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Submission from the Campaign Against Arms Trade to the Foreign Affairs Committee's inquiry into Libya

1. The Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) in the UK is working to end the international arms trade. This trade has a devastating impact on human rights and security, and damages economic development. CAAT believes that large scale military procurement and arms exports only reinforce a militaristic approach to international problems.
2. This submission is written in the belief that it is better to prevent a crisis than to respond to one; should prevention prove impossible, then to calm the situation rather than inflame it. The example of Libya shows exactly what can happen when there is a military and commercial approach to international policy. The arms companies can sell to almost any government which has money; then, when things go wrong, the UK government's response is military action. Human rights concerns do not feature. The case of Libya also shows how quickly UK governments can move from supporting an authoritarian regime to fighting it.
3. As well as looking at the specific consequences with regarding Libya, CAAT would suggest that your Committee looks at the more general lessons from this example.

Arms embargo imposed and lifted

4. In January 1986 the European Union, following the lead of the USA, imposed an embargo on the export of arms and other military equipment to Gaddafi's Libya. This was in response to support Libya was said to have given to attacks on European airports. The embargo was confirmed in April 1986 after Libya was implicated in a terrorist attack on a discotheque in Berlin and the bombing of a passenger aircraft flying from Rome to Athens. In April 1999, after Libya handed over two men accused of the 1988 Lockerbie bombing for trial in the Netherlands, some of the restrictive measures then in place were lifted. However, the arms embargo remained in force.
5. The EU Council lifted the arms embargo in October 2004 after Libya agreed to end its weapons of mass destruction programmes and pay compensation to dependants of victims of the 1986 Berlin discotheque attack as well as, following pressure from Italy, limit the number of refugees crossing the Mediterranean to Europe.
6. The embargo lifted, Libya was immediately seen as a major marketing opportunity. In June 2005 the UK government's arms sales agency, then the Defence Export Services Organisation (DESO), held a seminar on Libya as an emerging market. According to the Defence Manufacturers Association News in July 2005, Libya was seen as "a relatively sophisticated customer with a political will to procure equipment from the UK". DESO opened an office in Tripoli in January 2006.
7. In May 2007 Prime Minister Tony Blair visited Libya. An Accord on a Defence Cooperation and Defence Industrial Partnership between the UK and Libya was signed. In addition, MBDA, in which BAE Systems has a 37.5% stake, was awarded a £199million contract from Libya for anti-tank missiles plus a related communications system (Reuters, 3.8.07), while General Dynamics UK was to supply the Libyan army with radios in a deal worth £85million (Telegraph, 25.9.11).

8. The support for exports continued. In a speech on 21st May 2009, Richard Paniguiian, Head of DESO's successor organisation, the UK Trade and Investment Defence and Security Organisation (UKTI DSO), said: "There have been high-level political interventions - often behind the scenes - in places like Libya, Oman, India and Algeria. The key here is consistent support over time, delivered at key points in a campaign. You'd expect us to deliver Whitehall support, and we are doing that." Libya was included in the list of UKTI DSO's priority markets for 2010/11 (Hansard, 28.6.10, col. 418-9W).
9. The trade in military equipment was also facilitated by arms exhibitions. In September 2009 Libya was invited to what was then called the Defence Systems and Equipment international which is co-organised by UKTI DSO. NMS International organised the UK pavilion of 50 British companies at the Libyan Defence, Security and Safety Exhibition (LibDex) arms fair in 2008 (Guardian, 21.2.11). UKTI DSO exhibited at the November 2010 LibDex with UK army specialists in attendance (Telegraph, 3.4.11) and also had a presence at another arms fair, the Libyan Aviation Exhibition (LAVEX), in 2009 in Tripoli (UKTI DSO letter, 21.7.09). The Libyan Airforce was amongst the organisers of LAVEX. In July 2010 Libya was represented at the Farnborough International Airshow and in November 2010 UKTI DSO was back in Tripoli exhibiting at the LibDex arms fair.
10. In the months immediately before the 2011 uprising, Manroy Engineering and Accuracy attempted to sell sniper rifles to Libya, offering to host visits to the UK by Libyan officials (Sunday Telegraph, 11.9.11). Papers found abandoned in Tripoli show UKTI DSO securing an invitation for one of Gaddafi's sons, Khamis, to the Queen's Official Birthday reception in June 2010 (Sunday Telegraph 25.9.11). The 10,000 strong Khamis Brigade, which was later to attempt to crush rebellions in Benghazi and Misurata, had been a customer for UK arms. Clearance for the training of some of the Brigade's members by the SAS had been given in January 2009.
11. Libya was only removed as a UKTI DSO priority market on 22nd February 2011 (Letter to CAAT from UKTI DSO, 4.5.11). The violation of human rights by the Libyan authorities did not begin that February, but the UK government had been willing to back the sales of weapons to Gaddafi's armed forces despite it. However, in the context of regional uprisings, in March 2011 an arms embargo was, once again, imposed on Libya. The bombing of Libya by the UK and others, ostensibly to protect civilians, began.
12. It is not as though the consequences of arming Libya were unpredictable. CAAT's *Private Gain, Public Pain* briefing from May 2010 states: "It is hard to see how the recent UK pushes to arm, for example, Libya and Algeria are likely to increase the UK's security. The risks are easier to envisage."

