
South Africa's Arms Industry: A New Era of Democratic Accountability?

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Impelled by the United Nations arms embargoes levied against it in the 1960s and 1970s, apartheid South Africa developed a formidable domestic arms industry in support of an equally formidable national defense force.¹ Ironically, despite its international isolation because of apartheid, South Africa was able to play on the fears of many western countries about communist, revolutionary movements in the third world to convince those same countries to supply much of the manufacturing technology for the South African arms industry, often in violation of the UN embargo. Proclaiming itself ardently anticommunist, South Africa portrayed itself as a bulwark against the rapid decolonization in Africa that gave birth to leftist, nationalist movements throughout the sub-Saharan region. The West, eager for help in the fight to contain communism and comfortable in ignoring UN sanctions, supplied South Africa with large amounts of military equipment and technology. The United States, West Germany, France, Great Britain, and Israel all exploited loose interpretations of the UN weapons embargo to provide the rogue apartheid state

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with various dual-use hardware that the UN declaration had not explicitly banned. At the same time, western arms manufacturers funneled clandestine military aid to South Africa in a thriving black market trade. During the 1970s, for example, two U.S. gun manufacturers shipped thousands of firearms and millions of rounds of ammunition to the apartheid regime through front companies in Europe and Africa.² Later, in the 1980s, a West German firm supplied all the essential components of an ammunition production plant.³

Yet despite the impotence of the United Nations embargo and the substantial flow of support on behalf of communist containment, South Africa's apartheid ideology drew increasing international criticism. Mounting political and economic castigation from the West, and the advancing threat of revolutionary, nationalist movements from Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) to Angola to Mozambique, together formed the basis for a pervasive sense of isolation and a "total onslaught" South African mentality. An increasingly militarized South Africa responded with an aggressive, "total strategy" doctrine of national security.

Increasingly in the 1970s and 1980s, South Africa launched extensive destabilization campaigns against the left-leaning and vehemently anti-apartheid elements that had taken root throughout the southern African region. For example, the South African Defence Force (SADF) utilized South Africa's colonial occupation of Namibia to channel weapons and supplies, as well as provide direct military support, to UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) in the Angolan civil war against the Cuban-backed MPLA government (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola). South African weapons and supplies were also provided to the rebel forces of RENAMO (Resistencia Nacional Mocambicana) in Mozambique in their opposition to the Soviet-backed, ruling government of FRELIMO (Frente de Libertacao de Mocambique).

While South Africa pumped arms and supplies to rebel groups abroad, simultaneously it had to contend with internal challenges to its own regime. Botswana, Swaziland, Lesotho, colonial Namibia, and townships within South Africa itself represented the embroiled front lines of an attritional guerrilla war between South African military and police forces and independence movements led by the ANC (African National Congress), SWAPO (South West People's Organization), and other groups.⁴

It is difficult to measure the extent to which South Africa's Cold War security policies contributed to the stunted development and enduring violence that now plague the wider southern Africa region. Perhaps American and Russian intervention would have insured similar results with or without South Africa's input. Or perhaps the residue of colonialism and

indigenous struggles for independence were sufficient to retard stable regional development, and the Cold War merely added insult to injury.

Whatever the long-term effect of previous South African policies, the end of the Cold War has dissolved the impetus behind South Africa's total strategy doctrine and previous reliance on military self-sufficiency. Yet where causes may have receded, their effects remain. The proliferation of weaponry throughout the southern African region, and South Africa's status as a first-rate weapons producer, is one of the more troubling legacies of the Cold War era and the former apartheid regime.

The South African Arms Industry Today

Because of its apartheid isolation and the need to provide total self-sufficiency to its military and internal security forces, South Africa today has the capacity to produce a wide range of sophisticated military hardware, from nuclear bombs to 9mm handguns, and almost everything in between.

In the nuclear realm, of course, South Africa is the only country in the world to date that has unilaterally decided to destroy its nuclear stockpile. In the 1980s, Pretoria successfully developed seven nuclear warheads as part of its total strategy arsenal, with Israeli and West German companies implicated in providing the requisite technology.⁵ Early in 1990, however, the South African government, under the reformist leadership of then President F.W. de Klerk, unilaterally chose to destroy its nuclear weaponry. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the negotiated independence of Namibia, and the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola convinced South Africa, at a time of deteriorating international relations and mounting economic sanctions, that a nuclear arsenal had become a liability rather than an asset.⁶ The country thus became the world's first nation that had fully developed, and then voluntarily dismantled, its military nuclear capability. President Nelson Mandela has since declared that South Africa must never again produce weapons of mass destruction.⁷ And, while the country still possesses stores of highly enriched uranium and cannot erase its acquired scientific technology, it is doubtful that it would choose to reactivate an overt nuclear capability anytime soon.

