹⁰² At the time of writing, the investigation is continuing.¹⁰³

In 2006, the former UK Defence Secretary Ian Gilmour told the BBC unequivocally: "You either got the business and bribed, or you didn't bribe and didn't get the business. You either went along with how the Saudis behaved, or what they wanted, or you let the US and France have all the business"

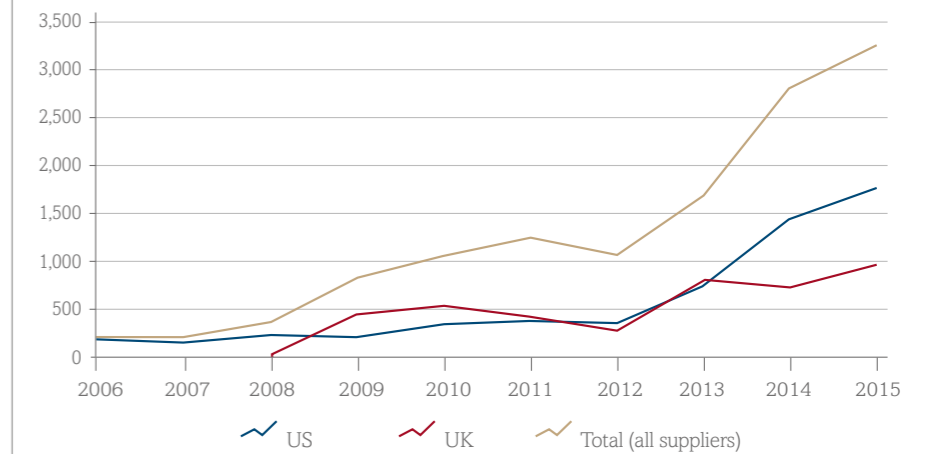
¹⁰⁴ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Arms Transfers Database <http://bit.ly/1pLMLnK>

¹⁰⁵ SIPRI, Arms Transfers Database <http://bit.ly/1pLMLnK>

¹⁰⁶ SIPRI, Arms Transfers Database <http://bit.ly/1pLMLnK>

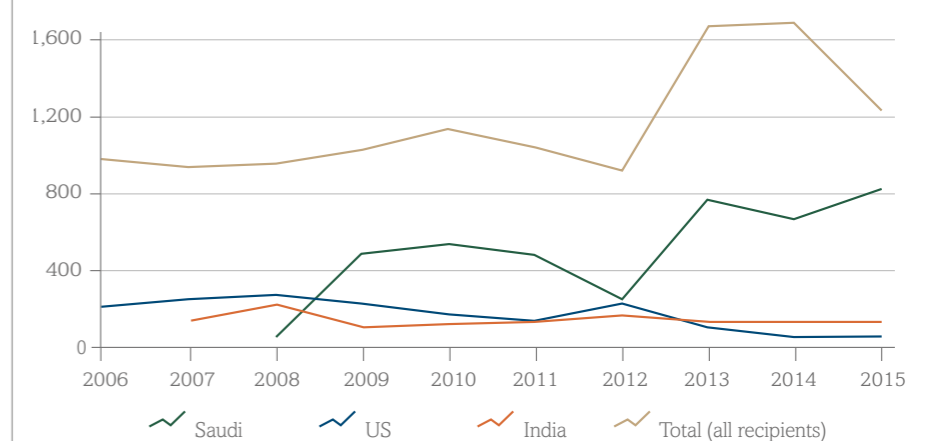
According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the UK is the world's fifth largest weapons exporter in the post-Cold War era, standing a long way behind the United States.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, the UK is a relatively close second to the US in terms of supplying arms to Saudi Arabia, and Saudi Arabia is the UK's top export market.

Leading sources of major arms transfers to Saudi Arabia, 2006-2015¹⁰⁵



Note: values are SIPRI Trend Indicator Values which SIPRI has developed to permit comparison between deliveries of different weapons and to identify general trends. The data are expressed in US\$m at constant (1990) prices. A blank entry indicates that the value of deliveries is less than US\$0.5m.

