



FIGHTING GLOBAL POVERTY

# Arming Repression

The new British imperialism in the Persian Gulf





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# Preface

**British governments have long regarded the Gulf states as 'vital partners' in securing the UK's energy security and military interests. Yet the strategic importance of the Persian Gulf is taking on a new significance, with the UK government in the process of building a permanent presence in the region and establishing a dedicated British Defence Staff to oversee it. Coordinating this new level of strategic engagement is the 'Gulf Strategy Unit', a group which includes a range of public intelligence and security agencies, but which operates in secret.**

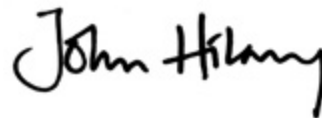
Central to the UK government's new strategy is the establishment of a network of facilities and partnerships designed to secure a permanent British military presence in the Gulf. New and enlarged bases in countries such as Dubai, Oman and Bahrain will enable the UK to present a more assertive position in the region, and to safeguard the all-important outward flow of gas and oil. At the same time, British arms companies continue to sell vast amounts of weaponry to support the Gulf states' own military expansion. Since 2010, the UK government has approved over 6,000 individual export licences to arms companies serving the region, with a combined value of £16 billion.

This War on Want report documents the findings of an investigation which has examined British complicity in state violence in the Gulf, and which uncovers a disturbing truth at the heart of Britain's foreign policy. There exists today an opaque and loosely

connected network of British state and corporate actors operating in the Gulf region, focused on ensuring 'stabilisation' and 'internal security' through the export of materiel and training which is used for the purposes of internal repression.

From the training of sniper units to the sale of CS gas, and from the delivery of covert surveillance technologies to the provision of public order training, British officials and corporations, working closely together, are playing a key role in arming repression throughout the Gulf. In this renewed military and economic strategy, guaranteeing the UK's continuing access to natural resources takes precedence over any publicly stated commitment to democracy and human rights.

It is up to the British people to hold the UK government and UK corporations accountable for their ongoing complicity in human rights abuses around the world. All readers of this report are encouraged to take action to end UK complicity in the repression faced by social movements in the Gulf region. Please ask your MP to write to the Prime Minister with the demands listed at the end of this report. Together we can shine a light on this latest chapter in the long history of British imperialism.



**John Hilary**  
**Executive Director**

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# 1 Neo-imperialism in the Gulf

03

**As the Chilcot Inquiry made clear when it reported in July 2016, UK involvement in the invasion and occupation of Iraq was disastrous in every way. With hundreds of thousands of ordinary Iraqis dead, political and economic instability entrenched, and Islamic State in control of large swathes of the country, the failures of the Blair administration have been laid out in impressive detail for all to see.**

What the Inquiry failed to do, however, was place the Iraq War and occupation within the context of the broader neo-imperial project which has characterised UK strategy towards the region since the end of formal Empire in the aftermath of the Second World War. This project, which has found a new urgency among the British foreign policy and defence establishment in recent years, has seen the UK play a highly interventionist role in the region, both in support of the USA and independently.

The UK has, for decades, focused on combating regional forces which prove resistant to British and American interests. British intelligence was central to the 1953 overthrow of the democratically elected Iranian Prime Minister, Mohammed Mossadegh, after he began nationalising the Iranian oil industry. The Iranian Revolution in 1979 challenged US and UK dominance in the region, as did the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam in 1990. Today, a bewildering array of armed Islamist groups operate across the region, opposed to the presence of Western forces.

Containing or destroying this opposition has been a core focus of UK strategy, as has guaranteeing the survival of regimes considered friendly to British interests. This neo-imperial strategy has sought to secure a range of interests, circulating around access to the region's crucial markets, bases and resources. Most obviously, securing access to, and control over, the huge oil deposits in the region is considered to be of vital importance.



## British forces in Basra, Iraq





British oil companies are operating throughout the region, and the UK economy is hugely reliant on oil imports: around 40% of current consumption is imported, a figure due to rise to around 75% by 2030.<sup>1</sup> In this light, the free flow of oil from the Persian Gulf is considered to be a priority of UK strategy, given that significant disruption would pose immediate economic disaster.

The UK's interest in the Gulf is about more than oil. Securing access to other markets, including defence and construction, also drives UK strategy towards the Gulf, as does, increasingly, ensuring that the UK is preferred as a site for Gulf investment.<sup>2</sup> Having a secured military presence in the region also enables the UK to project its power beyond into Africa, the Indian Ocean and Asia. Indeed, imperial strategy throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries saw the main value in the Gulf protectorates as providing a springboard to defend the Suez Canal, as well as lines of shipping, communication and defence through to imperial territory in India and South-East Asia.

