



SOUTH AFRICAN ARMS SUPPLIES TO SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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I. Introduction

South Africa aspires to be a major player in the shaping of peace and security in Africa. It is also the only African country with an industrial capability to produce a wide range of military products.

This SIPRI Background Paper aims to describe the extent to which South Africa has succeeded in becoming a major supplier of arms to sub-Saharan Africa and why those exports could be of concern.¹ Section II describes the role of South Africa as a supplier of arms to Africa. Section III explains the motives for and restraints on South African arms exports. Section IV discusses examples of how weapons supplied by South Africa have been used in Africa. Section V offers brief conclusions.

II. South African arms exports to sub-Saharan Africa

In general, arms imports by sub-Saharan Africa are small in comparison to arms imports by other regions. The only sub-Saharan country with significant arms import volumes is South Africa itself, which ranked globally as the 19th largest importer of major arms for the period 2005–2009.² As an exporter, South Africa offers both newly produced arms and military equipment as well as South African National Defence Force (SANDF) surplus equipment. Both SIPRI arms transfer trend indicators and South African Government data indicate that South Africa's arms exports to sub-Saharan Africa account for only a small percentage of the country's total arms exports.

The volume of exports of major conventional arms

According to SIPRI estimates, in the period 2000–2009 South Africa exported major conventional weapons to 14 countries in sub-Saharan

¹ Sub-Saharan Africa is taken to be all the states of Africa other than Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt.

² SIPRI Arms Transfers Programme, 'The suppliers and recipients of major conventional weapons, 2005–2009', *SIPRI Yearbook 2010: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2010), table 7A.1.

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SUMMARY

● Despite efforts by South Africa's well-developed arms industry and its government to position the country as a key supplier of arms to African countries, exports to sub-Saharan African destinations do not account for a significant share of South African arms exports. The driving force of South African arms exports to sub-Saharan destinations appears to be maximizing turnover for the industry and earnings from the sale of surplus equipment.

Since the end of apartheid in 1994 South Africa has developed export policies, regulations and guidelines aimed at preventing arms exports that could fuel conflict or support human rights abuses. However, doubts persist about the functioning of this system. Like other countries, South Africa still allows questionable arms transfers to zones of conflict and to countries where arms are used in human rights violations. In general, South Africa's export policy seems to be mainly a matter of abiding by United Nations arms embargoes with few other restrictions.

A positive development in 2010 is that, after several years of not publishing arms export reports, South Africa has returned to a level of public transparency about its arms export policy, which provides some opportunities for parliamentary and public accountability. Hopefully, recent changes in the legislation will not mean a return to opacity in reporting.



Table 1. Transfers of major conventional weapons by South Africa to sub-Saharan Africa, 2000 to 2009

The columns ‘Year(s) of deliveries’ and ‘No. delivered/produced’ refer to all deliveries since the beginning of the contract. Deals in which the recipient was involved in the production of the weapon system are listed separately. The ‘Comments’ column includes publicly reported information on the value of the deal. Information on the sources and methods used in the collection of the data, and explanations of the conventions, abbreviations and acronyms, can be found at <<http://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>>. The SIPRI Arms Transfers Database is continuously updated as new information becomes available.

Recipient	No. ordered	Weapon designation	Weapon description	Year of order/ licence	Year(s) of deliveries	No. delivered/ produced	Comments
African Union	(60)	Mamba	APC/ISV	(2005)	2006	60	For AU/AMIS peacekeepers in Darfur; Mamba-3 version
African Union	(68)	Casspir	APC/ISV	(2007)	2008	68	Ex-South African; modernized before delivery; for peacekeepers in Sudan
Burkina Faso	6	GILA	APC/ISV	(2009)	2009	6	For police; financed by Canada; for Burkina Faso peacekeepers in Darfur
Cameroon	(1)	MB-326K/L	Ground attack aircraft	(2001)	2002	1	Ex-South African; Impala-2 (MB-326K) version
Djibouti	9	Casspir	APC/ISV	2000	2000	(9)	Ex-South African; modernized before delivery
Gabon	(6)	Mirage F-1A	FGA aircraft	2006	2006-2008	(6)	Ex-South African; modernized before delivery; Mirage F-1AZ version
Ghana	(39)	Ratel-20	IFV	(2003)	2003-2004	39	Ex-South African; incl 24 Ratel-90 version
Ghana	4	Casspir	APC/ISV	(2005)	2005	4	Ex-South African; Rinkhals ambulance version
Guinea	(10)	Mamba	APC/ISV	(2003)	2003	10	
Mali	(5)	RG-31 Nyala	APC/ISV	(2002)	2002	5	
Mozambique	5	Casspir	APC/ISV	2000	2000	5	Ex-South African; for police; aid