Leading recipients of major arms exports from the United Kingdom, 2006-2015¹⁰⁶



Note: values are SIPRI Trend Indicator Values which SIPRI has developed to permit comparison between deliveries of different weapons and to identify general trends. The data are expressed in US\$m at constant (1990) prices. A blank entry indicates that the value of deliveries is less than US\$0.5m.

¹⁰⁷ Overall figures cited here are for Single Individual Export Licences. These are the main type of export licence, however, there are other types including Open Individual Export Licences for which there are no values as there is no limit to the volume of equipment that can be exported under them. Also note that when the full value of goods licensed for export is not shipped within the approved timescale, a further licence may be issued to allow for those shipments to be made. See for example, Hansard 12.1.2016 <http://bit.ly/1SAM0Y9>

¹⁰⁸ CAAT, Arms Export Licences <http://bit.ly/248H9nk>

¹⁰⁹ BAE Systems, Annual Reports 2012-2015 <http://bit.ly/20IX0ff>

While the UK government does not provide values for deliveries of arms exports, it does publish information on the values of most arms export licences.¹⁰⁷ According to official statistics, the total known value of licences approved by the UK government for military exports to Saudi Arabia from 2010 to 2015 inclusive is £6.7bn.¹⁰⁸ The value of approved licences from the start of the bombing of Yemen to the end of 2015 (the most recent available data) is £2.8bn.

Major deals

BAE aircraft deals

UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia are dominated by the giant aircraft deals in which BAE Systems is the prime contractor. Its recent Annual Reports set out contracts over the past few years.¹⁰⁹

While Al Yamamah was agreed in the 1980s, it has morphed into the Saudi British Defence Co-operation Programme which provides “operational capacity” to the Royal Saudi Air Force and the Royal Saudi Naval Forces. New major contracts continue to be awarded:

- in 2012, there were orders totalling £3.4bn for the support of operational capacity until the end of 2016. This included the provision of manpower, logistics and training to the Royal Saudi Air Force
- in 2013, a £1.5bn contract was agreed for Tornado aircraft upgrades and weapons.

There are two main programmes relating to the 2007 Al Salam Eurofighter Typhoon purchase. First the aircraft deliveries; about a dozen Typhoons are presently being delivered each year, with 57 of the 72 Typhoons having been transferred by the end of 2015.

Alongside this sits the Saudi Typhoon support programme. Recent contracts include:

- in 2012, an “availability contract” which was to support the aircraft’s entry into service (“including air crew and ground crew training, maintenance facilities, technical support, spares and repairs, aircraft availability, and aircraft capability upgrades.”)
- in 2013, a five year, £1.8bn follow-on support contract.

The other main BAE equipment deals have been for training aircraft:

- in 2012, a £1.6bn contract for supply and initial support for 22 Hawk training aircraft and 55 PC-21 Pilatus training aircraft. Both would help Saudi pilots learn to fly the Typhoons previously sold
- in 2016, a contract for 22 more Hawk aircraft.

Paveway IV bombs

In 2014, the US Congress approved Raytheon UK’s sale of precision-guided Paveway IV bombs to Saudi Arabia, in a deal thought to be worth £150 million.¹¹⁰ The following year, with the war in Yemen underway, Paveway IV bombs on Raytheon UK’s production line for supply to the UK Royal Air Force were instead diverted to the Saudis in order to replenish their arsenal.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Defense News, ‘Paveway Pays Off: Saudi Deal Boosts Precision Bomb Production for Raytheon UK’, 31.3.2014

¹¹¹ Defense News, ‘RAF Bombs Diverted to Saudis for Yemen Strikes’, 16.7.2015 <http://bit.ly/1Ody3Ms>

¹¹² SIPRI, Arms Transfers Database <http://bit.ly/1pLMLnK>; Foreign & Commonwealth Office, written evidence to the Committees on Arms Export Controls, March 2016 <http://bit.ly/1TVZUXv>