In fact, South Africa is already emerging as a world leader among nonaligned nations in promoting nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament, a reputation that the new South African government is consciously seeking to enhance through its unilateral nuclear disarmament and renunciation of apartheid. Moreover, in April of 1995, South African diplo-

macy played a significant role in UN-sponsored talks that forged a consensus among member nations of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to extend the agreement indefinitely.⁸

Despite these positive trends in the nuclear realm, however, South Africa's growing military industrial capability and arms export potential in conventional weapons give some cause for concern. In the wake of Pretoria's unprecedented nuclear disarmament and in a world in which regional violence and instability are the product of far more modest and conventional means, it is South Africa's excellence at producing reliable, durable, and sophisticated armor, artillery, and infantry weapons that presents the greatest proliferation challenge.

The South African arms industry has developed into a mature, broad-based, industrial sector, capable of developing new technologies while improving and updating older ones. Among its staples are an extensive variety of armored fighting vehicles and artillery systems, including the Olifant Main Battle Tank upgrade, (a variant of the British Centurion); towed and self-propelled 155mm howitzers; the 127mm, 40 round, Valkiri Mk II multiple rocket launcher, and the Rooikat armored car, which serves as a chassis for a variety of different armaments, including a 76mm or 105mm gun, twin 35mm anti-aircraft guns, or a laser-guided, antitank missile launcher.⁹ In addition to the Rooikat, the industry produces a wide array of armored personnel carriers and infantry fighting vehicles for military and internal security purposes, and is noted especially for its expertise in the design of high-mobility wheeled and mine-resistant vehicles.¹⁰

On the lighter side, South Africa produces a 107mm, single tube rocket launcher; 60mm and 81mm mortars; a 40mm, single or six-shot, shoulder-fired grenade launcher; a 92mm, shoulder-fired anti-tank weapon; and a variety of different mortar ammunition and hand and rifle-launched grenades. A variety of South African machine guns, adopted from foreign designs, include a 20mm, G-12 cannon (developed from the French-made M-693), the 7.62mm, MG-4 mounted machine gun (based upon the US Browning M-1919A4), and the 7.62mm SS-77 light machine gun (adapted from the Soviet Goryunov design). South Africa's ability to adapt foreign weapons designs is also demonstrated by domestic production of a 5.56mm assault rifle (based upon the Israeli Galil), a 9mm sub-machine gun (similar to an Israeli Uzi), and the Z-88 and Vektor 9mm pistols, based on the Italian Beretta and German Walther, respectively.

The centerpiece of South Africa's emerging defense aviation industry is the Rooivalk combat support helicopter, which boasts impressive power and maneuverability and is armed with antitank and air-to-air missiles and

a chin-mounted 20mm cannon. In addition, South Africa is expanding and developing its expertise in mobile, land-based, air defense systems, including towed and self-propelled 35mm anti-aircraft guns and high velocity, infrared, surface-to-air missile systems.¹¹

Having evolved out of active combat experience during South Africa's destabilization campaigns in Angola and colonial Namibia, South African weapons have been repeatedly adapted and improved, based upon actual field deployment against largely Soviet-made technology in the harsh environs of the southern African bush. Out of that country's aggressive militarized heritage has thus emerged a significant reputation for rugged and reliable military technology.

In addition to its domestically manufactured arms, the South African government has also amassed a large stockpile of captured light weapons. Many of these arms are of Soviet and other Eastern bloc origin, which had been funneled to SWAPO and ANC guerrilla forces and to the communist-backed governments in Angola and Mozambique. Weapons seized include handguns, carbines, assault rifles, machine guns, rocket launchers, antitank and antipersonnel mines, and even anti-aircraft weapons. One estimate puts the South African security forces stockpile, including government issue and illegal, confiscated arms, at over 4.9 million weapons.¹² Even so, government seizures have made little dent in the circulation and ready availability of the millions of Cold War weapons that continue to plague the region.

The Problem of Small Arms and Light Weapons

Because of the secrecy and lack of accountability surrounding legal arms smuggled to resistance movements from abroad, as well as those procured and distributed by the South African government, it is difficult to determine the exact number of arms currently circulating in the southern Africa region. Greg Mills of the South African Institute of International Affairs arrives at a rough total of 8.7 million weapons for the security forces of the region alone.¹³ These stockpiles are, however, very poorly accounted for, which both obscures their numbers and contributes to the problem of illegal circulation. In South Africa itself, government firearms are frequently stolen or "lost." The former Special Constables of the South African Police were especially notorious for reportedly selling their R-5 assault rifles, shotguns, and handguns to the highest bidder.¹⁴ Today, violent assaults are often perpetrated with military issue R-4 and R-5 assault rifles, and there are allegations that rogue elements within the

newly reorganized South African Police Service have distributed their weapons for both profit and political purposes. In other cases, policemen are murdered for their weapons, or they or their families are threatened with harm if the policemen do not "lose" their weapons. Other South African policemen have allegedly sought to promote violent opposition to the new ANC-led government by supplying small arms caches as well as paramilitary training to anti-ANC Inkatha warlords in the Kwazulu/Natal province.¹⁵

The circulation of small arms within the country continues unabated, fueling endemic violence and instability. South Africa's population is one of the most heavily armed in the world, with a per capita murder rate more than five times that of the United States; in 1993, 8,000 people were shot to death, while another 10,000 suffered gunshot wounds and 33,000 were robbed at gun point.¹⁶ Firearms are also the single leading cause of death in South African political violence.¹⁷