Africa and to the African Union (AU) (see table 1). In the same period the region accounted for 14 per cent of South Africa’s total major arms exports the same period, while sub-Saharan African countries (excluding South Africa) imported only 0.2 per cent of their arms from South Africa.³ Thus, South African exports to sub-Saharan Africa account for only a fraction of the region’s total arms imports. By far the largest importer of South African

³ These percentages are based on SIPRI data on arms transfers which refers to actual deliveries of major conventional weapons. SIPRI uses a trend-indicator value (TIV) to compare the data on deliveries of different weapons and to identify general trends. TIVs give an indication only of the

**Table 1** continued.

Recipient	No. ordered	Weapon designation	Weapon description	Year of order/licence	Year(s) of deliveries	No. delivered/produced	Comments
Mozambique	(16)	Casspir	APC/ISV	(2003)	2003	16	Ex-South African, incl 5 for police
Rwanda	(20)	RG-31 Nyala	APC/ISV	(2005)	2006	20	
Rwanda	(35)	Ratel-90	IFV/AFSV	(2007)	2007	35	Ex-South African; incl 20 Ratel-60 version
Senegal	(8)	Casspir	APC/ISV	(2004)	2005-2006	8	Ex-South African
Senegal	(47)	AML-60/90	Armoured car	(2005)	2006	47	Ex-South African; AML-90 (Eland-90) version
Senegal	12	GILA	APC/ISV	(2009)	2009	12	For police; financed by Canada; for peacekeepers in Darfur
Swaziland	7	RG-31 Nyala	APC/ISV	(1999)	2001	7	For police
Swaziland	3	SA-316B Alouette-3	Light helicopter	2000	2000	3	Ex-South African; aid; possibly modernized before delivery
Tanzania	(5)	Casspir	APC/ISV	(2008)	2009	(5)	Second-hand; supplier uncertain; financed by USA for peacekeeping
Uganda	15	RG-31 Nyala	APC/ISV	1998	2002	15	
Uganda	(5)	Mamba	APC/ISV	(2003)	2004	5	
Uganda	31	Buffel	APC/ISV	(2004)	2005	31	Ex-South African
Uganda	6	GILA	APC/ISV	(2009)	2009	6	For police; financed by Canada; for peacekeepers in Darfur
Zambia	1	Rhino	APC/ISV	(2004)	2005	1	Ex-South African

() = uncertain data or SIPRI estimate; AFSV = armoured fire support vehicle; APC = armoured personnel carrier; FGA = fighter/ground attack; IFV = infantry fighting vehicle; ISV = internal security vehicle; Ex-South African = South African National Defence Force (SANDF) surplus equipment.

Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, <<http://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers/>>.

major arms is the United States, which accounted for 40 per cent of South African arms exports during 2000–2009.

The financial value of exports of arms

The South African Government publishes annual reports about national exports of military equipment and services which include figures for their

volume of international arms transfers and not of the actual financial values of such transfers. For a description of the TIV and its calculation see SIPRI Arms Transfers Programme website at <<http://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers/background>>.

Table 2. The financial value of South African arms exports according to the South African Government, 2000–2009

Figures are in thousands of South African rands at current prices. The data are aggregates of values for deliveries of items in categories A, B, C, G (related to military equipment) in the South African Government's arms export reporting system. Values related to category D (non-lethal equipment) are excluded.

Country	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Angola	–	620	756	–	25 000	–	14 948	–	4 997	450
Benin	–	–	–	–	–	–	9 297	765	–	771
Botswana	10 266	367	1 125	66	229	547	586	20	12 508	30 051
Burkina faso	–	–	–	–	–	–	6 168	4 656	–	34 579
Burundi	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	15 179	22 439
Cameroon	3 757	871	2 529	3 646	1 068	1 068	–	–	–	–
Chad	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	15 234	2 000
DRC	–	–	912	–	–	–	–	–	–	3 371
Congo	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1 501	–	–
Djibouti	9 180	–	–	–	–	2 877	405	–	–	–
Gabon	–	–	–	–	–	–	17 458	16 314	5 220	721
Ghana	–	–	–	29 120	17 922	400	–	811	45	25 036
Guinea	–	–	–	12 516	–	–	–	–	–	–
Côte d'Ivoire	–	–	5 639	2 866	–	–	–	–	–	–
Kenya	141	8 005	8 284	1 184	630	13 298	–	358	–	55 739
Lesotho	281	–	143	236	58	744	3 661	345	3 330	1 578
Madagascar	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	600
Malawi	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	14 530	–
Mali	–	–	13 377	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Mauritania	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	64
Mozambique	59	–	3 300	15 399	185	240	375	57	230	–
Namibia	–	–	–	–	768	64	–	9 538	–	5 264
Niger	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	7 600	–
Nigeria	–	20 790	–	1 647	–	33 129	11 183	126 021	51 029	12 526
Rwanda	–	6 095	–	–	873	873	40 094	40 547	4 694	2 435
Senegal	–	–	–	–	–	2 666	20 673	–	32 690	84 579
Somalia	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	793	–	4 577
Sudan	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2 065	64 025	–
Swaziland	254	21 654	–	237	–	–	–	–	2 070	12 461
Tanzania	–	–	–	–	416	1 408	–	6 296	11 246	9 394
Uganda	–	–	16 202	–	5 480	4 719	10 878	3 150	2 150	169 015
Zambia	–	–	24 089	60 335	–	6 435	36 350	11 036	18 920	32 141