¹¹³ CAAT, ‘Saudi Arabia uses UK-made armoured vehicles in Bahrain crackdown on democracy protesters’, 16.3.2011 <http://bit.ly/1UEvIXF>; BAE Systems, Annual Report 2010 <http://bit.ly/20IX0ff>

¹¹⁴ Export Control Organisation, response to Freedom of Information Act request, 12.9.2012 <http://bit.ly/1XfxhTP>

¹¹⁵ CAAT, Arms Export Licences <http://bit.ly/1Ri1vll>

¹¹⁶ CAAT, Arms Export Licences <http://bit.ly/1MkBQvh>

¹¹⁷ CAAT, Arms Export Licences <http://bit.ly/1UC3uGQ>

¹¹⁸ CAAT, Arms Export Licences <http://bit.ly/1Ri0oC3>

¹¹⁹ CAAT, Arms Export Licences <http://bit.ly/1LDVBy4>

¹²⁰ CAAT, Arms Export Licences <http://bit.ly/1S3pnsz>

¹²¹ CAAT Company Map, www.caat.org.uk/map/saudi-arabia

Brimstone and Storm Shadow missiles

The UK has sold Brimstone ground attack missiles and Storm Shadow cruise missiles to Saudi Arabia. Both are manufactured by MBDA.

Saudi Arabia ordered 1,000 Brimstone missiles in 2008 and the following year ordered 350 Storm Shadow cruise missiles, with a further 100 ordered in 2013. In March 2016, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office confirmed the use of both types of missiles in Yemen.¹¹²

Tactica armoured vehicles

Tactica armoured vehicles manufactured by BAE in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne and supplied to the Saudi Arabia National Guard between 2008 and 2010 were used by Saudi troops supporting the crushing of the pro-democracy uprising in Bahrain in spring 2011.¹¹³ Licences for parts for these vehicles continued to be regularly approved in the months following the intervention in Bahrain.¹¹⁴

Unidentified licensed equipment

In addition to identified export deals, the UK government publishes information on equipment that is licensed for export. This indicates the general type of equipment but doesn’t make known the exporting company or the specific equipment.

Military equipment licensed for export to Saudi Arabia in recent years includes assault rifles,¹¹⁵ grenade launchers,¹¹⁶ water cannon,¹¹⁷ gun silencers,¹¹⁸ components for military helicopters,¹¹⁹ and components for military combat vehicles.¹²⁰ All of course have the potential to be used in the commission of violations of international law in wartime or in the repression of domestic opponents.

While it is not known which companies were granted these specific export licences, separate data on the arms export licences applied for by UK companies has been obtained under the Freedom of Information Act and is available on the CAAT Company Map.¹²¹

The following year, with the war in Yemen underway, Paveway IV bombs on Raytheon UK’s production line for supply to the UK Royal Air Force were instead diverted to the Saudis in order to replenish their arsenal

MAPPING SAUDI'S SUPPLIERS

There are many UK suppliers of military and security equipment to Saudi Arabia. The map shows the relevant sites of some of these companies. More details, as well as sources for the information, are available at caat.org.uk/map/saudi-arabia

BAE SYSTEMS

BAE Systems is the world's third largest arms company. It is the lead contractor on the Al Yamamah and Al Salam deals and has sold a vast array of equipment to Saudi Arabia, including the Eurofighter Typhoon and Tornado combat aircraft used in Yemen. Typhoons are manufactured at its **Warton** and **Samlesbury** sites.

CHEMRING

Chemring has stated that Saudi Arabia is its third largest market. Chemring Defence UK, in **Draycott**, is known to have applied for multiple arms export licences for the export of ammunition to Saudi Arabia.

SELEX

Selex (part of Finmeccanica) is based in Italy and the UK but has a presence in other countries, including Saudi Arabia. In the UK, its sites include a maintenance training centre in **Luton** for the Eurofighter Typhoon. Six Saudi engineers began training there in January 2016.

ROLLS-ROYCE

Rolls-Royce manufactures engines for the Eurofighter Typhoon jets for the Royal Saudi Air Force. The engines are manufactured at a site in **Bristol**.

