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Submission from the Campaign Against Arms Trade to the International Development Committee's inquiry into the Crisis in Yemen

1. The Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) works to end the international arms trade. CAAT believes that large-scale military procurement and arms exports only reinforce a militaristic approach to international problems.
2. In March 2015, hostilities in Yemen escalated when the Saudi Arabia-led coalition commenced a military campaign, targeting Houthis and allied rebel groups backing the former president of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh. This military campaign has involved substantial numbers of air strikes against a wide variety of targets, as well as blockades of harbours. Describing the role of the Department for International Development (DfID), Minister of State Desmond Swayne MP said in written answer 17201 on 30th November 2015: "Since the start of the crisis in Yemen, UK aid has assisted at least 700,000 people directly affected by the conflict including vulnerable host communities, internally displaced people and migrants. We have provided critical support for healthcare, malnutrition, water and sanitation, protection and shelter. We have also continued to strengthen and protect local capacity and community assets from further shocks by providing agricultural and other livelihoods assistance."
3. One question posed by your Committee asks how effectively DfID is working with other government departments, including the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Ministry of Defence, to co-ordinate the UK government's response to the crisis in Yemen and to influence relevant organisations and countries. It is clear that the UK government, through its substantial support for Saudi Arabia, is exacerbating the desperate plight of the people of Yemen. DfID is left to provide assistance to help alleviate the situation for which the UK government is partly responsible.
4. For decades, successive UK governments have disregarded Saudi Arabia's abysmal record on human rights. Now it seems that the reports from those on the ground in Yemen, including United Nations officials and respected human rights organisations, saying that Saudi Arabia's bombing campaign breaks International Humanitarian Law (IHL) are to be similarly ignored. This is a bombing campaign that the UK government admits has seen the use UK-supplied equipment and in which those undertaking the bombing are assisted by UK personnel. Even if IHL were not being violated, UK would still be complicit in the most appalling destruction of life and infrastructure.

UK government support for Saudi Arabia

5. As the Saudi military campaign was starting in March 2015, Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond said: "Saudis are, as I understand it, flying British-built aircraft in the campaign over Yemen and we have a significant 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.” ([Telegraph, 27.3.15](#))

6. The major arms deals between the UK and Saudi Arabia are covered by government-to-government contracts. These are complemented by other contracts between the UK government and the prime contractor, BAE Systems. The Al Yamamah agreements of the mid-1980's focused on Tornado and Hawk jets. Tornados remaining in service continue to be upgraded and serviced under the Saudi British Defence Co-operation Programme. The Al Salam deal for Eurofighter Typhoon aircraft was agreed in stages between 2005 and 2014. Much other military equipment has also been sold to Saudi Arabia, either as part of these contracts or independently of them.
7. The UK government provides on-going support for the deals. The Ministry of Defence Saudi Armed Forces Project (MODSAP) covers the Saudi British Defence Co-operation Programme and Al Salam. Around 200 staff work for MODSAP. As at 1st April 2015, the breakdown of these was:
 - Number of civilians based in the UK - 71
 - Number of military personnel based in the UK - 35
 - Number of civilians based in Saudi Arabia - 33
 - Number of military personnel based in Saudi Arabia - 61MODSAP's cost, £55.01million in 2014/15, is reimbursed by the Saudi government. (Email from MODSAP, 21.7.15) This means Saudi Arabia is paying for UK civil servants and military personnel.
8. In addition to the UK government employees, BAE Systems also has staff supporting its Saudi deals. Over two thousand of them are from the UK, but based in Saudi Arabia. (<http://bit.ly/116leWt>)
9. On 9th December 2015 the Export Control Organisation of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills said that: “UK military personnel are not directly involved in Coalition operations, but are supporting Saudi forces through pre-existing arrangements and additional liaison officers in Saudi headquarters. Since the start of Coalition operations, the UK has deployed a small number of military personnel serving as liaison officers to building our relationship and provide insight into Saudi operations.” (Letter to CAAT's lawyers, Leigh Day) It is presumed that that the “pre-existing arrangements” are those provided under MODSAP.
10. Military exports have continued as usual since March. Parliamentary question [11948](#) answered by Foreign Office Minister Tobias Ellwood on 19th October 2015 set out the position: “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, but this does not represent a direct UK involvement in operations. The UK operates one of the most rigorous and transparent export control regimes in the world. All exports of military and dual-use goods are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria. We are satisfied that extant licences for Saudi Arabia are compliant with the Consolidated Criteria.”
11. The UK government's “business as usual” approach to arms sales and support for Saudi Arabia in the face of the devastation it is causing in Yemen is truly appalling. The approach continues despite the increasing evidence that Saudi Arabia has breached IHL in its action in Yemen. On 8th December 2015 Lords question [4013](#) asked whether the UK government had: “... investigated claims by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International that weapons supplied by the UK, such as Paveway IV missiles, have been used by Saudi Arabia to attack civilian targets in Yemen; and whether they have taken legal advice about the UK's responsibility for such attacks under international humanitarian law.”
12. In response Foreign Office Minister Baroness Anelay said: “The Ministry of Defence monitors incidents of alleged international humanitarian law (IHL) violations using available information

which in turn informs our overall assessment of IHL compliance in Yemen. We consider a range of evidence from government sources, foreign governments, the media and international non-governmental organisations. We are aware of reports, including from Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, of alleged violations of IHL by the Saudi Arabian-led Coalition. We have received repeated assurances from the coalition that they are complying with IHL and we continue to engage with them on those assurances. The Saudi Arabian authorities have their own internal procedures for investigations and we encourage them to be open and transparent in this. The UK operates one of the most rigorous and transparent export control regimes in the world. All exports of arms and controlled military goods are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria, taking account of all relevant factors at the time of the application which include consideration of the risk of the goods being used to commit violations of human rights or international humanitarian law.”

13. Criterion Two, c, of the Export Licensing Criteria says that the UK government will: “not grant a licence if there is a clear risk that the items might be used in the commission of a serious violation of international humanitarian law.” Since UK supplied equipment has been used by the Saudi-led coalition, there is a “clear risk” that any further equipment supplied could be used to commit violations of IHL. At the very least, the UK government should be revoking any extant licences for such equipment and not issuing further ones. The UK government also needs to withdraw assistance to the Saudi-led coalition provided by MODSAP or other pre-existing arrangements.
14. BAE Systems is reportedly hoping for a further deal for 48 Eurofighter Typhoon aircraft. ([DefenseNews, 12.11.15](#)) It is sometimes argued that military exports give the UK influence in an oil-rich region. However, the power is entirely in the hands of the arms purchasers. This has led successive UK governments to disregard Saudi corruption, human rights abuses and, now, the catastrophe that it is causing in Yemen. Until UK governments stop prioritising military exports, to attempt to help via DfID while ignoring the cause and the UK role demonstrates that the prime political drive is to support Saudi Arabia rather than desperate populations. DfID's role then seems to be to help address either the collateral damage or the UK's reputational damage, or maybe both. At best it is incoherent, at worst cynical.

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