Legal, privately owned firearms are heavily concentrated among the white minority population, for whom gun ownership is a part of the legacy of discriminatory gun registration laws and a highly militarized apartheid culture. As of the end of 1992, there were an estimated 3.5 million firearms in the hands of 1.3 million white South Africans.¹⁸ The number of licenses issued annually continues to rise. As South Africa struggles with the transition from apartheid to democracy, uncertainty and fear among many whites have led to reliance on private security measures. Conservative, right-wing groups, apprehensive of post-apartheid reform, have been stockpiling legally owned small arms in substantial private arsenals. In a fashion similar to that in countries as diverse as Russia and Colombia, the number of private security firms providing armed guards to South African companies and residential neighborhoods has increased dramatically.

In the impoverished black townships, local street militias known as Self-Defence Units (SDUs) continue to maintain underground arsenals of illegal small arms originally smuggled into the country by the rebel ANC. Under apartheid, the ANC sought to create and arm the SDUs as part of its revolutionary strategy to render South Africa's black majority ungovernable by the ruling white minority. All too often, however, these SDUs exhibited the types of factionalism that plagued the anti-apartheid movement, both within the ANC and in such rivalries as existed between and among the Zulu and Xhosa tribes, and often operated beyond the control of the ANC. Today, many of these SDUs continue to subvert the governmental authority of the ANC-led regime, albeit more through criminal activity than through organized political opposition (SDU members are

barred from joining the new integrative South African security forces; see page 607). Drawn from the ranks of a highly militarized and politicized generation of black South African youth, young SDU members discarded what little schooling was available in order to take up arms in the “peoples’ war” against apartheid. Ill-educated and dispossessed, they now lack marketable skills with which to contribute to a post-apartheid society.¹⁹ Short on constructive alternatives and disillusioned by a political settlement that is far more conciliatory than revolutionary, many local SDU members have turned to gangsterism and are believed to be involved in a variety of organized criminal activities including gun running, drug smuggling, extortion, and money laundering.²⁰

Accordingly, the problem of domestic gun control in South Africa remains acute, and is made more so by the vast quantities of small arms in the region as a whole. National borders are poorly defined and are located deep in the African bush where they are very difficult to control. As a result, small and light weaponry can travel from one country to another with frequency and ease and can be endlessly recycled. Weapons captured by the South African government from ANC and SWAPO guerrillas, for instance, have been resupplied to UNITA and RENAMO forces in Angola and Mozambique. In the wake of the ceasefire agreements in those countries, many of the same weapons are likely to cycle back into South Africa. Meanwhile national borders fail to contain the conditions of social and economic plight that generate so much of the supply and demand for small arms. Weapons continue to flow across borders as poverty, strife, and lack of economic opportunity throughout the region continue to create both criminal and political motivations for the use of these weapons while simultaneously making them available at sharply discounted prices. It has been rumored, for example, that an AK-47 assault rifle can be purchased on the South Africa-Swaziland border for as little as R20 (between 5 and 6 US dollars).²¹ The circulation of Cold War weaponry is, for South Africa and for every other country in southern Africa, a national problem of regional dimensions.

As South Africa possesses by far the strongest and most advanced military force in the region, and is its only significant, indigenous arms producer, Pretoria is in a position to help develop a regional arms control and collective security strategy. Yet it is precisely these attributes that make South Africa part of the problem. The militarized character of much of South African society (both white and black), and the tremendous quantities of weapons produced by South African companies, must both be curbed if domestic and regional stability are to be achieved. Thus it is all the more imperative that South Africa take the lead in refashioning its

civil-military relations in a manner more consistent with the country's transition to a pluralist, democratic society.

With the holding of its first democratic election, and with the lifting of the international trade embargoes, South Africa has been welcomed back into the international community. The new government of National Unity possesses an unprecedented opportunity to dismantle a security apparatus that was forged in isolation to defend a regime and fight an enemy, neither of which still exist. Curbing South Africa's military industrial complex could bolster regional confidence and encourage a cooperative disarmament strategy throughout a strife-torn region. Unfortunately, these opportunities are not as easy as one would hope. Many of the political and economic constraints on South Africa's transition to an all-race democracy fundamentally conflict with these wider regional security imperatives.

The South African Military

South Africa's 1994 elections, while momentous, must be understood within a larger historical context. The country cannot yet be considered a fully democratic nation, given the difficult transition needed to evolve from apartheid to a pluralistic civil society. In the coming years, it is faced with the daunting economic and political tasks of restructuring its entire society, and it faces them with a historical legacy more deeply rooted in political violence than in democratic power sharing. To date, the policies of the multiparty government of Nelson Mandela have been a precarious, high-stakes balancing act between maintaining some semblance of stability while effecting some level of reform; of safeguarding the political and economic interests of the white minority while asserting those of the black majority. In this process, political change in South Africa has had to mitigate high ambition with extreme caution. In dismantling decades of apartheid, a long-suffering black majority may turn extremist if democratic reform and economic gains come too slowly. On the other hand, an anxious white minority could likewise threaten democratic stability if political and economic reforms move too quickly.

