

Selling Weapons: The Military-Industrial Complex

Part II

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Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Militarization and WMD](#)

This is the second of a 2-part beginners' guide to the weapons industry. The first part is called 'Selling Weapons – The Most Corrupt Industry in the World'

"We have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportion...we must not fail to comprehend its grave implication...in councils of government we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence by the military-industrial complex". (US President Eisenhower 1961(1))

A military-industrial complex exists when the connection between politicians, industry and the military becomes so strong that governments end up taking political and military decisions partly because it is in the interests of companies that can make profit from war and weapons sales. Despite President Eisenhower's warning in 1961, this is actually the system that exists in the US today. Over a quarter of US senators and congressmen have investments in weapons corporations.(2)

Senior government officials and advisors come from the weapons industry, and can find ready employment within the industry when their government careers end. One study found that 84% of retiring US generals go into senior positions in weapons companies. In earlier administrations, Caspar Weinberger, George Schultz, William Perry and James Baker were just a few of the people who had senior jobs with weapons companies before or after having a top job in the US government. The connections between the US government and weapons companies became even stronger under former President George W. Bush. Vice-President Dick Cheney and Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld made big profits due to the shares that they continued to hold in weapons companies whilst in office.(3) Some individuals now work simultaneously in the weapons industry and in government. As one expert pointed out:

"it's impossible to tell where the government ends and Lockheed begins".(4)

The same is true in Britain, with senior personnel moving between weapons companies and government jobs. During his time as Prime Minister, Tony Blair effectively became a salesman for Britain's biggest weapons company, British Aerospace, when he personally tried to promote weapons deals with India, Saudi Arabia and Zimbabwe.(5)

In her book, *The Shock Doctrine*, Naomi Klein points out that the military-industrial complex has now become 'disaster capitalism.' Weapons companies buy subsidiaries so they now profit from both destruction and reconstruction. They own private healthcare companies that profit by treating the wounded, they own construction companies so they profit from re-

building after a war, and they own security companies so they profit from our fear of terrorism.(6) A significant part of the US economy is now based on the premise that the US will be fighting multiple wars well into the future. Without these wars, parts of the US economy would collapse.

The production of ever more expensive and sophisticated weapons systems becomes an end in itself. These weapons may not serve any particularly useful purpose. The scientists within the corporations just come up with better weapons and these get made. This was highlighted at the height of the cold war (discussed in an earlier post) when there was a discussion about whether to replace existing nuclear missiles with a bigger, more powerful design called MX. One commentator pointed out that there was “no good reason to justify the existence of the MX missile” as the existing system was perfectly adequate. A group of scientists had worked out how to build it, so they tried to persuade the US government to buy it.(7) The missile was deployed, but only in small numbers. The Seawolf submarine and the V-22 Osprey tilt-rotor assault aircraft are just two examples of US weapons systems that nobody wants, yet they have cost the taxpayer billions of dollars.(8) Most recently, the F35 jet has an estimated cost of \$1.5 trillion, but repeatedly fails its test flights. The US government regularly overpays contractors by absurd amounts. Most famously, they paid \$2,043 for a nut that would normally cost a few cents. The ten biggest weapons companies in the US all repeatedly defraud the US government.

Profits from conflict – no ethics in the weapons industry

Weapons sales abroad are presented in the media in the same way as other financial news. British Aerospace or Boeing wins a contract to supply the government of ‘insert repressive regime here’ with ground attack planes. The companies that make these weapons and the shareholders who profit from them talk about sales, prices, earnings and dividends. The government ministers who proudly assist with these sales at arms fairs think mostly about the relationships they build with foreign leaders. The consequences of these sales – death, disability, repression and destruction on a huge scale – are mostly ignored.

There are many examples of weapons being supplied to both sides in a conflict.(9) India and Pakistan have had almost continuous disputes over Kashmir, yet British and US companies supply weapons to both sides.(10) This is an example of corporations profiting by fuelling conflict. It is possible that some conflicts would end much faster, some would stop immediately, and some might never start if the participants were not supplied with weapons by advanced nations. The current war in Yemen is a good example of weapons keeping a conflict going. Saudi Arabia receives almost all of its weapons from the US, Britain and France. If those three countries stopped supplying weapons, and stopped providing the expertise to operate and maintain those weapons, the war would almost certainly end quickly.(11)

The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) gave \$11 billion of weapons to terrorists in Afghanistan during the 1990s. These have since been used by terrorists in wars throughout central Asia and the Middle East. Weapons that had been sold to Libya were stored in warehouses. When the US and Britain destroyed Libya in 2011, the warehouses were looted and the weapons became widely available to anyone who wanted one. Weapons sales make the world less safe.