This logic remains, with the UK government's 2015 National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) stating that the UK needs to be positioned so as to ensure 'the sea lanes stay open and the arteries of global commerce remain free flowing'.<sup>3</sup> In this, the UK plays a supporting role to US hegemony in the Gulf, and one which is likely to become more active as America 'pivots' towards Asia.<sup>4</sup>

## Ensuring 'stability'

In the years since the start of the so-called 'Arab Spring' in 2010, attempts by civil society groups across the Gulf region to challenge longstanding authoritarian rule have been met with brutal force by the state.

Pro-democracy protests have been targeted with indiscriminating force, human rights groups have been subjected to widespread state surveillance, and the torture and extrajudicial execution of dissidents has become even more prevalent than before.<sup>5</sup> Ruling regimes across the Gulf region have used the excuse of 'internal security' and the threat from 'extremism' and 'terrorism' to justify their violent crackdown on a wide range of political movements.

The UK government, and British arms and security companies, are deeply implicated in the continuing state violence across the Gulf, despite an official narrative which stresses support for democracy and human rights. This involvement is no mistake: support for the region's governments in their fight against 'internal instability' has been a central plank of British foreign policy in the Gulf for decades. During the years of formal British empire in the Gulf (up until 1971), and during the subsequent postcolonial phase, the UK has played a key role in stabilising governments considered friendly to British interests. This continues today, and has accelerated in recent years as Whitehall has identified 'stabilisation' as central to its Gulf strategy in the near future.

British and American dominance in the Gulf is ensured through both a direct military presence across the region, and through bolstering the capacity of client states to ensure domestic stability. British strategy has centred on arming and training police and security forces across the region in order to maintain internal security. This strategy is not just government-led: there is an increasing involvement of private security companies and defence contractors working hand-in-glove with the British foreign policy and defence establishment as the privatisation of war continues to pick up pace.<sup>6</sup>

# 2 New strategic presence

05

Today, we are witnessing a rapid upswing in British military and strategic commitment to the Persian Gulf, intended primarily to secure the uninterrupted flow of oil from the region, as well as access to markets and resources. Rather than the large-scale but temporary influx of troops between 2002 and 2009, this new strategy foresees a permanent but 'shadow' presence policing shipping lanes, providing security assistance, and enabling a larger force to be introduced in the future if circumstances warrant.

## Vital partners

The UK sees the Gulf States as 'vital partners', not least in the realm of energy security. As such, the government is in the process of building 'a permanent and more substantial UK

military presence' in the region, and establishing a new British Defence Staff dedicated to the Gulf.<sup>7</sup> Coordinating this new level of strategic engagement is the 'Gulf Strategy Unit': a highly secretive group which includes a range of intelligence and security agencies.<sup>8</sup> Despite its high-level position within the British government, very little public information exists regarding the Unit. Freedom of Information (FOI) requests for simple information such as the number of times the Unit has met, or the work that it is involved in, have been rejected.<sup>9</sup>

Central to this commitment is the establishment of a new network of regional facilities and partnerships, designed explicitly to establish a permanent British military presence throughout the region. In October 2012, the Government agreed the UK-Bahrain Defence Cooperation Accord, which according to the Foreign Secretary 'provides



**Former Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond and Bahraini Foreign Minister Sheik Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa help lay a cornerstone for a new British military base, Manama, Bahrain**





a framework for current and future defence activity with Bahrain, including training and capacity building, partly in order to enhance the stability of the whole region.<sup>10</sup>

This was closely followed by 'a defence industrial partnership' with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), signed following a visit by Prime Minister David Cameron, for the 'security of the UAE and the wider Gulf region'.<sup>11</sup> In 2016, visits to the region by Defence Secretary Michael Fallon landed similar agreements with Oman and Qatar.<sup>12</sup>

## New bases

As well as training and joint exercises, these new partnerships are designed to facilitate base construction and expansion. For instance, according to David Cameron, 'what you are seeing specifically with the United Arab Emirates is not just a plan to sell Typhoon aircraft, but a big, significant defence co-operation, which could lead to more British troops stationed in their country'.<sup>13</sup> These would likely be positioned at the al-Minhad air base in Dubai, which already holds a squadron of RAF Typhoons and was a logistical hub for the war in Afghanistan.<sup>14</sup> One defence source has been quoted as saying that 'you could see an infantry battalion based in al-Minhad, being able to train alongside the Emirates' as one of several new bases in the region.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps the boldest move so far has been the 'landmark' agreement between the UK and Bahrain in December 2014, when it was announced that the UK would build a permanent naval base in the country. Construction for HMS Juffair – named after a colonial base in the country from the 1930s – began in November 2015, with costs of £15 million being met largely by the Bahraini government.<sup>16</sup> According to the Foreign Secretary, Philip Hammond, this base constituted a 'watershed moment', and was

designed to guarantee 'Britain's sustained presence east of Suez' and 'enable Britain to work with our allies to reinforce stability in the Gulf and beyond'.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, Oman is seen as a crucial future location for military facilities to which the UK will have access.