ACCURACY INTERNATIONAL

Portsmouth company Accuracy International declares itself to be the "creator of the world's finest sniper rifles". It is known to have applied for multiple arms export licences for the export of small arms to Saudi Arabia.

SAYWELL

Saywell is an aircraft parts supplier located in **Worthing**. It is known to have applied for many arms export licences for the export of aircraft components to Saudi Arabia.

PYSER-SGI

Pyser-SGI, located in **Edenbridge**, is a manufacturer of optical equipment including weapon sights. It is known to have applied for multiple arms export licences for the export of small arms equipment to Saudi Arabia.

RAYTHEON

Raytheon is based in the US and is the world's largest missile maker. Its weapon sales to Saudi Arabia include TOW anti-armour missiles, Sidewinder air-to-air missiles, Joint Stand-Off Weapons and Paveway IV guided bombs. The Paveway bombs are being used in Yemen and are manufactured in **Harlow** and **Glenrothes**.

MBDA

MBDA is Europe's largest missile producer. Its sales to Saudi Arabia include approximately 450 Storm Shadow cruise missiles (manufactured at **Stevenage**), 1,000 Brimstone air-to-surface missiles (manufactured at **Lostock & Henlow**), 2,000 Mistral portable surface-to-air missiles and 100 Milan anti-tank missiles.

PRIMETAKE

Primetake is located in **Lincoln** and manufactures a wide range of ammunition including for sniper rifles and "public order". It is known to have applied for arms export licences for the export of ammunition to Saudi Arabia.

MBDA

RAYTHEON

HIDDEN TECHNOLOGY

Hidden Technology "manufactures and supplies surveillance and intelligence gathering equipment to police, military and government security agencies around the globe" at a site in **Southend on Sea**. The UK government's arms promotions unit supported it to expand its business into Saudi Arabia, which it supplies with tracking technology.

5 UK EXPORT CONTROLS

¹²² Hansard, 27.1.2016 <http://bit.ly/1KI3KXu>

¹²³ Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 'Consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria' <http://bit.ly/1ObSWph>

¹²⁴ Amnesty International, 'Government breaking the law supplying arms to Saudi say leading lawyers', 17.12.2015 <http://bit.ly/1Oai7yZ>

When questioned in Parliament in January 2016 about UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia, the Prime Minister reached for what has now become a well-worn stock phrase for UK officials defending the arms trade: "we have the strictest rules for arms exports of almost any country anywhere in the world".¹²² It is an assertion that belies the reality, and which is strongly contradicted by the government's simultaneous, energetic efforts to promote those same exports.

UK companies seeking to export arms and military technologies overseas must apply to the Export Control Organisation, part of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

Arms export licensing decisions are made on a case-by-case basis, using the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria, adopted in October 2000, and subsequently updated in 2014.¹²³ In the Saudi case, three specific criteria in particular appear to be pertinent, namely those prohibiting arms sales where

- "there is a clear risk that the items might be used for internal repression";
- "[the] items... would provoke or prolong armed conflicts or aggravate existing tensions or conflicts in the country of final destination";
- "there is a clear risk that the items might be used in the commission of a serious violation of international humanitarian law".

In practice, however, the controls are interpreted so weakly as to allow sales that violate the criteria by any common sense definition.

Unlawful exports

In December 2015, Amnesty International and Saferworld announced the results of an assessment they had jointly commissioned from eminent international law experts on the legality of UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia, in the context of the intervention in Yemen. The advice was that such sales were unlawful.¹²⁴

The experts had concluded that "any authorisation by the UK of the transfer of weapons and related items to Saudi Arabia... in circumstances where such weapons are capable of being used in the conflict in Yemen, including

¹²⁵ P.Sands, A.Clapham & B.Ni Ghraigh, 'The lawfulness of the authorisation by the United Kingdom of weapons and related items for export to Saudi Arabia in the context of Saudi Arabia's military intervention in Yemen', Matrix Chambers, 11.12.2015 <http://bit.ly/1lb64iy>

¹²⁶ S.Twigg, Letter to Secretary of State, Department for International Development, 2.2.2016 <http://bit.ly/1WkMiD5>