In this regard, the ability of elements in South Africa's military and internal security forces to undermine the coalition government, and the pace of reform, are of great importance. While aware of the inevitable need for military restructuring, de Klerk and Mandela have thus far been constrained in their approach to the task. Political expediency has favored evolutionary rather than abrupt and confrontational policies. Nonetheless,

there have been notable gains in transforming South Africa from its former garrison state mentality to a society in which the military and security forces are more subject to democratic controls.

This transformational process began in the early 1990s, when a combination of Namibia's independence, the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola, and the legalization of the ANC and other opposition parties within South Africa greatly reduced the need for the existing security apparatus. In response, then President de Klerk cut South Africa's standing defense forces in half by lowering the term for national military service to one year. While this greatly reduced the overall size of the South African Defense Forces, it is also true that shortening terms of military service for conscripts did not address the apartheid mentality that is most firmly entrenched at the command level and in the special and covert units, many of which have been implicated in the "Third Force" plots that sought to destabilize the anti-apartheid movement. In the early 1990s, De Klerk was reluctant to confront these elements, retaining or, if necessary, reassigning troublesome hard-liners who opposed his reformist agenda. In December 1992, for example, when he did dismiss or suspend 23 military officers for inciting violence in the black townships, he chose not to press charges against them.²²

Since then, more progress has been made in downsizing the military and reforming those covert special forces units most dedicated to upholding white minority rule in the former apartheid security structure. The Recce Commandos, for example, a counter-insurgency unit of the apartheid government used to undermine political opposition that is known for its use of torture and assassination, was reduced by half and absorbed into other units by the end of 1994.

Overall, a new South African National Defense Force (SANDF) is being created out of units of the South African military and the armed wings of its former opponents, including the MK (Umkhonto we Sizwe) of the ANC, the Azanian Peoples' Liberation Army (APLA), and the independent defense forces of the black homelands of Transkei, BophuthaTswana, Venda, and Ciskei. This integration process has admittedly been slow, hampered by the recalcitrance of some elements in the former South African military, as well as language problems and differences in training levels, organization, and experience among members of the different military forces. There is no doubt, however, that the inclusion of both white and black combatants from the apartheid era is essential to the formation of a new volunteer military force that is consistent with the needs of a democratic state.²³

But, as South Africa's defense forces come to more nearly reflect the

country's political diversity, questions remain about its overall mission and roles. One concern is the continuing role of the military in domestic affairs. Army units continue to be deployed internally in a civilian policing capacity, recalling previous apartheid practices whereby South African soldiers were used to suppress political dissent and enforce white minority rule. The use of the military for domestic law-and-order functions may indeed be a necessity while a capable civilian police force is created. There is a danger, however, that this internal security function could become institutionalized over the long term and undermine the separation of military and civil-political affairs that is critical to democratic reform.²⁴

The external orientation of South Africa's newly integrated military force must also be shifted to a more defensive posture that is less threatening to both domestic political reform and the country's regional neighbors. The Mandela government also recognizes the necessity of reducing the financial drain imposed by a formidable military organization. Accordingly, South African Defense Minister Joe Modise has outlined plans to cut the South African National Defense Force, which because of the integration process has expanded in recent years to more than 120,000 troops. The proposal entails offering separation payments to about 10,000 members of former black liberation forces who would be demobilized immediately, and gradually reducing the overall military force to 70,000–75,000 by the year 1999.²⁵

As a result of these force reductions, several tens of thousands of demobilized soldiers, both white and black, will need economic incentives and job training to ease their assimilation into the civilian population. Without such programs, unemployment and disillusionment are liable to breed any number of unpleasant outcomes, including black market sales in military hardware, the recruitment of former soldiers into mercenary armies, or even renewed armed insurgency. Indeed, these problems already confront the new South Africa. As noted above, government-issue weapons are poorly accounted for and often turn up on the street via theft or black market sales. In 1994, a number of former MK soldiers threatened to resume the armed struggle against the government after being dismissed from the military for insubordination when they protested the slow pace of integration. Also, former South African military troops are being recruited by a private firm, Executive Outcomes, to provide military training in Angola. This South African company recently won several more contracts to supply mercenaries to five other unidentified African states.²⁶ In response to such developments, the South African Foreign Affairs Department has denounced these mercenary operations as under-

mining the Mandela government's attempts to promote regional peace and stability.²⁷

South African Weapons Exports

If political constraints are making it difficult to establish a new post-apartheid security structure, economic necessity has proven even more of an obstacle to scaling back a broad-based defense industry inherited from the apartheid, Cold War era. In order to redress the gross socioeconomic disparities of apartheid that continue to riddle South Africa, the new ANC-led regime has proposed a multibillion dollar Reconstruction and Development Program to be phased in over five or more years. The program's agenda includes a system of free and compulsory schooling, construction of one million new homes, electrification of 2.5 million existing homes, creation of 2.5 million new jobs, and redistribution of 30 percent of South Africa's agricultural land.²⁸ It is an ambitious policy for a country with an \$8 billion budget deficit and an unemployment rate approaching 50 percent.