Sources: National Conventional Arms Control Committee annual reports for the years 2002–2009, available at the SIPRI website <http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/transfers/transparency/national_reports>.

financial value.⁴ Although the reports provide further insights into the recipients of the arms, the data compilation process lacks transparency, and

⁴ These figures include all categories of goods and services controlled under South African arms export regulations, including demining equipment and riot control products. For a more detailed description of these goods and services see South African National Conventional Arms Control Committee, 'South African export statistics for conventional arms 2000–2002', <http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/transfers/transparency/national_reports>. A list of the published reports is maintained on the SIPRI website at <http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/transfers/transparency/national_reports>.



therefore the reliability of the data is uncertain. According to the South African Government figures, during the period 2000–2009 a total of 34.5 billion rand (\$5 billion) worth of military equipment was exported. Of the total, 1.7 billion rand (\$241 million) or 4.9 per cent was accounted for by exports to sub-Saharan African countries. Table 2 provides official data on South African arms exports to sub-Saharan African countries.

South African arms production

Built up during the apartheid regime, the South African arms industry peaked in the 1980s when it employed over 80 000 people.⁵ Major cutbacks in the South African military budget have led to the industry's rapid down-sizing, and according to the South African Defence Industry Association, 13 646 people were employed in the South African arms industry in 2007.⁶ Nevertheless, the South African arms industry is by far the largest and most technologically advanced arms industry in Africa. It produces a wide range of military equipment, including ammunition for small arms and light weapons (SALW) and artillery; components for or complete small arms; anti-tank, anti-aircraft and air-to-ground missiles; unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs); radar and other electronic equipment; and upgrade packages for armoured vehicles and armed helicopters.⁷ A particular area of South African expertise is the production of wheeled armoured vehicles that offer a high level of protection against landmines and have been sold to a range of countries worldwide.⁸

The South African industry is increasingly integrated into the global arms industry. It produces arms under licence and components for military equipment produced elsewhere, and a growing number of companies have become subsidiaries of foreign companies.⁹ For example, a partnership between the South African company Denel and the Swedish company SAAB produces A-109LUH helicopters in South Africa under licence from the Italian company AgustaWestland for delivery to the Nigerian armed forces.¹⁰ Furthermore, South African military products contain many foreign-sourced components or technology. For example, South African armoured vehicles often use German engines and Swedish steel.¹¹ South African companies are also involved in maintaining and repairing military products that are produced elsewhere. For example, Denel is involved in the maintenance, repair and overhaul of Ukrainian-produced Antonov and US-produced Lockheed transport aircraft.¹²

⁵ Batchelor, P. and Willett, S., SIPRI, *Disarmament and Defence Industrial Adjustment in South Africa* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1998), pp. 128–30; and Heitman, H. R., 'Building up strength', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 5 Dec. 2007, pp. 22–29

⁶ This is the most recent year for which a figure is available. Heitman (note 5); and South African Aerospace, Maritime and Defence Industries Association (AMD), *South African Defence Industry Directory 2009–10*, 11th edn (AMD: Centurion, 2009).

⁷ South African Aerospace, Maritime and Defence Industries Association (note 5).

⁸ SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, <<http://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers/>>.

⁹ Heitman (note 5)

¹⁰ Jackson, P. (ed.), *Jane's All the World Aircraft 2010–2011* (Jane's Information Group: Bracknell, 2010), p. 286; and Mueller, H., 'Back in business!', *AirForces Monthly*, Dec. 2010, p. 95.

¹¹ Campbell, K., 'Black-owned defence firm wins its first order', *Engineering News*, 6 Apr. 2007.

¹² Cowan, G., 'Antonov and Denel join forces in push for African MRO market', IHS Jane's, Farnborough International Airshow, Show news, 21 July 2010, <<http://www.janes.com/events/>>

**Box 1. The South African arms fair**

One particular way in which South Africa is involved in the flow of arms to Africa is the Africa Aerospace and Defence (AAD) fair that is organized every second year by the South African arms industry in cooperation with the government.⁴ Although AAD is small in comparison with similar fairs in Europe and the Middle East, it is by far the largest event of its kind in Africa.