Lesson not learnt

13. In the immediate aftermath of the Libyan uprising in spring 2011, Foreign Office Minister Lord Howell of Guildford said: "Perhaps a year or two ago, many people in this House would have been happy with the number of licences going to Libya, but it turns out that a great many of these - I think 118 of them - have been revoked, and rightly so. All licences for weapons of any kind of concern for Libya have been revoked.we are applying the best possible filter and controls, possibly by world standards, that are available to ensure that weapons are not misused, or used for repression in horrible ways." (Hansard, 22.3.11, col 593)
14. The lessons from this were not, however, learnt. After a short pause following Gaddafi's overthrow, Libya was in 2012 again identified as a priority market for UKTI DSO. In its response to the Committees on Arms Export Controls (CAEC) July 2012 Report, the Government said that Libya's inclusion in the priority list was because the country had "urgent civil security and defence needs" following the 40 years of Gaddafi's regime. It was also said to need "air force reconstruction".
15. In September 2012, Lord Jonathan Marland, a Department of Business, Innovation and Skills Minister, cancelled a trade trip to Libya because of safety concerns. For the people of Libya, the chaos just continued and worsened. Despite the continuing security problems, however, in April 2013 UKTI DSO organised a "Defence and Security Industry Day" in Tripoli aboard the Royal Navy frigate, HMS Kent. Eleven companies were there including Babcock International, BAE Systems, General Dynamics, Thales and Ultra (Hansard, 19.3.13).

16. Libya had not been invited to London's DSEI arms exhibition in 2011, but in 2013 it was back. It was only dropped again as a UKTI DSO priority market in April 2014. By September 2014 factional fighting had forced the Libyan government to flee and there have subsequently been two rival governments. Weaponry from Gaddafi's armed forces, plus some supplied to rebels, became increasingly insecure within the country and, because of Libya's "long and porous borders", a threat both to those within the region and beyond (Rand Corporation, Libya after Gaddafi, 2014).

Lesson which needs to be learnt

17. The consequences of UK military action in Libya, as in Afghanistan and Iraq, have been disastrous. Thousands of people have been killed, injured or forced to flee their homes. Infrastructure has been reduced to rubble. There have been major movements of refugees. The overseas militarisation has also alienated sections of the UK and other western publics, some of whom have, unfortunately, resorted to violence to make their anger known.
18. Huge regional instability continues both in Libya and in the wider middle east and north African region. Yet the UK still supports and promotes the sale of arms to countries in the area, including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which do not tolerate dissent from their own people. Both are UKTI DSO priority markets. The governments of both countries received official UK government invitations to London's Defence and Security Equipment International arms fair in September 2015. Saudi Arabia is leading the coalition, of which the UAE is also part, which is bombing Yemen, causing many civilian deaths and injuries, as well as destroying the infrastructure.
19. By marketing arms to repressive regimes the UK gives them international credibility and negates any claim the UK makes regarding support for the human rights of the peoples of these countries. The last Parliament's CAEC, in its 2013-14 Report, pointed out that: ".... the Government would do well to acknowledge 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 rather than claiming, as the Government continues to do, that these two policies 'are mutually reinforcing'".
20. The policy of selling arms to human rights violators is morally wrong. In the chaos after such repressive governments are overthrown there is no way of knowing what the situation will be, or where, or in whose hands, military equipment may end up. Taking military action when things go wrong, exacerbates the situation.
21. This vicious cycle will only end when the UK government puts human rights, rather than commercial interests, at the centre of its foreign policy, ends arms sales to repressive regimes and removes military intervention as a policy option.

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