A crucial first step toward rebuilding South Africa's economy is a revitalization of its industrial base, which has long been in decline under the burden of international sanctions. Yet it was precisely this decades-long isolation that compelled apartheid South Africa to develop indigenous arms production capacities into a major industrial and technological sector of the economy. Aside from employing nearly 10 percent of the domestic work force, the South African weapons industry provides one of the country's leading economic bases for attracting much needed foreign investment and trade. For example, South Africa's defense procurement agency, Armscor, signed several countertrade and offset agreements drawing some \$1.15 billion worth of new, foreign investment into the country over the fiscal year 1994-95.²⁹

Ironically, the financial demands of political reform both support and threaten the vitality of South Africa's arms industry. The South African government has been forced to make substantial cuts in national defense on behalf of its social restructuring agenda; between 1989 and 1993 the defense budget was reduced by 43 percent, from 15.7 to 8.2 percent of total government expenditure.³⁰ For fiscal year 1995-96, the defense budget appears to be bottoming out at 10.5 billion Rand (\$2.9 billion), or 2.1 percent of GDP, as budget increases are projected for the years ahead.³¹ Thus, while the South African economy will continue to rely on the military industrial sector to help bolster growth, it has been accepted by

South African policymakers that the country cannot afford to maintain the levels of defense spending inherited from the apartheid years.

Yet one major consequence of this reduction in domestic defense procurement has been an increasing emphasis on exports in order to retain South Africa's military industrial base and meet the pressing socio-economic imperatives of transition. Armscor, which in addition to national defense procurement is responsible for issuing export permits to South Africa's arms manufacturers, has obtained government approval for a plan to expand arms exports by 300 percent over the next five years, creating 20,000 new jobs and raising export earnings from \$244 to \$800 million annually.³² In fiscal year 1994-95, for example, there was a 26 percent increase in weapons exports, and such exports now account for 27 percent of total Armscor sales.³³

Accordingly, short of a healthy economy and adequate investment resources, there has been little opportunity for South Africa's arms industry to otherwise diversify its military production capabilities. Near-term reliance on arms exports as an economic building block threatens to preempt conversion of South Africa's military industrial capabilities into more constructive and less threatening civilian alternatives.³⁴

In addition, South Africa's commitment to greater arms exports could complicate Pretoria's foreign policy and international attempts to constrain the proliferation of conventional weapons. Because of its previous international isolation, the country's arms sales and procurement activities have long been of a surreptitious and inherently illegal nature. With a history of opportunistic and indiscriminate trading policies, Armscor has sanctioned arms sales to repressive governments (Haiti and Burma), to countries on the verge of civil war (Somalia and Sudan), and even to declared enemies of the former apartheid regime (Pakistan, Jamaica, Mexico, and the People's Republic of China).³⁵ In 1994, the United States government indicted Armscor (along with a U.S.-based firm, International Signal and Control) for smuggling U.S. weapons technology into South Africa during the 1980s, and then passing it on to Iraq in a covert swap for crude oil.³⁶ In 1992, Armscor is reported to have supplied arms to Croatia, including mines, mortar rounds, and shotgun and rifle ammunition, all in violation of a United Nations arms embargo on the former Yugoslavia. More recently, South Africa supplied thousands of automatic rifles, grenade launchers, grenades, and millions of rounds of ammunition to Rwanda. In 1993 the Rwandan government began to standardize its army with South African military equipment, and there are allegations that Pretoria continued to supply arms to Rwanda until April of 1994, more than a year after the country exploded in ethnic conflict.³⁷ The

Mandela government, however, maintains that no South African arms were exported to Rwanda after the outbreak of civil war in February 1993, and that a \$12.3 million contract signed in July 1993 was subsequently cancelled.³⁸ Nonetheless, groups such as Human Rights Watch continued to maintain, as recently as July 1995, that South Africa, along with France and Zaire, was continuing to supply weapons to Hutu forces exiled in Zaire, and through Zaire to Hutu rebels in Rwanda itself.³⁹

It is thus doubly ironic that, with the arms embargo against South Africa itself only recently lifted, at least some portion of the country's weapons exports are either illegal or in violation of international embargoes. Nonetheless, as U.S. officials have recently predicted, South Africa has the potential to become a major exporter of conventional weapons in purely legal transactions, given the significant opportunities in the global marketplace for the types of weapons specialized in by South Africa.⁴⁰ While it is true that, at present, South African weapons exports account for less than one percent of the global total,⁴¹ the salient point regarding South Africa's arms industry is its future export potential, given that the country is the tenth largest weapons producer in the world and is now shifting its attention to export markets as a means of generating foreign revenue.⁴²

Moreover, the contraction of U.S. and Soviet military aid in the wake of the Cold War has led many developing countries to seek alternative, less expensive sources for the modest yet durable weapons technology suitable to their security needs. Anxious to expand its foreign market base and with a reputation for superior yet affordable weaponry, South Africa's arms industry will attract many of these buyers. In November of 1994, some 16 defense chiefs and 500 foreign delegates attended the Defence Exposition of South Africa (DEXSA) held in Johannesburg, representing countries as diverse as Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, Israel, Taiwan, Singapore, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Russia, Ukraine, and Romania.⁴³ Even prior to the exposition, the South African Denel Group had completed the country's first major arms sale transaction since the UN arms embargo was lifted, with the signing of a \$120 million contract with The Sultanate of Oman for an estimated twenty-five 155mm self-propelled artillery systems.⁴⁴ Other deals being negotiated include the sale of H-2 and H-3 air-launched guided bombs to Pakistan by the Kentron Aerospace Company and the fitting of a South African 155mm artillery gun to Soviet-designed T-72 tanks in India.