At the fair—the latest one took place in 2010—arms producing companies from all over the world are given the opportunity to market a wide variety of arms to prospective buyers. Most South African arms producers present at the fair try to interest visitors, predominantly from Africa, in their products. During the most recent AAD one South African company tried to show its dedication to the African market by unveiling a new armoured vehicle with the name ‘Mbombe’, a mythical western African warrior. Many foreign companies tried to interest the South African military, which is by far the largest client for arms in sub-Saharan Africa, in their products, but many of the weapons on display were more likely to attract the interest of other African countries.

⁴ See the website of the fair at <<http://www.aadexpo.co.za/links.htm>>. Other information is based on observations by the author during a visit to AAD2010.

The limited size of the South African armed forces means that exports are essential for sustaining the arms industry. In the period 2005–2007 exports reportedly accounted for roughly 40–50 per cent of the total turnover of the South African arms industry.¹³ The industry has marketed itself by stressing that it is well placed to pursue smaller export orders and is ‘often able to offer solutions to non-aligned and non-NATO markets’, that its products have been ‘purpose-built for the rugged and challenging environment of Africa’ and that South African companies are willing to offer complete packages including weapons, training service and spare parts (see box 1).¹⁴ Despite such promotional efforts, during the period 2007–2009 the share of the total turnover that the South African arms industry derived from exports to African destinations was below 9 per cent.¹⁵ The most important market for the industry has been the USA, which procured large numbers of wheeled armoured personnel carriers.¹⁶ Denel, the largest arms-producing company in South Africa, reported that during 2009 only 50 million rand (\$6.7 million) of its total export revenue of 1.23 billion rand (\$165.8 million) came from sales to sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁷

Exports of surplus arms

The combination of downsizing, restructuring and modernizing of the South African armed forces in the past 20 years has resulted in a considerable number of weapons becoming surplus and being sold to export customers.¹⁸ Table 1 indicates the major conventional weapons exported from

exhibitions/farnborough2010/sections/daily/day3/antonov-and-denel-join-fo.shtml>.

¹³ South African Aerospace, Maritime and Defence Industries Association (note 6).

¹⁴ South African Aerospace, Maritime and Defence Industries Association (AMD), ‘The industry association of the South African defence-related industry (SADRI)’, Marketing brochure, [n.d.], <<http://www.amd.org.za/docs/amd-marketing-brochure-web.pdf>>; Campbell, K., ‘SA military-vehicle servicing firm seeking out African niche’, *Engineering News*, 15 June 2007; and Kraft, J., ‘Military vehicle specialist gains strong foothold in Africa’, *Engineering News*, 17 Sep. 2010.

¹⁵ Data received from South African defence-related industry, email with author, 21 Oct. 2010. It is unclear from the data if sub-Saharan Africa or the whole of Africa is included.

¹⁶ SIPRI Arms Transfers Database (note 8).

¹⁷ Denel, *Annual Report 2010* (Denel: Centurion, [n.d.]), p. 86.

¹⁸ South African National Assembly, Defence Portfolio Committee, ‘Excessive stock management within the Department of Defence’, Restricted document, 26 Aug. 2003, available on the website of the



SANDF surplus in the period 2000–2009. In particular, surplus wheeled armoured vehicles have been supplied to African countries together with a small number of surplus SANDF combat aircraft. In at least one case, surplus SANDF equipment has been sold to a foreign company and then resold to an African destination: in 1999, 120 Eland/AML armoured vehicles were sold from SANDF surplus stocks to a company in Belgium, which upgraded the vehicles and resold approximately 82 of them to Chad in 2007–2008.¹⁹

SALW are widely used in conflict and violence throughout Africa. It is therefore significant that in February 1999 the South African Government decided to destroy all state-held redundant semi-automatic and automatic weapons of calibre 12.7 mm or smaller. This decision was taken in accordance with the 1997 report of the United Nations Secretary-General on small arms, which recommended, among other things, that all states should consider destroying all surplus small arms.²⁰ The destruction of more than 262 000 redundant SALW belonging to the SANDF commenced in July 2000.²¹

Transit of arms through South Africa

Two recent incidents have shown that arms shipments to African destinations transit through South African ports and territory. First, in April 2008 a shipment of arms was to be offloaded in Durban for further transport overland to Zimbabwe (see section IV below). Second, in November 2009 the South African authorities impounded in Durban a shipment of spare parts for tanks and other military goods from North Korea that were to be shipped via South Africa to the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) in violation of the UN embargoes on arms exports from North Korea.²² However, little information is available on the transit of arms through South Africa, and based on these two examples alone, no conclusions can be drawn about the volume of such arms transits. Nevertheless, considering that South Africa has several major ports and serves as a gateway for goods transported to its landlocked neighbours, it is possible that South Africa plays a significant role as a transit country for weapons.

Exports are essential for sustaining the South African arms industry

Parliamentary Monitoring Group, <<http://www.pmg.org.za/docs/2003/appendices/030826stock.htm>>.

