



## Analysis Brothers in arms

By Chris Jones

Two floors underground at a high-end south London hotel, a conference hall foyer is bristling with men in dark suits, their foreheads creased as sharply as their trousers as they talk of mergers and acquisitions; deals and opportunities; new markets and old associates.

The scene is much as you might expect at any business conference: a registration desk, conference packs, and tea, coffee and pastries. There are some notable differences, however: four policemen at the front door of the hotel, and security guards wearing earpieces lurking in hallways and corners, scanning the crowd intently. A closer look reveals a few notable exceptions to the business attire – namely, men in military camouflage or khaki suits, adorned with medals and ribbons.

The event is the annual ‘Symposium’ of the UK Trade & Investment Defence & Security Organisation (UKTI DSO). UKTI DSO has one aim: “to help UK companies to export” and it “works with industry to build and maintain relationships with overseas customers, providing the essential government-to-government interaction.” [1]

An alternative description from Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) refers to the organisation as “a taxpayer-funded arms sales unit.” [2]

The annual Symposium sees arms industry executives mingling with military top brass, high-level bureaucrats, and government ministers. According to UKTI DSO, the Symposium is:

*“[A]n annual showcase event, inviting Ministers, senior officials from overseas governments (as customers) and senior representatives from the defence and security industry to meet, network and discuss the challenges ahead in maintaining the UK’s successful record on defence and security exports.”*

The foyer is crowded. Two men pass by: “It’s even busier than last year, isn’t it?” says one to the other.

### **A renewed commitment to the arms industry**

Since coming to power in May 2010, the UK’s coalition government has made no secret of its support for the manufacture and sale of military and security equipment. Gerald Howarth, Minister for International Security Strategy remarked to the Symposium audience in 2010 that “this government has been clear from the outset, and so have I: we are proud to support the biggest defence exports drive in decades.” [3] Peter Luff, Minister for Defence Equipment, Support and Technology, echoed this in June of the same year: “There’s a sense that in the past we were rather embarrassed about exporting defence products. There’s no such embarrassment in this government.” [4]

There was not an ounce of embarrassment on show in the opening lines of the speech by Richard Paniguan, head of UKTI DSO, to the crowd at the Symposium: “I want to pay tribute to the resilience, fortitude and leadership you have all shown.”

*A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy*, published in October 2010, states that: “[O]ur entire government effort overseas must be geared to promote our trade, the lifeblood of our economy.” [5]

What this means for military and security exports is outlined further in *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR)* also published in October 2010. Here it is made clear that the government “will promote defence exports to secure economic and security benefits.”

Significant attention will be given to states of geopolitical and strategic importance, with a focus on:

*“Countries that provide us with access, basing and over-flight privileges; and on where defence activity can add most value, for example in countries where the military plays a prominent role in national policy-making.” [6]*

### **Internal affairs**

In order to make the most of both the economic and strategic potential of military and security exports, it seems that some changes have been made within the state bureaucracy. In the SDSR, the government outlines its intention to work with:

*“[T]he Ministry of Defence and Home Office, specifically to promote defence and security exports for good commercial reasons and where this will build the capacity of our partners and allies.”*

The Foreign & Commonwealth Office's (FCO) overseas network is also earmarked for a new role, with a "sharper focus on promoting our national security and prosperity". In achieving these ends, the FCO will help to:

*"Maximise the economic opportunities provided by the network with a new emphasis on commercial diplomacy including more effort on creating exports and investment; opening markets; ensuring access to resources and promoting sustainable global growth." [7]*

This will seemingly bolster the work of UKTI DSO's regional offices, which "are the first point of contact between British arms producers and military services companies and overseas customers." [8]

Within the FCO, a whole new department has been created: the Arms Export Policy Department, headed by Richard Tauwhare, a former Governor of the Turks & Caicos Islands. Little has so far been made public about this department. One mention in *Hansard*, the UK's parliamentary record, states that the department "sits alongside the existing Counter Proliferation Department to reflect the importance of countering the proliferation of conventional weapons as well as weapons of mass destruction." [9]

### **Back in the room**

One wall of the conference hall was adorned with a banner emblazoned with the names of the companies sponsoring the event: BAE Systems, Defense News, Defence and Security International, General Dynamics, Marshall Aerospace, MBDA Missile Systems, Northrop Grumman, Rolls-Royce, SAAB and Ultra Electronics. Thales provided lunch and Finnmeccanica sponsored the evening reception.