In addition to developing country markets, South Africa will itself seek opportunities to collaborate with western arms industries in order to further expand its markets and diversify its productive capabilities. Re-

cently, South African arms manufacturers have unveiled several new collaborative weapons development projects, including the Nemesis low level air defense system, which incorporates British radar and fire control system technologies, and a new surface-to-air missile launcher, jointly designed with Switzerland's Oerlikon-Contraves group. Also in the works is a joint Russian and South African engine upgrade package for South Africa's Mirage combat fighter fleet.⁴⁵

Given the need for international efforts to construct a more responsible and transparent global arms trade, however, the South African defense industry's surreptitious and illicit activities under the former apartheid regime could be a poor foundation upon which to unlock that industry's latent export potential. The regulatory demands of a newly democratic and human-rights-conscious government, as well as those of the international community at large, will be a difficult pill for this arms industry to swallow in lieu of both former habits and future objectives.

Despite the transition toward democracy and the cessation of Cold War hostilities, for example, elements within South Africa's military and defense industrial sectors have continued to fuel conflict in Angola with covert military assistance. In the fall of 1994, Armscor officials allegedly attempted to supply UNITA with a shipment of some 8,596 Kalashnikov assault rifles, 15,665 G-3 rifles, and more than 14 million rounds of ammunition, in direct contravention of a United Nations ban on aid to UNITA and in violation of the policies of the new South African government, which has forbidden military exports to countries engaged in civil war and human rights abuses.⁴⁶ Apparently the deal fell through when UNITA could not come up with enough funds to pay for the weapons.

The arms consignment was subsequently shipped to Yemen, again in contravention of government policy prohibiting weapons sales to countries affected by civil war. The shipment bore what proved to be a forged end-user certificate specifying Lebanon as its ultimate destination. The Lebanese embassy in South Africa denied purchasing the arms and quickly recognized the certificate as a rather sloppy job of forgery, something Armscor officials should also have noticed were they truly innocent of either negligence or complicity.⁴⁷ The Danish shipping company that transported the arms then confirmed, despite initial denials by Armscor, that the shipment was in fact destined for Yemen, bearing the label "special goods." Upon discovering the true contents of the Danish vessel, Yemeni port authorities refused to unload its cargo.

According to the findings of the government-appointed Cameron Commission, it appears that Armscor purchased some of the weapons from China (e.g., the Kalashnikovs) for transshipment to UNITA.⁴⁸ There are

indications as well that conservative elements within the South African military were involved in the deal. Armscor later admitted that the arms consignment was in fact never intended for Lebanon, but attempted to dodge responsibility by claiming to have had its otherwise legitimate intentions misled on account of the falsified end-user certificate. Meanwhile, Armscor was reluctant to cooperate with the Cameron Commission, insisting that vital information concerning its export practices must be kept secret lest South Africa's foreign relations be jeopardized.⁴⁹

Mandela Government Policies

Clearly there remain disparities between the way the South African arms industry continues to do business and the way the new South Africa is hoping to be perceived as legitimate member of the international community. President Mandela brings to the new regime a deep personal commitment to the struggle for human rights, and he has aspired to make that commitment a central pillar of South African foreign policy.⁵⁰ He is keenly aware of the relationship between the worldwide flow of arms and the causes of ethnic conflict and repression, and has sought to reflect that awareness with new arms trade policies banning weapons sales to countries engaged in civil conflict. At the opening ceremony for DEXSA, for example, Mandela stated that there was no reason for South Africa's arms industry to continue to "operate under a cloak of secrecy," and suggested that the exhibition itself was to show to the world that South Africa is "resolved to act responsibly."⁵¹

Recent revisions to South Africa's classification of arms client countries, in which the Foreign Affairs Department categorizes foreign states according to four levels of arms export restrictions (no restrictions, some restrictions, nonlethal equipment only, and no sales), supports Mandela's contention. The most recent government document, released in July 1995, reflects greater sensitivity to human rights concerns and to preventing sales to repressive and authoritarian regimes. The South African government proposes to ban all weapons sales to 31 countries exhibiting civil strife or human rights abuses. Included in this category are Rwanda, Iraq, Yemen, the states of the former Yugoslavia, and even Nigeria, recently eligible for South African exports. In addition, nine other countries are restricted to nonlethal equipment, including two countries (Angola and Mozambique) with longstanding ties to Mandela and the ANC. Partial restrictions are to be imposed on 15 other countries, while a number of African states have no restrictions at all (Botswana, Zimbabwe, and

Mauritania), reflecting a willingness to develop new relations with the more stable African nations.⁵²

These proposed revisions to South Africa's export policies represent significantly tighter restrictions than has been the case since the most recent policy changes in 1993. A total of 48 countries have been downgraded to more restrictive categories, because of either internal conflict, political instability, sponsorship of international terrorism, or proximity to conflicts in neighboring countries. By comparison, only two countries (Uganda and Nicaragua) have been upgraded to less restrictive categories. Thus the proposed changes to South African arms export policies demonstrate the Mandela government's commitment to a more responsible arms export policy, while at the same time paving the way for exploiting new markets in Southeast Asia and the Middle East.

