

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

020-7281 0297
07814 410893
ann@caat.org.uk

Submission from the Campaign Against Arms Trade to the inquiry by the Committees on Arms Export Controls into the Arms Trade Treaty

1. The Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) in the UK is working to end the international arms trade and promote progressive demilitarisation in arms-producing countries. The arms business has a devastating impact on human rights and security, holds back economic development, and reinforces a militaristic approach to solving international problems.
2. The UK government frequently says it has one of the most [rigorous](#) and robust arms export licensing regimes in the world. It worked for the arms trade treaty and has continued to promote it. However, neither the UK's own, nor international, rules were ever intended to impede arms sales. A contradictory UK government policy - to increase arms sales - has always been paramount.

Government and corporate advocates never intended the treaty to limit arms sales

3. The international arms trade treaty was adopted at the United Nations in New York on 2 April 2013. A year later, on 2 April 2014, the UK ratified the treaty, which entered into force on 24 December 2014. The [treaty text](#) recognises the "legitimate political, security, economic and commercial interests ... in the international trade in conventional arms".
4. Those working for a treaty argued that it would do much to prevent the devastating impact of the arms trade. However, given the dominance of the military mindset in international relations and the political influence of arms companies, it was always unclear how this would happen.
5. The UK and other European Union government, among the most supportive of the treaty, have consistently approved licences that should have been refused under any commonsense interpretation of the existing national and EU criteria, including those on human rights. It seemed highly unlikely that the treaty, which contains similar criteria, would lead to stricter export controls.
6. The arms industry certainly did not believe a treaty would curtail its activities in any way. The then Defence Manufacturers Association (DMA), now part of ADS - the trade body for the UK's Aerospace, Defence, Security and Space sectors, said in *DMA News*, January 2006, that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) had emphasised to it that the treaty would not hamper what both clearly saw as "legitimate, responsible trade". The DMA believed "the eventual Treaty would not bring new obligations for UK industry." This was confirmed later by the Foreign Office Minister Alistair Burt MP. He said the UK was fully committed to securing a treaty that would help "create a level playing field for the legitimate defence industry". ([Hansard, 1.3.11, col 390w](#)) The arms companies were represented on the UK delegation negotiating the treaty.
7. The inclusion of "commercial interests" in the treaty's text confirmed that no real reduction in the arms trade was intended. That CAAT was right to be sceptical about the treaty was further confirmed by a [letter](#) dated April 2013 from the Arms Export Policy Department of the FCO. This says that the treaty recognises States' "legitimate interests in producing, exporting, and importing weapons. International industrial collaboration in arms production will be promoted through the introduction of common standards". The hand of the arms companies could not have been more obvious.

Syria, Saudi Arabia and the arms trade treaty

8. It has been unambiguous throughout that, a treaty notwithstanding, the UK would simply continue to arm Saudi Arabia's authoritarian rulers. Likewise, Russia's weapons supplies to Syria's President Assad would continue unabated. As UK Foreign Secretary William Hague [explained](#) to the Foreign Affairs Committee on 16 July 2013 (Q21), Russia would argue that it would be within its rights to supply the Assad regime with weapons and that would not change.
9. The UK government's support for Saudi Arabia since it began its bombing of Yemen in March 2015 brutally exposes the treaty as having no impact, and export licensing controls as a meaningless paper exercise. The [written evidence](#) (paragraph 29) from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to your Committees' inquiry into the use of UK-manufactured arms in Yemen says that the UK has "accelerated delivery of Paveway precision-guided bombs".
10. Yemen is a total humanitarian catastrophe, yet the UK government cynically turns a blind eye to the numerous credible reports of breaches of international humanitarian law in order to continue to allow the servicing of fighter aircraft and the supply of bombs to Saudi Arabia. Indeed, it has actually speeded up the delivery of the latter.

Sales are the real priority

11. Nothing will change while governments, including that of the UK, continue to support and subsidise the arms companies as they go about their deadly business. While the UK government says it supports human rights, peace and democracy, it is clear that the real priority is the promotion of arms exports.
12. Saudi Arabia is the UK's biggest customer for arms and a "priority market" for the Government's arms sales agency, the UK Trade & Investment Defence and Security Organisation (UKTI DSO). Its 140 civil servants promote military and security equipment sales around the world. They work on behalf of private arms companies, but are paid for by the UK taxpayer. Prime Ministerial and royal visits, and the major arms fairs, can bring arms promotion work to public attention, but much of UKTI DSO's work takes place behind the scenes, arranging contacts and smaller-scale visits.
13. Even this level of assistance is not seen as being enough. Despite the UK's promotion of the treaty, Defence Secretary Michael Fallon MP told delegates at the DSEI arms fair in London in September 2015 that his Department would be stepping up its role in arms export promotion. The additional support was confirmed in the [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review](#) 2015 published in November 2015, paragraph 6.62.
14. Unfortunately the UK is not alone in this. For example, France ratified the treaty and has also subsequently been expanding its arms sales unit. ([DefenseNews](#), 16.2.16)
15. If the UK, French and other governments want to do something to end the devastation caused by the arms trade, they could do so immediately without the need for further treaties or changes to the existing rules. They could simply stop their unrestrained promotion of arms sales.

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