The stage was flanked by two large screens on which were projected introductory titles for the speakers and, in between speeches, images of fighter jets and warships. Two podiums provided room for a speaker and a questioner, with a semi-circle of chairs in the middle of the stage for the afternoon's panel discussions.

First up to face the glare of the stage lights was Richard Paniguan, head of UKTI DSO, who was very clear about the significant commitment that both government and state have towards boosting arms exports. He noted how UKTI, and in particular his department, were "at the centre of the growth strategy." With "heavy hitters" such as the Prime Minister David Cameron supporting the exports strategy, there is a "significant and impressive" breadth of ministerial support for both the Symposium and the industry that it seeks to assist.

Paniguan also noted how the Foreign & Commonwealth Office's "commercial diplomacy initiative" has proved useful to DSO in its work in countries such as Japan, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and the UAE. Furthermore, 2011's Defence and Security International (the world's largest arms fair, hosted in London and fully backed by

UKTI DSO) was “widely heralded as the most successful ever”, with over 274 delegates from 55 countries.

Recent figures demonstrate, however, that the value of UK defence exports dropped by £400 million in 2011, to £5.4 billion. Despite this, the UK is still the world’s second largest arms exporter, with a 15% market share.

The security side of the industry is faring rather better. Paniguan noted in his speech that it is “forging ahead”, and security exports increased by £600 million in 2011 – an increase of 30% - to reach a total value of £2.6 billion. [10]

A UKTI DSO security delegation visited Libya in February, and the Libyan Ministry of Interior’s training and equipment requirements will apparently “provide a number of opportunities for UK companies.” [11]

### **“Beyond the commercial balance sheet”**

The UK’s *National Security Strategy* does outline another role for the UK in its overseas endeavours. The UK’s international role “extends beyond the commercial balance sheet, vital though it is.” This other role means that “[o]ur national interest requires us to stand up for the values our country believes in – the rule of law, democracy, free speech, tolerance and human rights.” [12]

The Foreign & Commonwealth Office’s 2011 report, *Human Rights and Democracy*, seeks to emphasise the UK’s commitment to promoting and upholding human rights standards around the world. Indeed, a significant amount of time and resources are put into this work. But the content of *Human Rights and Democracy* is utterly divorced from that of the *Strategic Defence and Security Review*, and the facts regarding Britain’s continued sales of military and security equipment to repressive regimes.

### **The “Arab Spring”**

The most illustrative – and pertinent – case studies include the FCO report’s section on countries in the Middle East and North Africa. The section on “UK policy prior to the Arab Spring” makes no mention of the UK’s support for dictatorships in the region. However, the UK’s approach to the region following the onset of unrest was apparently based on “upholding universal values, rights and freedoms.” [13]

This sits rather uneasily with the fact that despite the revocation of some arms exports licences for Bahrain, Egypt and Libya in early 2011, just months later it appeared to be business as usual in the region. Saudi Arabia proved to be the biggest customer with over £1.7 billion of military exports during the last year, and indeed is the UK’s biggest customer for “controlled exports.” The majority of the money spent on military equipment went on aircraft, helicopters, and drones. However, £15 million worth of grenades, bombs, missiles and countermeasures were exported, and £1.5 million went on small arms.

Sales to Libya, where the UK supported another rebel movement were put on hold in February and have not yet significantly resumed. The UK famously made significant sales to the Gaddafi regime before the start of the civil war and the subsequent NATO intervention. In 2010 alone, the total value of military exports reached nearly £217 million. During the NATO bombing of Libya, the countries involved faced “a common problem in the world of blowback: negating the very arms they had exported to the country.” [15]

William Hague has stated that the UK is seeking to ensure that “Libya’s future is one governed by the rule of law and respect for human rights.” [16] Following up DSO’s visit to the country in February, another delegation went to Libya from 29 April to 3 May this year. UKTI DSO representatives were accompanied a number of arms firms including BAE Systems; General Dynamics UK; Kellogg Brown & Root; 3SDL and Selex Galileo; and Surrey Satellite Technology. Whether these companies’ future exports or contracts will be in line with Hague’s ambitions remains to be seen.