¹²⁷ Leigh Day, letter to the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, ('In the proposed proceedings R (Campaign Against Arms Trade) v Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills'), 8.1.2016 <http://bit.ly/20zFBmt>

¹²⁸ House of Commons, Foreign Affairs Committee, 2012. British foreign policy and the 'Arab Spring'. (HC 80, Second Report of Session 2012-13) – Report, Together with Formal Minutes, Oral and Written Evidence. London: TSO (The Stationery Office)

¹²⁹ House of Commons, Business, Innovation and Skills, Defence, Foreign Affairs and International Development Committees, 2012. Scrutiny of Arms Exports (2012): UK Strategic Export Controls Annual Report 2010, Quarterly Reports for July to December 2010 and January to September 2011, the Government's Review of arms exports to the Middle East and North Africa, and wider arms control issues. (HC 419-I, First Joint Report of Session 2012-13) – Volume I: Report, Together with Formal Minutes. London: TSO (The Stationery Office)

¹³⁰ The Times, 'Show will go on, Formula One chief says as violence flares up', 15.2.2012 <http://thetim.es/22OKdXG>

¹³¹ The Independent, 'A relationship with strategic - and business - motives', 14.1.2012 <http://ind.pn/1QjKknk>

to support its blockade of Yemeni territory, and in circumstances where their end-use is not restricted, would constitute a breach by the UK of its obligations under domestic, European and international law".¹²⁵

The chair of the House of Commons International Development Committee echoed the language of the key relevant arms control criterion in his letter to the government, stating, "we are convinced that there is more than a clear risk that weapons sold to Saudi Arabia might be used in the commission of serious violations of international humanitarian law. The evidence we have heard is overwhelming that the Saudi-led coalition has committed violations of international law, using equipment supplied by the UK".¹²⁶

This is consistent with advice produced by lawyers acting for CAAT. According to that advice, the failure to suspend existing licences and the decision to continue granting new licences for equipment that could be used by the Saudi military in Yemen is unlawful. Accordingly, CAAT commenced formal legal proceedings against the UK government in March 2016, seeking a judicial review by the High Court of the government's continuing arming of Saudi Arabia.¹²⁷

Facilitating internal repression

Aside from the specific question of Yemen, there is the broader point about arms sales indirectly facilitating or directly being used in internal repression. In evidence given to the UK Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, Amnesty International has said that "the UK Government's focus on arms sales to the MENA [Middle East and North Africa] region ... is completely at odds with its stated aim of upholding human rights ... Equipment and components licensed for sale...to Bahrain [and] Saudi Arabia [include] ... types of equipment that are likely to have been used in serious human rights violations against civilians."¹²⁸

In 2012, the UK House of Commons Committees on Arms Export Controls concluded that the revocation of some licences to Bahrain and other MENA states after the 2011 crackdowns (in other words, when it was too late) merely exposed the fact that the government had been allowing arms exports to known human rights abusers. The committees noted that "there is an inherent conflict between strongly promoting arms exports to authoritarian regimes whilst strongly criticising their lack of human rights at the same time". In 2011, the Chair of the Committees opined that the government's "judgments have been shown to be wildly over-optimistic and rose-tinted regarding the sale to authoritarian regimes of weapons that could be used for internal repression".¹²⁹ The fact that many arms sales continued even at the height of the crackdown shows that the export control criteria are effectively worthless in practice.¹³⁰

As Shashank Joshi, Associate Fellow at the Royal United Services Institute, pointed out during the controversy over UK ties to regimes cracking down in protesters in 2011, "[i]t would be British arms and security forces trained by British personnel that would do much of the killing if a 'Saudi Spring' ever did unfold".¹³¹