¹⁹ Mampaey, L., *Commerce d'armement triangulaire Belgique-France-Tchad : limites et lacunes de la réglementation belge et européenne* [Triangular arms trade between Belgium, France and Chad: shortcomings and limits of Belgian and European legislation], Note d'analyse (Groupe de recherche et d'information sur la paix et la sécurité/GRIP: Brussels, 14 Feb. 2008), <http://www.grip.org/fr/siteweb/dev.asp?N=simple&O=291&titre_page=NA_2008-02-14_FR_L-MAMPAEY>.

²⁰ United Nations, General Assembly, Report of the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms, A/52/298, 27 Aug. 1997.

²¹ South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation, 'Small arms non-proliferation', [n.d.], <<http://www.dfa.gov.za/foreign/Multilateral/profiles/arms.htm>>.

²² South African National Assembly, Question 2633, answers to questions from Mr D. J. Maynier, [n.d.], Parliamentary Monitoring Group, <<http://www.pmg.org.za/node/23057>>; and United Nations, Security Council, Report of the Panel of experts established pursuant to Resolution 1874, annex to S/2010/571, 5 Nov. 2010, p. 25.

Box 2. Transparency in South African arms exports

Transparency is an essential element in facilitating the accountability of arms export policies. This was recognized in South Africa in the late 1990s when new arms export control regulations were introduced. South African law determines that the National Conventional Arms Control Committee (NCACC), which oversees the implementation of the country's arms export policy, must report to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA).^a Since 1995 South Africa has reported fairly regularly to UNROCA.^b Compared to other countries' submissions to the UNROCA, the South African reports have been of a relatively high standard, in part because of their specificity: they have included details about the actual type and designation of equipment and the intended end-user. However, South Africa has never included background information about the import and export of small arms and light weapons (SALW), as formally requested by the UN General Assembly since December 2003.^c In 2010 South Africa, for the first time, did not submit its report before October.

In addition to, and separate from, the UNROCA report, the NCACC is legally obliged to provide a parliamentary committee with quarterly reports and the Parliament and the public with annual reports on arms exports.^d The reports provide information about the financial values of items exported in five general categories, but do not provide details about the actual types of equipment involved and in most cases do not provide details about the intended end-user or end-use. This poses an obstacle for the use of the information for understanding the potential impact of South African arms supplies.

Despite the obligation to report, during 2003 and 2006 no report was released. Only in 2007 was a report published about the years 2003 and 2004.^e Reports detailing transfers in 2005 and 2006 were presented to the parliament but were blocked from public release. In 2009 the law was amended such that, when the new regulations come into force, there will no longer be an obligation to make the annual report publicly available.^f

In August 2009 the opposition Democratic Alliance (DA) party criticized the NCACC for not disclosing information to the Parliament and the public as required by law. In response, in a public parliamentary meeting, the NCACC chairman presented general data about South African arm exports in 2008 but refused to provide details on specific deals.^g Furthermore, members of the ruling African National Congress stated that the DA was potentially guilty of releasing classified information and that the individuals involved could face up to 20 years in prison, although no action has taken place. Following the controversy, the NCACC gave its first briefing to the Parliament since August 2005 and released a public report detailing arms exports from South Africa in 2008.^h In March 2010 the report detailing arms exports in 2009 was, for the first time since 2002, released on time.ⁱ

^a National Conventional Arms Control Amendment Act, Act no. 73 of 2008, assented to 14 Apr. 2009, *Government Gazette* (Pretoria), vol. 526, no. 32136 (16 Apr. 2009).

^b United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, 'Overall participation', <http://unhq-appspub-01.un.org/UNODA/UN_REGISTER.nsf>.

^c UN General Assembly Resolution 58/54, A/RES/58/54, 8 Jan. 2004. The texts of UN General Assembly resolutions are available at <<http://www.un.org/documents/resga.htm>>.

^d National Conventional Arms Control Amendment Act, Act no. 41 of 2002, assented to 12 Feb. 2003, *Government Gazette* (Pretoria), vol. 452, no. 24575 (20 Feb. 2003).

^e Lamb, G., 'ISS Today: the transparency and accountability of South Africa's arms trade', Institute for Security Studies (ISS), Web news, 6 Aug. 2007, <<http://www.iss.co.za/pgcontent.php?UID=5063>>.

^f National Conventional Arms Control Amendment Act (note a); and South African Conventional Arms Control Directorate, '2008 national conventional arms control committee (NCACC) annual report', May 2009, p. 3.

^g South African Press Association, 'Radebe silent on questionable arms deals', Polity.org.za, 2 Sep. 2009, <<http://www.polity.org.za/article/radebe-silent-on-questionable-arms-deals-2009-09-02>>.