The insanity of the current system becomes obvious when weapons sold by rich countries

are used against their own armies. Peacekeepers in Somalia, Bosnia and Rwanda all found themselves facing weapons supplied by their own governments.(12) British weapons were used against British troops in Iraq.(13) During the Falklands War between Britain and Argentina in 1982 (a dispute that has been likened to two bald men fighting over a comb(14)), Argentina was using warships built in Britain, and other weapons purchased from other advanced nations.(15) The Argentinians sank a British warship using an Exocet anti-ship missile, supplied by France, launched from a warplane, also supplied by France.(16) At the time, Argentina was being run by the military, who had overthrown the civilian government. The invasion of the Falklands would have been much less likely to happen if advanced nations had not provided Argentina's military leaders with weapons. Perhaps just as important, the military government would have been much less likely to come to power in the first place if they had not been supplied with weapons and supported by other nations.

There are no good arguments supporting huge weapons expenditure

One sometimes hears arguments suggesting that we should be able to sell weapons to countries that are peaceful and democratic. But it is impossible to know if a country will remain peaceful in the future, and it is democracies such as the US and Britain that have been responsible for many recent war crimes. Politicians sometimes try to defend weapons exports on economic grounds, but many of those exports are actually paid for by US and British taxpayers. The subsidies to weapons companies are greater than the money raised through weapons sales. We could provide far more jobs by spending the money in other industries.

It is perfectly reasonable to argue that if Britain or the US is going to have a military for defensive purposes, then they should have the best equipment available. But when was the last time that any weapons were really used by the British or US military for defence? For Britain the answer is probably 1940. For the US the answer is 'not in living memory'. There is no evidence that any country will attack Britain or the US in the near future. The corruption involved in the weapons trade is so profitable for everyone involved that military spending is not about 'security' at all.

It's all about offence - not defence

The weapons industry is usually referred to as the defence industry. This is a glaring example of how language is used as propaganda. In 1947, the US had a government labeled the 'war department'. This was changed to the 'Defence Department'.(17) In the UK, the War Office (together with other departments) became the Ministry of Defence. If it were labeled 'the Ministry of Invasion and Occupation', people might be more critical of what they do. Similarly, if the 'defence' industry were labeled the 'mass murder and maiming industry', people would realise how destructive it is. By hiding the criminal nature of these activities behind the word 'defence', people are misled into believing that it is fairly harmless. Weapons are used for invading other countries, or to control people who do not agree with their government.

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Rod Driver is a part-time academic who is particularly interested in de-bunking modern-day US and British propaganda. This is the eighth in a series entitled *Elephants In The Room*, which attempts to provide a beginners guide to understanding what's really going on in relation to war, terrorism, economics and poverty, without the nonsense in the mainstream media.

Notes

1) Jim Garrison and Pyare Shivpuri, *The Russian Threat*, 1983, p.260.

The original draft of the speech used the term “military-industrial-congressional complex” to indicate that the assistance of congress plays an important part in maintaining the power and influence of weapons companies within the US economy. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military-industrial_complex

2) Ralph Forbes, ‘151 congressmen derive profit from war’, 5 May 2008, at http://www.americanfreepress.net/html/151_congressmen_derive_financi.html

3) Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 2007, p.311.

Donald Rumsfeld held shares in Gilead and Dick Cheney held shares in Halliburton.

4) Danielle Brian, cited in Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 2007, p.319

5) Saferworld, ‘The good, the bad and the ugly – a decade of Labour’s arms exports’, May 2007, at <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/264-the-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly—a-decade-of-labours-arms-exports>

6) Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 2007, p.381

7) Jim Garrison and Pyare Shivpuri, *The Russian Threat*, 1983, pp.147-156. One officer said of the MX, “there is no earthly strategic doctrine to justify their existence” (p.156)

8) Mark Zepezauer, *Take The Rich Off Welfare*, 2005, pp.54-75

9) Human Rights Watch, ‘Money Talks: Arms Dealing With Human Rights Abusers’, April 1999, at www.hrw.org/reports/1999/bulgaria

10) Mark Curtis, *Web of Deceit*, 2003, p.189

11) Arron Merat, ‘The Saudis couldn’t do it without us’: the UK’s true role in Yemen’s deadly war’, *The Guardian*, 18 June 2019, at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/18/the-saudis-couldnt-do-it-without-us-the-uks-true-role-in-yemens-deadly-war>

12) Mark Curtis, *Web of Deceit*, 2003, p.186

13) Jennifer Erickson, *Dangerous Trade: Arms Exports, Human Rights and International Reputation*, 2015, P.115

14) Jorge Luis Borges, cited in Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 2007, p.137

15) Martin Middlebrook, *The Argentine Fight For The Falklands*, 2003

16) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exocet>

17) Noam Chomsky, 'Creating the horror chambers', interview with Dan Falcone, Jacobin, July 2015, at <https://chomsky.info/072015-2/>

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