Some exports to Bahrain were halted in February, although by June they had resumed and totalled £2.25 million for the year. Sales included components for pistols, sniper rifles, silencers, “sporting guns” and small arms ammunition. [17] This is also a country in which armoured vehicles made in the UK were used to assist in suppressing protests, after they were supplied to the Bahrainis by the Saudi government. [18]

Egypt, a country still under military rule and in which “many human rights violations have been committed...through excessive use of violence” [19] by the authorities since Hosni Mubarak stepped down, purchased over £2 million worth of arms in 2011.

This is a significant increase upon the 2010 figure of £1.2 million, although this should perhaps not be surprising – significant effort has gone into promoting arms sales to the country. David Cameron visited Egypt in February 2011, whilst on a tour of the region that was ostensibly “to promote Arab democracy.” Backing him up was a trade delegation that included eight military and security firms, including BAE Systems, Qinetiq, Thales, Rolls Royce, the Cobham Group, and Babcock. [20] This trip was described in the FCO’s 2011 report as involving “a trade delegation from the oil, gas and retail sectors.” [21]

In his first speech to the United Nations General Assembly, David Cameron stated that “the Arab Spring is a massive opportunity to spread peace, prosperity, democracy and vitally security, but only if we really seize it.” [22]

### **A humanitarian intervention**

One (uninvited) attendee at the DSO Symposium attempted to point out the hypocrisy of the UK’s policy towards the Middle East and North Africa.

Following Richard Paniguan onto the stage was Vince Cable (Liberal Democrat MP and Minister for Business, Innovation and Skills). As he began his speech, he was interrupted by a protestor, who declared that he was there to:

*“[G]ive a voice to...the Bahrainis, the Saudis, the people in Libya...You’re ruining their lives. I’m here to give a voice to the people who need money spent on development, and you’re spending trillions of pounds on the arms trade...There’s a job centre in Brixton, and you need to get down there as soon as you can.” [23]*

As the protestor was dragged through the back door, the delegates briefly applauded the work of the security guards. A ripple of rather nervous laughter rolled around the room as Cable remarked that some people will always be dissatisfied with the work of the defence industry.

It is interesting to note that Cable is a member of the Liberal Democrats, a party whose own policies have held in recent years that UKTI DSO should be shut down. [24] Now part of a coalition government with the Conservatives, his attitude has apparently changed, with him informing the audience that “ultimately, you bolster our national security.”

Intervention over, Cable continued his speech, making much of the words ‘responsible’ and ‘legitimate’: “The key word is responsible – some goods and some countries are off limits.”

The morality of weapons sales, and the clash between human rights obligations and arms exports, was an issue taken up by David Cameron in a speech to the Kuwaiti National Assembly in February 2011:

*“For decades, some have argued that stability required highly controlling regimes, and that reform and openness would put that stability at risk. So, the argument went, countries like Britain faced a choice between our interests and our values. And to be honest, we should acknowledge that sometimes we have made such calculations in the past. But I say that is a false choice.” [25]*

### **The influence of defence**

Some politicians are rather more sanguine about these issues. Gerald Howarth, an MP and Minister for International Security Strategy followed Vince Cable onto the podium. At one point he put it to the audience that “no area of government action yields more influence than defence.”

The Middle East in particular is a region in which the UK has long-standing strategic and diplomatic interests. Howarth recalled a discussion with a minister from the UAE on the issue of the ‘Arab Spring.’ The Americans, apparently, did not understand the situation in the same way as the British. “You’ve been here 200 years!” cried the

UAE's minister, and the British were thus duty-bound to support governments attempting to 'stabilise' their unruly populations.