^h South African National Conventional Arms Control Committee (NCACC), 2008 annual reports, 27 Aug. 2009, available on the SIPRI website at <http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/transfers/transparency/national_reports>. See also Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 'National Conventional Arms Control Committee (NCACC) Introductory & Annual Report 2008 briefing', 2 Sep. 2009, <<http://www.pmg.org.za/print/18065>>.

ⁱ Engelbrecht, L., 'NCACC approves contracts worth R82.5 billion in 2009', defenceWeb, 8 Apr. 2010, <http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7455:1>.

III. South African arms export criteria and foreign policy

During the apartheid era, arms exports were a secretive business often involving arms supplies to controversial destinations. Soon after the African National Congress (ANC) came to power in 1994, South Africa adopted a new and, on paper, more restrictive arms export policy and control system. This system revolved around the National Conventional Arms Control Committee (NCACC), a permanent cabinet-level committee that was established



in 1995 (see box 2).²³ Under the NCACC's current export guidelines, South Africa is committed to avoiding arms exports to recipients involved in crime, terrorism, armed conflict or the systematic violations of human rights.²⁴ South Africa reiterated its arms export criteria when speaking out in favour of efforts to establish an international arms trade treaty with common international standards and criteria for transfers of conventional arms.²⁵ South African arms regulations also control brokering activities, whereby a person resident in South Africa rendering a brokering service between persons resident in foreign countries requires a permit.²⁶ Although some administrative problems have occurred, the export control system appears to function reasonably well.²⁷

In the mid-1990s some people within the new ANC-led government saw arms exports as a potential tool for foreign policy and the industry as an essential attribute of a strong sovereign state. They placed an emphasis on arms exports within Africa, in particular to states in southern Africa, an area perceived as South Africa's natural sphere of influence. Politicians and government officials hoped that arms sales within Africa would provide political leverage, and they promoted arms sales as a key to establishing regional security cooperation. Furthermore, they argued that African states would benefit from buying South African arms because it would lessen their dependence on non-African sources. However, countries in Africa proved apprehensive of strengthening South African dominance in the region and have been hesitant about procuring arms from South Africa.²⁸

South Africa has not become the arms supplier to Africa that some had hoped it would be

To date, South Africa has not become the arms supplier to Africa that some South African politicians and the arms industry had hoped it would be. Furthermore, arms supplies do not play a major role in South Africa's politics of peace and security in Africa. Only occasionally does South Africa donate military equipment to African countries.²⁹ Mediation, its role in the African Union and participation in peacekeeping operations are South Africa's key instruments with regards to its efforts at shaping peace and security in Africa.³⁰

²³ See Batchelor, P., 'Arms and the ANC', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, vol. 54, no. 5 (Sep./Oct. 1998), pp. 56–61.

²⁴ South African National Conventional Arms Control Committee, 'Policy for the control of trade in conventional arms', Jan. 2004, <<http://www.dti.gov.za/nonproliferation/ArmsControl.html>>, pp. 7–8.

²⁵ United Nations, General Assembly, 'Towards an arms trade treaty: establishing common international standards for the import, export and transfers of conventional arms', Report of the Secretary-General, 17 Aug. 2007, A/62/278, p. 194.

²⁶ Lamb, G., 'The regulation of arms brokering in Southern Africa', *Disarmament Forum: Tackling Illicit Brokering*, no. 3 (2009), pp. 45–46.

²⁷ South African Department of Defence (DOD), *Annual Report FY 2008–2009* (DOD: Pretoria, 2009), pp. 399–401; Joubert, J., 'Arms control chaos', City Press, 31 Jan. 2010; Engelbrecht, L., 'NCACC approves R8.1bn in deals', defenceWeb, <http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3375&Itemid=366>, 7 Aug. 2009; and South African Department of Defence (DOD), *Annual Report FY 2009/10* (DOD: Pretoria, 2010), p. 303.

²⁸ Batchelor and Willett (note 5), pp. 128–30.

²⁹ South African Department of Defence (note 27), p. 347.

³⁰ See e.g. Vines, A., 'South Africa's politics of peace and security in Africa', *South African Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 17, no. 1 (Apr. 2010), pp. 53–63.



IV. The use of South African arms in sub-Saharan Africa

Although South African arms supplies to sub-Saharan Africa are small, they can play a significant role in fuelling armed conflicts or human rights abuses in the region. A typical and widely criticized example was the delivery of small arms and other military equipment from South Africa to Rwandan Government security forces in 1992—weapons which were soon after involved in the 1994 Rwandan genocide.³¹ On the other hand, weapons and military equipment can also contribute to stability, for example when they are supplied to peacekeeping forces.

