

FINNISH ARMS COMPANY SELLS MORTAR SYSTEM TO SAUDI ARABIA

In autumn 2010, the Finnish defence products company Patria signed a major arms deal regarding its Nemo 120 mm mortar system. Recently, the end-user country of this deal has been confirmed to be Saudi Arabia. With this deal, one of the least democratic countries in the world is becoming one of the biggest targets of Finnish arms exports in the 2000s. Neither Patria nor the Finnish government officials have commented on the issue.

In autumn 2010, Patria reported that the company had signed a letter of intent for delivering the Nemo 120 mm mortar system into a third-party country. The deal was conducted within the US Government's Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program framework. The final sales contract was signed in November, yet the final destination of the weaponry was not made public. According to estimates by SaferGlobe Finland, this arms deal is worth about 150 million euros. It equals up to Finland's two years arms exports in average and makes Saudi Arabia one of the top-three destinations of Finnish arms exports in the 2000s. The other two countries at the top are Poland and Sweden.

Based on Finnish and American documents, SaferGlobe Finland found out that the end-user country of the Nemo 120 mm mortar system is supposed to be Saudi Arabia. The Ministry of Defence of Finland, responsible for arms export licences, has recommended that the interested people should get into contact with Patria, who, in turn, does not want to discuss the issues of its customers in public. The Foreign Ministry of Finland, responsible for the Finnish arms exports policy, has refrained from commenting on the issue. However, none of these actors has denied the existence of the deal.

Nemo Deal Contradicts EU Common Position on Arms Exports

According to the EU Common Position on Arms Exports, a non-binding legal instrument to harmonise arms export policies, the exporting country shall take into account the end-user country's domestic situation concerning armed conflicts and inner tensions; the protection of regional peace, security and stability; and the observance of human rights. Finland has proclaimed that it will abide by the principles of the EU's common position. However, Finland is not the only EU member state trading in arms with Saudi Arabia.

According to the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index 2010, Saudi Arabia has been ranked the 8th least democratic country in the world. After Saudi Arabia, on the index there are countries such as Myanmar and North Korea. Saudi Arabia does not have a parliament, and its monarchs rule the country in an autocratic way. Furthermore, political parties are prohibited, and freedom of speech and peaceful assembly do not exist. Torture by officials is reported as being exercised regularly, and capital punishment is being used commonly, for example for deeds considered religiously offensive under the Saudi Arabian legislation. Women's rights are almost as absent as they were in the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan ten years ago. Women are, for example, not allowed to drive a car or to leave home without a male relative's permission and supervision.

The majority in Saudi Arabia consists of Sunni Muslims. However, there are Shi'a as well living in the country, mainly on the eastern coast. It is particularly in these areas that the security forces have shot down demonstrators during the last weeks. Saudi Arabia has blamed Shi'a-majority Iran for supporting



An American manufactured military vehicle of the Armed Forces of Saudi Arabia patrolling in the east of the country (Courtesy of SaferGlobe Finland)

the Shi'a in Bahrain, Yemen and Saudi Arabia. In November 2009, Saudi Arabia bombed Yemen's Shi'a rebels in the country's northern parts with fighter plane and artillery attacks. In spring 2010, the Saudi Arabian Armed Forces participated in suppressing the demonstrations of the Shi'a in Bahrain, who demanded democracy and reforms. It is hard to see how Finland may approve of the Nemo mortar system export to Saudi Arabia without violating the official Finnish foreign policy, which advocates for women's rights, democracy and human rights, and peace-building.

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS ON ARMS EXPORTS IN FINLAND

SaferGlobe's interest in this particular arms deal was awakened by the fact that Patria had not applied for an export license despite of the deal having already been closed. According to the Ministry of Defence of Finland, an export license had not been applied for until the end of April 2011. Jarmo Pykälä of SaferGlobe Finland does not believe, however, that Patria would have closed a deal of such importance without having a prior advice, issued by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, on the foreign and security policy aspects in relation to the arms deal. The prior advice is classified. Patria's consultative committee included five members of the Finnish Parliament and one Armed Forces' Defence Commands' general in 2010.

Pykälä emphasises the fact that to ensure democracy and transparency in arms exports, the policy on individual deals should be decided upon before closing them. Patria, however, has taken a conscious risk in not having applied for an export license before signing the deal. In public, the company has called the export license a mere formality, which seems to be an odd stance, since arms deals are always a part of the country's foreign policy as well. In Finland, the course of foreign policy is decided upon by the Parliament, the government, and the President. Now it looks as if the company is trying to get approval for the deal from the decision-makers, without giving them the possibility of discussing the matter. This makes it difficult for the decision-makers to influence the deal without awkwardness.

FINNISH SNIPER RIFLES AND THE DEMONSTRATORS IN BAHRAIN

Great Britain has voiced its suspicion that the Bahrainian security forces might have used British sniper rifles while shooting at demonstrators demanding democracy and reforms. Finland as well has issued a license to export sniper rifles, more than 200, to Bahrain during the recent years.

Finland has also issued licenses for exporting defence materials to other unrest- and revolution-affected countries in northern Africa and the Middle East. This material includes gas masks, artillery, a production line for a gunpowder plant, and telescope masts for weapons and communication systems. Halfway through March, Finland had not yet cancelled any export licenses for defence material unlike some other EU member states had.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- Patria is owned by the Finnish State (73 %) and the the pan-European aerospace and defence conglomerate EADS (27 %).
- Nemo is a 120 mm mortar turret system with great fire-power and the capability to fire both indirect and direct fire. Usually, it is meant to be installed on wheeled armored vehicles. It can, however, be installed on other chassis, such as patrol boats, as well.
- Formerly, Nemo systems were sold, among others, to the United Arab Emirates.
- In 2006, the Armed Forces of Saudi Arabia requested the US to sell 724 armored vehicles of the LAV II type. The US Army's Tank-automotive and Armaments Command (TACOM) started to prepare the deal as a part of the US government's Foreign Military Sales programme. The tender was won by General Dynamics Land Systems Canada (GDLS-C; a daughter company of General Dynamics) in November 2009. According to an announcement, the deal's worth was going to be about 2.2 billion dollars. The shipments were supposed to start in April 2011.
- Patria, as a part of this contract, is to deliver 36 Patria Nemo 120 mm mortar systems, together with the Belgian company Mecar SA.