

CANADA SEES ARMS INDUSTRY AS JUST ANOTHER ENTREPRENEURIAL VENTURE

By James Young

As the the Iran-Contra affair made daily headlines in the United States in November 1986, Canadians were shocked by reports that Canadian-built helicopter parts had been shipped to Iran, with Ottawa's approval. Experts said the engine components could be used by military helicopters in the war against Iraq, a conflict which had already left 500,000 dead.

Canadians' shock was not really justified. There was indeed scandal and embarrassment on Parliament Hill, since the shipments flouted a policy to refuse direct arms sales to war zones. But Canadian aircraft engines were already being used by both Iran and Iraq, after being "transformed" into military equipment in factories in Switzerland and Brazil.

The Iranian parts are not the exception to the rule.

The Canadian arms industry has been involved in almost all the world's current trouble spots including the U.S. bombing of Libya in the spring of 1986, the invasion of Grenada in 1983, and the on-going civil war in El Salvador. In addition, Canadian arms manufacturers play a large part in the construction of American nuclear missiles.

This information, accompanied by a wealth of documentation, is provided by Ernie Regehr, in his new book, *Arms Canada: The Deadly Business of Military Exports*.

"Canadians are reluctant to include the role of weapons merchant in their self-definition," says Regehr, research director for Project Ploughshares at the University of Waterloo.

But Canada's arms export industry is now worth \$2 billion annually. Eighty-five per cent of these exports go to the U.S. but there are further direct shipments to at least 45 countries, including such brutal human rights violators as Chile, Guatemala, Pakistan and South Korea.

"Canada's production of military commodities for

export has tripled within the past six years," says Regehr.

With 20 million casualties in the 100 wars in the third world since 1945, and Canada producing about one per cent of the weapons and components exported there, Regehr infers that our country has been responsible for 200,000 deaths abroad. The estimate may not be verifiable, but it makes a point - Canadians are unwitting participants in international violence.

Researching *Arms Canada* was not easy, says Regehr, thanks to government secrecy and the so-called Access to Information Act.

In November 1985, after requesting information on the permits which accompany military exports, Regehr received a sample from External Affairs, with the explanation that "you will note that considerable information will probably be exempted."

Regehr calls that note "a remarkable example of understatement". The sample permit was essentially a blank piece of paper.

The accompanying letter went on to say that the rest of the documents would cost \$3000, the price of censoring them.

But Regehr feels confident his own research is accurate.

"I've been told that External Affairs had intended to really tear strips off it (the book) if they found errors," he says. "In fact, they haven't found those errors, and so they've been very, very silent."

Overall, Regehr says the Mulroney government has continued the disturbing long-term trend of supporting the arms industry as a commercial venture - instead of one designed to meet legitimate Canadian defence needs. He points to a structural weakness within External Affairs, as the department includes both programs to restrain military exports and to promote them.

The Defence Programs Bureau, for example, publishes a glossy catalog of military products, offering foreign buyers wares ranging from plastic watercans to jet aircraft and clothing for protection from nuclear, chemical or biological warfare.

The bureau also arranges trade fairs - which exclude the public - for promoting military products.

Another federal project, the Defence Industries Productivity Program, has given out hundreds of millions of dollars

in subsidies since its creation in 1959.

"The really high flying arms dealers are not sheiks and soldiers of fortune, but middle level bureaucrats in drab middle level government offices," says Regehr.

But Regehr also criticizes External Affairs minister, Joe Clark, who went to Saudi Arabia to hawk a fleet of light armored vehicles to the royal family in 1986. By doing so, Clark gave high profile support to sales of active combat equipment in a militarily sensitive area, to a government which supplies arms to Iraq and favours the Palestine Liberation Organization.

In the rest of *Arms Canada*, Regehr examines the economic delusions behind the arms industry as a job creator, and points to how relying on American markets can undermine Canadian independence in foreign policy.

In the final chapter, Regehr proposes ten alternative export policies the federal government could adopt. The most essential is to realize "all Canadian military production should grow out of Canadian-defined military needs" instead of viewing the arms industry as a commercial enterprise. Countering entrepreneurial rhetoric, Regehr argues that no one has a "right" to manufacture and market weapons.

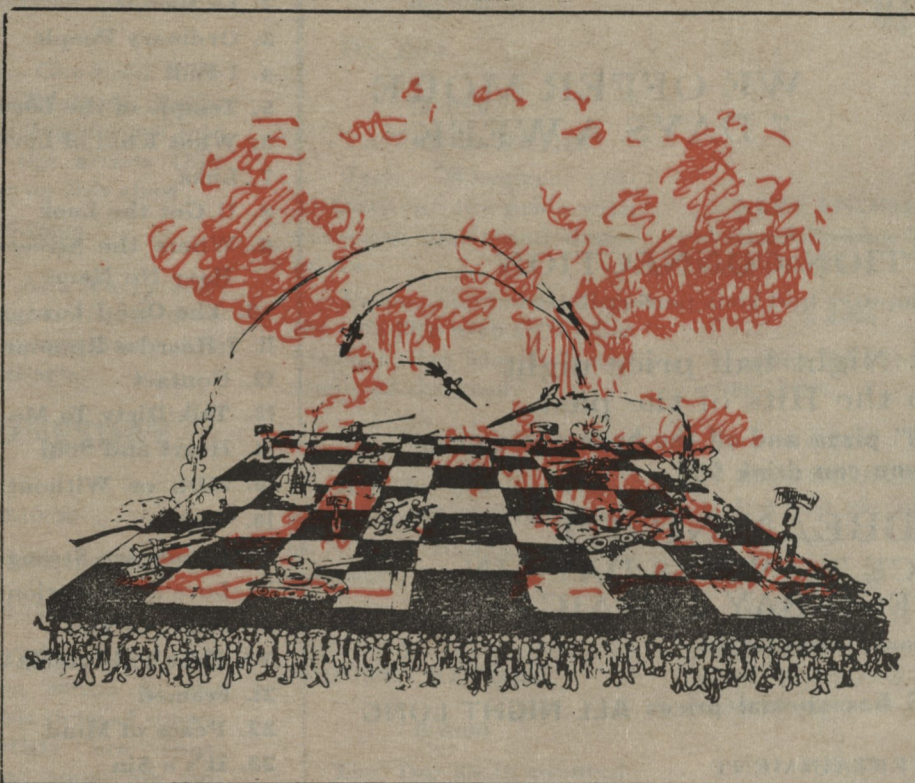
The ultimate entrepreneurial irony was perhaps when British troops in the Falklands were attacked by British-made weapons.

Moreover, arms exports should be undertaken only on a government-to-government basis, consistent with Canadian foreign policy objectives promoting international stability.

Canada also needs more effective control over the final destination of military goods and must refuse them to human rights violators. And there should be a full annual public disclosure and review of exports.

"Canadians are not without choices," says Regehr. "On the one hand, this country has the technical and financial resources to become a strong competitor in the race to make the weapons of war widely available in an unrestrained global arms bazaar."

"On the other hand, it has the political and moral resources to resist dealing in weapons for the economic fun of it."



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