The international arms trade has historically acted as a key factor in bolstering repressive forms of government. One of the main reasons that authoritarian rule has persisted in the Middle East is that the internal security and military forces of the various regimes have grown out of all proportion,

fuelled by arms sales from strategic allies such as the US, the UK, France and Russia. Where the means of violence are expanded in this way, they are often sought more to fend off internal threats to the regime, rather than external threats to the nation. The more arms are imported, and the larger the military and security forces grow, the more likely it becomes that regimes will be inclined to respond to domestic challenges with physical force, and to develop a particular 'national security' mentality which in turn leads to human rights abuses and violent repression. This is plainly what has happened with regard to Saudi Arabia, and the UK has played a leading role in the process.¹³²

The act of supplying arms also sends a legitimising signal, a sign of approval for a regime. The House of Commons' Foreign Affairs Committee recognised this in its 2013 report into the UK's relations with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain: "Both the government and the opposition in Bahrain view UK defence sales as a signal of British support for the government. The UK Government should take this into account when considering high-profile sales, such as the Eurofighter Typhoon, to Bahrain."¹³³ This signal of support applies equally to Saudi Arabia.

¹³² S.L.Blanton, "Instruments of Security or Tools of Repression? Arms Imports and Human Rights Conditions in Developing Countries", Journal of Peace Research, 36(2), 1999, p233-244

¹³³ House of Commons, Foreign Affairs Committee, 'The UK's relations with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain' (HC 88, Fifth Report of Session 2013-14), 12.11.2013, London: TSO (The Stationery Office) <http://bit.ly/1outHcy>



Destroyed house in the south of Sanaa, 13 June 2016
Credit: Ibrahim Qasim / Licence: CC-BY-SA-4.0

6 A POOR DEAL ALL ROUND

UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the alliance between the two states are a bad deal for the people of Saudi Arabia and the wider Middle East. However, they are also a poor deal for the people of the UK, regardless of the public justifications made by the UK government and arms companies. The relationship is anti-democratic, represents a major security threat, and is a waste of skills and resources that could be put to far more efficient and productive use.

Undermining democracy

As well as playing a key role in buttressing the anti-democratic regime in Riyadh, the arms trade and the overall UK-Saudi alliance has served to undermine democratic values in the UK.

The power of Saudi as an arms buyer (in a buyers' market) has contributed to muting potential criticism of the Saudi regime's human rights abuses. The UK has gone as far as arranging a vote-trading deal with Saudi Arabia, so that both countries could be elected to the UN's Human Rights Council in 2013.¹³⁴ In October 2015, that Council failed to support an independent inquiry into war crimes in Yemen.¹³⁵

However, perhaps the most obvious example of the damage the relationship causes was the UK government forcing the Serious Fraud Office to drop its investigation into allegations of wide-scale corruption surrounding what at the time was the largest weapons contract ever entered into by the UK state. This effective exemption from the rule of law for the Saudi regime is clearly counter to the accountability and transparency that is vital to the basic health of a democratic state.

¹³⁴ The Guardian, 'UK and Saudi Arabia 'in secret deal' over human rights council place', 29.9.2015 <http://bit.ly/1O7vBuF>

¹³⁵ The Independent, 'Anger as Saudi Arabia blocks UN inquiry into 'war crimes' in Yemen', 1.10.2015 <http://ind.pn/1NSiSuw>

¹³⁶ The Nation, 'France Should Stop Listening to Saudi Arabia on Syria', 15.11.2015 <http://bit.ly/1Mw0nrY>; The Independent, 'Turkey and Saudi Arabia alarm the West by backing Islamist extremists the Americans had bombed in Syria', 12.5.2015 <http://ind.pn/1jLcHMT>

¹³⁷ Reuters, 'In Yemen chaos, Islamic State grows to rival al Qaeda', 30.6.2015 <http://reut.rs/248ybXi>; Wall Street Journal, 'As Yemen's Civil War Rages, Al Qaeda Gains', 3.12.2015 <http://on.wsj.com/1lbWTo2>

¹³⁸ European Parliament, 'Joint motion for a resolution on the situation in Yemen', 27.7.2015 <http://bit.ly/1TOkd9T>

¹³⁹ S.Hamid, 'Sisi's Regime Is a Gift to the Islamic State', Foreign Policy, 6.8.2015 <http://atfp.co/1MS8Z0i>