These admittedly valuable policy steps have been taken to realize a more democratic accounting of South Africa's arms export practices, but the Mandela government's practical commitment to disciplining the surreptitious tendencies of its arms industry is complicated by the pressing socioeconomic imperatives of post-apartheid reform. During a trip to Washington in late 1994, Mandela had requested that disciplinary actions taken by the United States against Armscor be lifted (because of the indictments pending against Armscor, the U.S. State Department had issued a "denial order" prohibiting American companies from doing business with Armscor and its arms manufacturing subsidiaries). Mandela made his request because of a pending British defense contract for the purchase of South African Rooivalk attack helicopters, fitted with U.S.-manufactured Hellfire missile systems. Without the desired missile technology, the Rooivalk was ineligible to compete. Mandela urged President Clinton to lift the ban, stating that the multinational contract was very important to the South African economy and would create new jobs and bolster the country's aviation industry.⁵³ In the end, the still ongoing legal difficulties faced by Armscor and International Signal and Control in the U.S. prevented South Africa from competing for the British contract. Similar difficulties in the future would be a significant obstacle for South Africa's weapons industry as it looks to western arms industries to expand and diversify its markets.⁵⁴ Clearly, the immediate needs of the South African economy at times conflict with the long term concern of ensuring accountability in arms industry exports.

Thus, the emerging role of post-apartheid South Africa in the international arms trade is still evolving. South Africa's democratic transformation is far from complete and the socioeconomic burdens of apartheid will be difficult to dismantle. As noted above, the Mandela government has

taken impressive steps to implement democratic control over the security structure and arms industry, as witnessed by the Cameron Commission and the draft regulations on weapons exports. In addition, South Africa is now supplying information on arms exports to the United Nations Register of Conventional Weapons, which represents an additional move in the direction of greater transparency. Nonetheless, the competing moral and practical interests of the new South African regime have yet to play themselves out. The tensions between them will greatly influence both South Africa's domestic stability and its role in regional and global security relations. The new government will need time in which to react to the shortcomings of its present course of reform. For the moment, however, initial steps have been taken to restructure the old apartheid defense structure and to transform the country's arms export policies, with positive results for South Africa itself, its neighbors, and the international community.

Notes

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1. In 1963, UN Security Council Resolution 181 requested that all nations voluntarily refrain from selling arms to South Africa. In 1977, UN Resolution 418 subsequently stiffened this measure into a mandatory embargo. In 1984, UN Resolution 558 called for an additional voluntary ban on importing military equipment produced by South Africa.
2. Michael T. Klare, "The Thriving Black Market for Weapons," *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, April 1988.
3. Klare, "The Thriving Black Market for Weapons," 6.
4. The African National Congress (ANC) and South West People's Organization (SWAPO) were the outlawed liberation movements to free South Africa and South African-occupied Namibia, respectively.
5. Klare, "The Thriving Black Market for Weapons," 20.
6. See F.W. Villiers, Roger Fardine, and Mitchell Reiss, "Why South Africa Gave Up the Bomb," *Foreign Affairs* 72, 5 (November/December 1993): 98–109.
7. Villiers, Fardine, and Reiss, "Why South Africa Gave Up the Bomb," 108.
8. See "South Africa Shines as Policy Beacon," *Defense News*, June 12–18, 1995, 1.
9. *Jane's Armour and Artillery, 1994-95* (London, New York: Jane's, 1994).