### **The ties that bind**

The strategic leverage military and security exports can provide to a government is reinforced through a vast network of formal and informal contacts, contracts, friendships, conferences and meetings.

In the morning session, the retired Vice Admiral Robert Walmsley played host. From 1996 to 2003, Walmsley was the Chief of Defence Procurement at the Ministry of Defence. After retiring, he has served as a non-executive director of General Dynamics; a senior advisor to Morgan Stanley; and as a director of ITT, Cohort and Ultra Electronics (all military technology firms); the British Energy Group; and Stratos Global Corporation. [27] He also advised Gerald Howarth MP whilst he was a member of the Conservative opposition.

Howarth works in the Ministry of Defence as the Minister for International Security Strategy, and described himself as being "joined at the hip" with Robert Paniguan on their travels around the world. Paniguan, until taking up his role at UKTI DSO in 2008, worked for British Petroleum in a number of roles including as Vice-President for the Caspian, Middle East and Africa.

Also in the room at the DSO Symposium was Geoff Hoon, a former Labour Minister of Defence who is now Vice-President of Agusta-Westland, a British-Italian helicopter manufacturer. According to Howarth, he is "doing a fantastic job."

Also present were CEOs and directors from the ADS Group, Astrium, Boeing, BMT Defence Services, Chemring, Cobham, EADS, MSI Defence Systems, and a whole host of other military, security, banking and other firms, along with representatives of the Thai army, the Brazilian navy, and numerous civil servants from a variety of government departments.

The DSO Symposium is of course one of many events that are organised with the aim of facilitating contact between major players from the public and private sides of the military-security complex. The most notable event in the UK, organised by UKTI DSO, is the world's largest arms fair, Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEi), held once every two years in London's Docklands.

However, smaller conferences and networking events take place frequently. In May, one of the "most prominent events in the defence and security calendar" took place, the London Chamber of Commerce's *Annual Defence Dinner 2012*.

*"Member feedback tells us that networking and corporate hospitality continues in 2012 to play an important role in marketing strategies and this dinner will fulfil and exceed both these requirements...you will have the opportunity to raise your profile and make new business connections." [28]*

In September 2011, in the build-up to DSEi, the London Chamber of Commerce hosted an event entitled *Middle East: A vast market for UK defence and security companies*. [29] Given the ongoing situation in countries such as Syria and Bahrain, for the organisers the numbers spoke for themselves:

*“As a region, the Middle East is the second biggest importer of defence goods (\$110 bn), and the one which procures the highest proportion of orders from the UK (c. 40% of total orders).”*

After campaigners found out about the event and promised protests outside, the event was moved to a secret location for “operational reasons” according to a spokesperson for the Royal Bank of Scotland, which was due to host the event. [30]

Arms company executives were also recently given time before the House of Commons defence select committee to air their views on defence procurement. Two of those invited – David Hansell, managing director of MSI Defence Systems, and Robin Southwell, chief executive of EADS’ British wing – had attended the DSO Symposium just weeks before.

### **Public relations**

The strategic interests that guide many arms sales are of course not frequently flaunted publicly. Enthusiasts are also less than keen to highlight the fact that the arms trade accounts for an estimated “40% of corruption in all world trade.” [31] Claims that weapons sold are used illegitimately, indiscriminately, or in violation of export controls normally meet a response phrased something like “the UK’s export licensing regime is already one of the toughest in the world.” The suits, seminars, and extravagant conferences in high-end venues all place a veneer of respectability on an industry intimately intertwined with conflict and death.

It is instead the economic benefits – in terms of jobs and revenue – that are put forth in public statements as underpinning the necessity of continued and increased manufacture and export of weapons. Claims are frequently made as to the economic necessity of the arms trade, yet despite the enormous revenues generated by the industry its exports rely significantly upon government support. According to Barnaby Pace, a researcher on the arms trade:

*“UK arms exports support around 55,000 jobs and make up 1.2% of the UK’s total exports but depend on a government subsidy conservatively estimated at £700 million per year, which works out to £12,700 per job every year.” [32]*

The data lying behind these figures is not perfect, [33] but clearly there is a significant amount of money going towards an industry that should, in theory, be able to support itself.