¹⁴⁰ The Guardian, 'Egypt plane crash: Russia says jet was bombed in terror attack', 17.11.2015 <http://bit.ly/1QILrvD>

¹⁴¹ G.Achcar, 'The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising', 2013, London: Saqi Books

¹⁴² The Guardian, 'David Cameron insists UK must have close ties with Saudi Arabia', 6.10.2015 <http://bit.ly/1hvp20I>

¹⁴³ The Independent, 'Britain: Saudi Arabia's silent partner in Yemen's civil war', 19.12.2015 <http://ind.pn/1YtDWcl>

Undermining security

The Saudi regime's autocratic rule and reckless foreign policies both serve indirectly to inflame the sort of violent extremism that threatens the UK. For example, in Syria, the Saudis have supported fundamentalist domestic rebel groups who in turn have been colluding with the local branch of Al Qaeda.¹³⁶ In Yemen, the humanitarian crisis exacerbated by the Coalition's intervention has opened up yet another anarchic space for 'Islamic State' to fill, with Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, one of the most dangerous branches of the movement, also making major gains as a result of the war.¹³⁷ A motion passed by the European Parliament in July 2015 stated that the Coalition's actions "have created conditions more conducive to the expansion of terrorist and extremist organisations such as ISIS/Da'esh and AQAP [Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula]".¹³⁸

In Egypt, the Saudis have given strong support to a regime which came to power in a military coup in 2013 and subsequently waged a campaign of state terrorism against its opponents which, predictably, gave a massive boost to jihadis in the country and opened the door to 'ISIS'.¹³⁹ That new 'ISIS' branch is the prime suspect in the 2015 bombing of a Russian airliner flying out of Sharm el-Sheikh,¹⁴⁰ a resort visited by hundreds of thousands of UK tourists each year. More broadly, it is precisely the decades-long dysfunctional rule of regimes like that in Saudi Arabia which has brought the Middle East to the current point of desperation, social breakdown and state collapse in which violent extremist groups are thriving as never before.¹⁴¹

A Saudi Arabian government that could be counted upon as a genuine ally in countering security threats to the UK would be one that played a responsible role in what is currently a highly volatile region. It would also be one carrying out extensive domestic reform to forestall the possibility of it going the way of Syria, Libya or Yemen, including an end to violations and denials of human rights. Instead, Saudi Arabia is taking the opposite course, and far from opposing this, the UK is continuing its support - expressed, above all, in the flow of arms.

David Cameron has argued that "We receive from [Saudi Arabia] important intelligence and security information that keeps us safe. The reason we have the relationship is our own national security. There was one occasion since I've been prime minister where a bomb that would have potentially blown up over the UK was stopped because of intelligence we got from Saudi Arabia".¹⁴²

It is impossible to verify the claim relating to the specific incident David Cameron refers to, but there are three things to say in response. First, this intelligence relates to a threat that the Saudis themselves are indirectly exacerbating. Secondly, intelligence cooperation goes in both directions, and given its acute vulnerability to terrorist groups, the Saudi regime is highly unlikely to cut itself off from the UK's extensive capabilities. Thirdly, one has to consider the cost of the relationship, relative to its alleged value. Journalist Iona Craig, reporting from the ground in Yemen,¹⁴³ responds to the Prime Minister's argument by saying, "perhaps we should ask what the Government's exchange rate is for British lives saved to Yemeni civilians, thousands of whom are already dead?"

Ignoring better economic alternatives

On the question of UK jobs, even if arming a regime such as that in Saudi Arabia could be justified on grounds of the benefits to this country, such an argument would still not be persuasive here. The supposed net benefit of UK arms exports are by no means clear, or easy to calculate, when all the state support provided to the industry is factored in.