10. "South Africa's Arsenal," *Military Technology*, 28, 11 (November 1994): 10.
11. See *Jane's Land-Based Air Defence Systems, 1994-95*, and "South Africa's Arsenal," 17-20 and 30-33.
12. Greg Mills, "Small Arms Control—Some Early Thoughts," *African Defence Review* 15(1994): 42.
13. Mills, "Small Arms Control," 45.
14. Mills, "Small Arms Control," 44.
15. "New Evidence but No Action," *Weekly Mail & Guardian*, 15-21 July 1994. See also Herbert Howe, "The South African Defence Force and Political Reform," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 32, 1 (March 1994): 29-51.
16. *New African*, 324 (November 1994): 30.
17. Mills, "Small Arms Control," 45.
18. Personal communication from Glenn Oosthuysen of the Small Arms Project, South Africa Institute of International Affairs, 2 August 1995.
19. For more on the SDU's, see Shaun McCarthy, "South Africa's Self-Defence Units," *Jane's Intelligence Review* (November 1994): 520-21.
20. Meverett Koetz, head of the Peace Secretariat in Witts-Vaal, was quoted in the *Weekly Mail and Guardian* as saying that "With the rate of unemployment so high, the SDU's are fighting over weapons, so as to have something to live by. . . . Most of them have realized politics is not the issue." See *Weekly Mail & Guardian*, "SDU Gangsters behind Crime Wave," 20-26 May 1994.
21. Mills, "Small Arms Control," 48.
22. Howe, "The South African Defence Force," 40.
23. See Jacklyn Cock, "The Dynamics of Transforming South Africa's Defense Forces," in *South Africa: The Political Economy of Transformation*, ed. S. Stedman (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993).
24. See Gavin Cawthra, "The Role of the South African National Defense Force: Worrying Developments Echo the Past," *International Security Digest*, June 1995 (London: Centre for Defence Studies, King's College).
25. "South Africa Defense Force to be Reduced by 60,000," *Military and Arms Transfer News*, 95/12, 8 September 1995.
26. *International Security Digest*, March 1995 (London: Centre for Defence Studies, King's College).
27. See "Investing in the Bibles and Bullets Business," *Weekly Mail & Guardian*, 16 September 1994, and "SA Groups Still Help UNITA, Claims General," *Weekly Mail & Guardian*, 30 September 1994.
28. Cheryl Carolus, "The Real Struggle," *Africa Report* 39, 4 (July/August 1994), 40.
29. *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 3 September 1994, 5.

30. Martin Navias, "The Future of South Africa's Arms Trade and Defence Industries," *Jane's Intelligence Review* (November 1994), 523.
31. See "\$2.9b Defence Budget Marks End to Decline," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 25 March 1995, 5.
32. Susan Willett, "South Africa—Arms Trade Dilemma," *International Security Digest*, November 1994 (London: Centre for Defence Studies, King's College).
33. *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 10 June 1995.
34. Susan Willett, "Open Arms for the Prodigal Son: The Future of South Africa's Arms Trade Policies," (London: British American Security Information Council, 1994), 5.
35. See "The Alice in Wonderland memo," *The Weekly Mail & Guardian*, 2–8 December 1994.
36. "US Batters Armscor in Bombs-for-Oil Court Case," *The Weekly Mail & Guardian*, 12–18 August 1994.
37. Frank Smyth, "Deadly Opportunities," *Multinational Monitor* (May 1994), 13.
38. The government did acknowledge, however, that more than \$50 million in weapons were sold to Rwanda in the three-year period prior to February 1993. See *Agence France-Presse International News*, 16 August 1995 (as reported by *Military and Arms Transfer News*, Issue 95/12, 8 September 1995).
39. Sources include both Human Rights Watch and Joel Boutroue, an official with the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. See "Rwandan Conflict Predicted, As Arms Flow," *Arms Trade News*, July 1995, and "SA's Arms-dealing Underworld," *Weekly Mail & Guardian*, 2 June 1995.
40. In addition to more conventional weaponry, South Africa is seen to be well-positioned to become a prominent exporter of laser-guided, air-launched weapons and unmanned aerial vehicles, according to U.S. officials. See "News Briefs: South Africa Markets Bombs to Pakistan," *Arms Trade News*, July 1995.
41. See "New Problems for Military Merchants," *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 23 June 1995.
42. Jacklyn Cock, "Rocks, Snakes, and South Africa's Arms Industry," *Mayibuye*, 20, February 1993.
43. *Jane's Defence Weekly* (3 December 1994): 10.
44. *Military Technology* 28, 9 (September 1994): 91.
45. For more on Russian-South African collaboration, see Kobus de Villiers, "The South African Crossing of the Iron Curtain," *Military Technology*, 28, 11 (November 1994): 50.
46. "New Tensions Over Yemen Weapons Deal," *The Weekly Mail & Guardian*, 30 September–6 October 1994.
47. "Unita not Yemen Was the Target," *The Weekly Mail & Guardian*, 7–13 October 1994.

48. The Commission was headed by Judge Edwin Cameron, and its report also made recommendations on the need for revising South Africa's arms export policies and basing them on the criteria of "South Africa's commitment to democracy, human rights, and international peace and security." See "Revealed: South Africa's Arms Blacklist," *The Weekly Mail & Guardian*, 28 July 1995.
49. "Secrecy Hinders Armscor Inquiry," *The Weekly Mail & Guardian*, 18–24 November 1994.
50. See Nelson Mandela, "South Africa's Future Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 72, 5 (November/December 1993): 86–97.
51. *Jane's Defence Weekly* (3 December 1994), 10.
52. See "Revealed: South Africa's Arms Blacklist," *The Weekly Mail & Guardian*, 28 July 1995.
53. *Jane's Defence Weekly* (22 October 1994), 1.
54. In the wake of its troubles with the U.S. "denial order," the South African firm Kentron announced plans to collaborate with the UK company GEC to produce the ZT-6 anti-tank missile for the Rooivalk helicopter, thus becoming eligible for future British helicopter procurement contracts; see *Flight International*, August 3, 1995.