When it comes to arms exports, however, it seems that classical economics does not apply. One part of Vince Cable's talk would have had Adam Smith spinning in his grave:

*"In some areas of the economy market forces are enough...but in some cases...there is a role for government getting behind best performing sectors [and encouraging] them."*

This relationship is no doubt seen as mutually beneficial by the numerous backers of the arms industry in positions of state and government power.

### **Public opposition**

Of course, even if arms sales did generate income for the economy, it would not necessarily provide sufficient justification for their continuation. There is a small but dedicated opposition to the arms trade in the UK that bases its arguments largely on a mix of ethical, political and economic grounds.

This opposition tends to be most visible during events such as the DSEi arms fair that takes place every two years. In 2001, protestors numbered in their thousands and although this has declined over the last decade, there seemed to be an upsurge of action against the 2011 fair. This began with an attempt by protestors in kayaks to block the warship HMS Dauntless from docking by the ExCel Centre, the venue for DSEi. Over the following three days protestors dropped banners, took part in vigils and "die-ins", lobbied parliament, and confronted arms dealers, military staff and politicians in person as they queued for an evening reception at the National Gallery.

This led to a follow-up letter-writing campaign which has seen the National Gallery announce that it will not host a reception for attendees of July's Farnborough Air Show. [34] Protestors have also attended BAE Systems' annual general meeting (as holders of one share each) in order to "hold the company to account for its arms sales, its corruption and its damage to Britain's democracy and economy." In the face of questions on sales to repressive regimes, chair Dick Oliver "said he was 'proud' to sell jets to Bahrain and refused to rule out arming the Saudi regime even if they used BAE's weapons to suppress a peaceful uprising." [35]

More militant groups have also engaged in what they refer to as "decommissioning" actions – the deliberate destruction of equipment owned by the military or arms manufacturers. In 1996, members of the East Timor Ploughshares group caused £1.7 million worth of damage by taking household hammers to a Hawk jet at the BAE Systems factory at Warton in Lancashire. They did so "because they were determined to prevent the plane from reaching Indonesia in case it was then used against the people of East Timor," [36] and in court based their not guilty pleas on the fact that "what they did in damaging the aircraft was not a crime but an attempt to prevent a greater crime." [37] Hawk jets had already been used by the Indonesian army in East Timor, and they were acquitted by a jury.

Similarly, in 2009 five people faced trial and were acquitted after destroying manufacturing equipment, computers, and paper files at a factory owned by the company EDO MBM in Brighton. They successfully argued that they were “legally justified in breaking into the factory because they believed EDO MBM was breaking export rules by selling military equipment to Israel, which they believed would be used to commit war crimes in the occupied territories of Gaza and the West Bank.” [38]

### **Arms around the world**

Six months before the DSO Symposium, David Cameron jetted off on another overseas trip, this time visiting South East Asia and taking with him “the biggest and most high powered trade delegation Britain has ever brought to this region.” [39] Once again a number of weapons manufacturers were invited along, including representatives of BAE Systems, Rolls Royce, Agusta Westland, and Thales.

Cameron “insisted there was no moral issue with taking arms manufacturers on such trips,” because Britain “has some of the toughest rules on defence exports anywhere in the world.” One country that received the delegation was Indonesia, to which British export rules in the 1980s and 1990s permitted the sale of over thirty Hawk fighter jets, when an uprising against the Indonesian occupation of East Timor was brutally suppressed. [40] It was these sales that led to the actions by protestors at BAE’s Warton factory in 1996.