More importantly, pursuing large-scale arms production and exports is a waste of valuable and scarce skills and investment. The scientific and engineering skills currently benefiting the UK arms industry could be transferred into the development of renewable energy and low-carbon technologies. Unlike the stagnant arms industry, the market for these technologies is expanding rapidly. Not only would these activities be potentially very lucrative, they would also be far more conducive to UK and international well-being and security in the years and decades to come.¹⁴⁴ For example, several thousand jobs could be created in the Clyde region if investment was redirected from warships to developing wave power and making the Clyde a global leader in a field that has enormous potential.¹⁴⁵

A far broader assessment of security is required: one that prioritises the well-being of people rather than being dominated by military power and relationships. Instead of contributing to repression and violence in the Middle East, UK industry could instead be tasked with both positioning the UK as a leader in key low-carbon technologies and helping address the imminent threat of climate change. Real security involves tackling the causes of problems, not creating more.

¹⁴⁴ CAAT, 'Arms To Renewables: Work for the Future', October 2014 <http://bit.ly/20qKDNs>

¹⁴⁵ CAAT, 'Arms Industry in the Clyde & Renewable Energy Options', November 2015 <http://bit.ly/1TZpYBB>

"The evidence we have heard is overwhelming that the Saudi-led coalition has committed violations of international law, using equipment supplied by the UK"



Royal Saudi Air Force Eurofighter Typhoon
Credit: Clément Alliaing / Licence: CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

7 CONCLUSION

Saudi Arabia is the UK's biggest arms customer, as well as representing the UK government's closest and most shameful alliance in the Middle East. One of the world's most authoritarian regimes, its repression at home and aggression abroad is enabled by and carried out with weapons made in the UK.

Not only does the Saudi regime brutally repress its own population, it has used UK-supplied arms to help crush democracy protests in Bahrain; now warplanes built in the UK are playing a central role in Saudi Arabia's indiscriminate assault on civilians in Yemen, where the Saudi-led military campaign has triggered a humanitarian catastrophe.

The UK government has continued to support Saudi air strikes in Yemen and provide arms despite overwhelming evidence of repeated breaches of international humanitarian law. It continues to sell arms to the Saudis irrespective of the regime's role in suppressing political protests in Bahrain, and its record of domestic human rights abuses. As well as being plainly immoral, this is also a clear violation of the UK's own guidelines on arms sales, and of European and international law, and makes a mockery of the government's claims to 'rigorously' control arms exports.

UK arms sales and military support for the Saudi regime make the UK complicit in its wrongdoing. CAAT therefore calls on the UK government to end all arms sales and military cooperation with Saudi Arabia. Concretely, this means an immediate implementation of the following:

- The refusal of any licence applications for exports to Saudi Arabia (directly or via a third country) where the end-user is the Saudi military;
- The revocation of any extant licences for exports to Saudi Arabia (directly or via a third country) where the end-user is the Saudi military;
- The cessation of any and all assistance being granted to the Saudi-led Coalition in respect of its intervention in the Yemeni civil war; and
- An end to cooperation between the UK military and the Saudi military at all levels.

Not only does the Saudi regime brutally repress its own population, it has used UK-supplied arms to help crush democracy protests in Bahrain; now warplanes built in the UK are playing a central role in Saudi Arabia's indiscriminate assault on civilians in Yemen, where the Saudi-led military campaign has triggered a humanitarian catastrophe.

ABBREVIATIONS

- DOJ – Department of Justice (US)
- DSEI – Defence & Security Equipment International
- ECGD – Export Credits Guarantee Department
- HRW – Human Rights Watch
- IHL – International Humanitarian Law
- MENA – Middle East and North Africa
- MoD – Ministry of Defence
- MODSAP – Ministry of Defence Saudi Armed Forces Project
- MP – Member of Parliament
- MSF – Médecins Sans Frontières
- NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation
- SANGCOM – Saudi Arabia National Guard Communications Project
- SAS – Special Air Service (UK special forces)
- SDLP – Social Democratic and Labour Party
- SFO – Serious Fraud Office
- SIPRI – Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
- UKTI DSO – UK Trade & Investment Defence & Security Organisation

Campaign Against Arms Trade,
Unit 4,
5-7 Wells Terrace,
London,
N4 3JU

Tel: +44 (0)20 7281 0297
Email: enquiries@caat.org.uk
Web: caat.org.uk

This publication is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License