Arms and conflict

The official South African arms export data shows that in the period 2000–2009 arms and military goods were exported to several sub-Saharan countries involved in armed conflict, including Chad in 2008–2009, Rwanda in 2004–2009, Sudan in 2007–2008 and Uganda in 2002–2009 (see table 2 above). Assessing the impact that these deliveries may have had on conflict in these recipient countries is not possible because it remains unclear what type of equipment was delivered to which end-user, and if and how it was used. For example, concerns could be raised that the delivery to Sudan in

2008 of 64 million rand (\$9 million) worth of items related to major weapons could be used by the Sudanese Government in the conflict in Darfur. Concerns could also be raised that the 169 million rand (\$24 million) worth of military products supplied to Uganda in 2009 might be used in the war against the Ugandan rebel group the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)

or in Ugandan military activities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, it is also possible that the equipment could be essential for Ugandan peacekeepers involved in the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).³²

There have been several documented cases of the use of South African-supplied arms in human rights abuses in the period 2000–2009. Mamba armoured personnel carriers supplied by a South African company in 2003 were used in September 2009 by Guinean police forces when forcefully dispersing a gathering of people related to those killed during anti-government demonstrations.³³ Armoured vehicles supplied from South Africa were also used in the violent suppression of demonstrations in Uganda in 2006.³⁴

The risk that arms supplied to Zimbabwe via or from South Africa could be used in government violence against the opposition is widely debated.³⁵ In April 2008 national and international civil society groups and foreign

There have been several documented cases of the use of South African-supplied arms in human rights abuses

³¹ Smyth, F., *Arming Rwanda: The Arms Trade and Human Rights Abuses in the Rwandan War*, Human Rights Watch (HRW), Arms Project Series, vol. 6, no. 1 (HRW: New York, 1994), appendix B.

³² Wezeman, P. D., 'Arms flows and the conflict in Somalia', SIPRI Background Paper, Oct. 2010, <http://books.sipri.org/product_info?c_product_id=416>.

³³ Amnesty International, *Guinea: 'You Did Not Want the Military, So Now We Are Going to Teach You a Lesson'* (Amnesty International Publications: London, Feb. 2010), p. 28.

³⁴ Oxfam, 'Loopholes in British law allow sale of military equipment to Uganda', Press release, 1 Mar. 2006.

³⁵ Du Plessis, M., 'Chinese arms destined for Zimbabwe over South African territory: the R2P norm and the role of civil society', *African Security Review*, vol. 17, no. 4 (Dec. 2008), pp. 17–29;



governments criticized the South African Government for allowing a shipment of arms from China to transit through South Africa to Zimbabwe. It was feared that the weapons would be used by Zimbabwean Government forces against the opposition, particularly in relation to the national elections. The South African authorities had provided a permit for the overland transit of the shipment, consisting of 3 million rounds of rifle ammunition, 3224 mortar shells, 31 mortars and 1500 rocket-propelled grenades. The South African Government's head of communications commented on the matter, stating that 'We are not in a position to act unilaterally and interfere in a trade deal between the countries.'³⁶ Whereas the government did not stop the transit of the weapons, a South African judge ordered the transit to be stopped after a coalition of civil society groups had applied for the court to do so. Further discussion about arms supplied to Zimbabwe arose when, in the summer of 2009, it became publicly known that the government was deciding about a permit for the export of 2 million rounds of small arms ammunition from South Africa to Zimbabwe.³⁷ In July 2009 the South African Government decided to halt all pending arms sales to Zimbabwe after taking into account the political situation in the country.³⁸

In 2010 the South African Government disclosed that in February and March 2009, 5000 units of unspecified riot control equipment worth 2.3 million rand (\$316 000) had been delivered from South Africa to Madagascar.³⁹ This raised concerns that the equipment might have been used in the March 2009 coup in Madagascar.⁴⁰

The South African Government does not usually publicly report information on its denials of arms export licences, but based on the available arms export data, South Africa appears to be willing to supply to most sub-Saharan African countries, except Zimbabwe and those under UN arms embargo. This assessment is strengthened by statements made by the NCACC chairman in reaction to the view that the South Africa had allowed the supply of arms to 'dodgy' countries, essentially stating that the sales were legitimate because none of the approved recipients were under UN embargo.⁴¹

Weapons and military equipment can fuel armed conflicts as well as contribute to stability, for example when they are supplied to peacekeeping forces

Spiegel, S. J. and Le Billon, P., 'China's weapons trade: from ships of shame to the ethics of global resistance', *International Affairs*, vol. 85, no. 2 (Mar. 2009), pp. 323–46.

³⁶ Du Plessis (note 35), p. 24.

³⁷ Maynier, D., 'Arming dictators all over the world: National Conventional Arms Control Committee in Crisis', Public statement, 2 Aug. 2009, <<http://www.da.org.za/newsroom.htm?action=view-news-item&id=7065>>.

³⁸ Kgosana, C., 'Arms deal to Zim put on hold', IOL, 15 Oct. 2009, <<http://www.iol.co.za/news/africa/arms-deal-to-zim-put-on-hold-1.461586?ot=inmsa.ArticlePrintPageLayout.ot#>>, p. 7.