The Indonesian military continues to commit human rights abuses in West Papua, [41] and weapons sales to the country raises questions: “military officers are rumoured to be receiving up to 40 per cent of the value of arms purchases in bribes.” [42]

Another violent and repressive regime in South East Asia has been the recipient of UK arms exports in recent years. As recently as March, Campaign Against Arms Trade “urged the coalition government to explain why it continues to licence weapons for export to Sri Lanka irrespective of war crimes by the country’s military.” A parliamentary committee on export controls stated that “it could not guarantee that British-licensed armaments were not used during the Sri Lankan government’s bloody attempt to eradicate the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam).” [43]

Channel 4 News described the civil war in the following terms:

*“In the crudest terms of war – the speed and rate of killing, the numbers of dead, and the apparent actions of Sri Lankan soldiers who seem to have filmed themselves on multiple occasions abusing and executing bound prisoners, as well as showing gross disrespect for the bodies of the dead – it has scarcely been matched in barbarity this century.” [44]*

Since the defeat of the Tamil Tigers in May 2009, it has been alleged by the United Nations that the “Sri Lanka Army and affiliated paramilitary groups have run and

made possible to run secret facilities [in] which torture and extra judicial killings...it is claimed, [have been] perpetrated.” [45] Human Rights Watch has urged the UK to suspend deportations of Tamils to Sri Lanka due to the UK Border Agency’s procedures “failing to identify Tamils at risk of torture upon return to Sri Lanka despite growing evidence that torture of Tamil activists deported from abroad occurs.” [46] The UK has since 2009 exported over £3 million worth of arms and other controlled goods to the country.

British involvement with Sri Lanka also draws in another example of the murky and secretive world in which it seems many arms deals and other diplomatic arrangements take place. Liam Fox, a Conservative MP and until October 2011 the Secretary of State for Defence, resigned his post following controversy over his association with a man called Adam Werritty. Werritty, a close friend of Fox’s, was found to have been distributing business cards describing himself as Fox’s “personal advisor.” He held no official role in relation to the Defence Secretary: Werritty’s costs were covered through his income as chairman of the non-profit think tank Atlantic Bridge – itself founded by Fox – as well as payments from the Good Governance Group, a security and intelligence consulting firm, and Tamares Real Estate, owned by the chairman of an Israeli lobbying group. [47]

Werritty apparently organised trips to Sri Lanka for Fox, who is known to be close to President Mahinda Rajapaksa and has met him on at least three occasions.[48] During one of his visits to Sri Lanka with Fox, Werritty allegedly “offered to help the regime...acquire arms supplies for internal security,”[48] a claim denied by the Ministry of Defence. Apparently, he was “familiar with the weapons industry and what was needed for counter-insurgency operations,” and offered to help obtain them for Sri Lanka from Israel and China. [49]

### **All above board?**

During a question and answer session at the Symposium, Gerald Howarth was asked what the UK could do to ensure that other countries implemented rules such as those put in place by the Bribery Act 2010. Joking that he would only answer the question if handed a “big brown envelope”, he went on to say that the UK should do everything it could to ensure that all trade was above board. However, he also implied that in some parts of the world, it is impossible to get things done without paying certain ‘commissions.’

Qualms over bribery have not prevented arms deals taking place in the past, [50] and there is little reason to believe that this will change in the near future. According to Andrew Feinstein, “there are very few transactions that are entirely above board.” [51] With the UK government insistent on promoting military and security exports around the world, it seems likely that ever more chances for corruption will arise.

## Diversifying from defence

The DSO Symposium also provided some indication that the industry's backers see the promise of profits in areas not traditionally the domain of military and security firms. Both Paniguan and Howarth referred to the Lifesaver system, which uses carbon filters to turn dirty water into drinking water. The firm took part in Cameron's trip to South East Asia, meeting him in Malaysia to celebrate a £60m distribution deal. [52]

Paniguan was markedly enthusiastic about this development, noting the wide range of business opportunities in humanitarian aid and disaster recovery. In his view, the defence industry "can deliver so much not just in economic benefits for the UK but in bringing relief." He went on to make the claim that the experience and expertise in disaster relief originates in the military and security industries. Needless to say, there was no mention of the role of those industries in contributing towards humanitarian disasters.

Howarth also praised the Lifesaver, noting three reasons why it is so important: first, it's a British export; second, its sale was supported by DSO; and third, it turns dirty water into clean drinking water.

Supporting British business is not the only aim of the push for greater weapons exports. The strategic interests at the heart of many arms exports are presented as being for national economic gain, and it is these geopolitical and diplomatic priorities that see human rights considerations sacrificed when supporting friendly or 'useful' regimes.

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