³⁹ South African National Assembly, Question 1515, May 2010, <<http://www.pmg.org.za/node/22034>>.

⁴⁰ Maynier, M., 'DA: Statement by David Maynier, Democratic Alliance shadow minister of defence and military veterans, on the National Conventional Arms Control Committee,' 9 Apr. 2010, <<http://www.polity.org.za/article/da-statement-by-david-maynier-democratic-alliance-shadow-minister-of-defence-and-military-veterans-on-the-national-conventional-arms-control-committee-09042010-2010-04-09>>.

⁴¹ Naidoo, P., 'Arms for rogues', *BusinessDay*, 21 Aug. 2009, <<http://www.businessday.co.za/Articles/Content.aspx?id=99579>>.



Arms and peacekeeping

Whereas South African arms exports may risk fuelling conflict, in several cases South African weapons have also been used for what can be seen as legitimate defence or contributions to efforts to prevent and end conflicts. This is most clearly illustrated by cases in which weapons have been specifically supplied to actors participating in international peacekeeping operations. For example, AU peacekeeping forces in Darfur received up to 138 armoured vehicles supplied by South African companies in the period 2005–2009.⁴² Most of these were paid for by Canada and the USA. In another example, a South African company was contracted in 2009 to supply 8 tonnes of ammunition to UN peacekeeping missions in Burundi, Côte d’Ivoire and Liberia.⁴³ It has been argued that South African companies could play a greater role in providing African peacekeepers with adequate equipment and related support packages.⁴⁴ However, there is currently no reason to assume that arms exports specifically for peacekeeping will make up the bulk of South African arms exports.

V. Conclusions

The South African arms industry is by far the largest and most technologically advanced in sub-Saharan Africa. Along with the South African government, the South African arms industry has made attempts to position the country as a key supplier of arms to African countries. However, despite these efforts, South Africa has not become a significant arms exporter to sub-Saharan African states, and its arms exports to sub-Saharan African destinations do not account for a significant share of South African arms exports. Still, concerns remain because even small supplies of arms can have a significant impact in the African context.

Since the end of apartheid in 1994 South Africa has developed export policies, regulations and guidelines aimed at preventing arms exports that could fuel conflict or support human rights abuses. However, doubts persist about the functioning of this system. Like other countries, South Africa still allows questionable arms transfers to zones of conflict and to countries where arms are used in human rights violations. In general, South Africa’s export policy seems to be mainly a matter of abiding by United Nations arms embargoes with few other restrictions. The driving force of South African arms exports to sub-Saharan destinations appears to be maximizing turnover for the industry and earnings from the sale of surplus equipment.

After several years in which the government did not publish arms export reports, in 2010 South Africa returned to a level of public transparency about its arms export policy. Such transparency provides some opportunities for parliamentary and public accountability. Hopefully, recent changes in the legislation will not mean a return to opacity in reporting.

⁴² SIPRI Arms Transfers Database (note 8).

⁴³ Engelbrecht, L., ‘UN confirms NGA ammo order’, defenceWeb, 9 Feb. 2010, <http://www.defenceweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6532>.

⁴⁴ Magnay, D., ‘South Africa’s booming defense industry’, CNN, 17 Sep. 2010, <http://articles.cnn.com/2010-09-17/world/south.africa.defense.industry_1_mine-protected-vehicle-hits-defense-industry?_s=PM:WORLD>.



ABBREVIATIONS

AFSV	armoured fire support vehicle
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
ANC	African National Congress
APC	armoured personnel carrier
AU	African Union
FGA	fighter/ground attack
IFV	infantry fighting vehicle
ISV	internal security vehicle
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCACC	National Conventional Arms Control Committee
SALW	small arms and light weapons
SANDF	South African National Defence Force
TIV	trend-indicator value
UAV	unmanned aerial vehicle
UN	United Nations



THE SIPRI ARMS TRANSFERS DATABASE

The data included in this fact sheet is taken from the SIPRI Arms Transfers Database. The database contains information on all transfers of major conventional weapons from 1950 to 2009.

SIPRI data on transfers of major weapons are based on actual deliveries of major conventional weapons defined by SIPRI as: aircraft, armoured vehicles, ships over 100 tonnes, guided weapons, larger radars and other sensors, artillery over 100-mm calibre, missile and gun air-defence systems, and engines and turrets for selected larger platforms.

The information in the database is collected from a wide variety of sources: newspapers and other periodicals; annual reference books; monographs; official national and international documents; information from industry; and blogs and other Internet publications. The common criterion for all these sources is that they are open, that is, published and available to the public.

The SIPRI Arms Transfers Database is available online at <http://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers/>.

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SIPRI BACKGROUND PAPER

SOUTH AFRICAN ARMS SUPPLIES TO SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

PIETER D. WEZEMAN

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