Corporate interests play a central role in this new strategic presence. In March 2016, Defence Secretary Michael Fallon announced a multi-million pound joint venture between British defence company Babcock International and the Oman Drydock Company. As well as providing work for the UK company, this will deliver a newly expanded port at Duqm, providing 'a strategic port for the Middle East on the Indian Ocean, benefiting the Royal Navy and others.' This 'permanent presence' by the British will, according to the Ministry of Defence (MoD), 'enable the UK to shape the development of the naval facility to support future carrier capability and wider British maritime needs in the area'.<sup>18</sup>

This new network of facilities will enable the UK to present a much more assertive position in the region. The UK's Chief of Defence Staff, General Sir David Richards, has spoken about new capabilities for British forces aiming to 'project power with global effect and influence', with a primary target for this projection clear: 'Nowhere is more important to us', said Richards in a speech to the Royal United Services Institute, 'than our friends in the Middle East and Gulf'.<sup>19</sup>

This plan is coming to fruition. For example, from April 2016, the UK has led the Combined Task Force (CTF 150), whose operational area covers the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Indian Ocean and Gulf of Oman. According to Fallon, this role is predicated on 'the permanent presence of the Royal Navy in the Middle East', which 'helps to keep maritime trade flowing and safeguards the UK economy by countering piracy and policing the flow of oil and gas into our ports'.<sup>20</sup>



# 3 Training and assistance

Despite a new direct military presence building up in the Gulf, a central plank of UK strategy remains one of building the local capacity to ensure stability and internal security. Gulf militaries remain the primary market for UK arms, with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, respectively, the first and second largest global recipients of British defence exports. More than 6,000 individual licences have been granted to companies exporting to the Gulf since 2010, with a combined value of over £16 billion (representing 30% of the total licences approved). In addition, hundreds of open licences to the region have been approved, providing UK arms companies with the ability to make multiple sales without further scrutiny.<sup>21</sup>

## Military training

As well as supplying arms and other security materiel, the UK continues to play a key role in providing police and military training to

regimes in the Persian Gulf. Such training is formally subject to the umbrella 'Overseas Security and Justice Assistance (OSJA) Human Rights Guidance', designed to 'ensure that our security and justice work reflects our commitments to strengthen and uphold the record of the United Kingdom as a defender and promoter of human rights and democracy.'<sup>23</sup>

However, concerns regarding human rights appear to have had minimal impact on the training and assistance programmes in the Gulf. For example, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia are among 16 states designated by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) as having significant human rights concerns, and yet both receive military training from the MoD.<sup>24</sup>

Much of this training takes place in the United Kingdom. There is a close relationship between the region's armed forces and the RAF College at Cranwell, which trains officers from the Gulf each year.<sup>25</sup> Likewise,



UK export figures to Gulf Cooperation Council states, 2010-16<sup>22</sup>

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total value
<b>Military</b>	£376m	£1.9bn	£608m	£1.8bn	£243m	£3.3bn	£598m	£9.2bn
<b>Dual use</b>	£340m	£1.6bn	£1.2bn	£2.5bn	£846m	£233m	£34m	£6.8bn
<b>Total value</b>	£1.1bn	£3.5bn	£1.8bn	£4.3bn	£1.1bn	£3.5bn	£632m	£16bn
<b>Open licences</b>	113	159	118	115	110	152	27	784

officers from all Gulf states train at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, which itself has been financed heavily through regular large donations from the King of Bahrain.<sup>26</sup> The Kingdom itself sent over 100 officers for training at Sandhurst and other military colleges between 2006 and 2011,<sup>27</sup> and 43 cadets to Sandhurst since the uprisings in 2011, for which the Academy received an income of £1,514,000.<sup>28</sup>

Other forms of training take place in the region itself. In Oman, for example, the UK is now 'working more closely than ever across military, counter-terrorism and intelligence fields to tackle shared threats to stability.' At least 45 short-term training teams are being deployed to Oman during 2016, and the UK is also looking at constructing a permanent training facility in the country.<sup>29</sup>

Likewise, the College of Policing, the professional body for police in England and Wales, is heavily involved in training the region's security forces.<sup>30</sup> Responses to FOI requests document that over 300 college staff and 'associates' engaged to deliver training have been deployed to UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain since 2012. Meanwhile, over 50 officers from the region have visited the UK for training purposes.<sup>31</sup> Despite the fact that such training is meant to be formally assessed for the impact on human rights, via the Department for International Development's Stabilisation Unit and the FCO's Overseas Security and Justice Assistance guidance,<sup>32</sup> new figures show that fewer than 25 assessments have been made by the International Police Assistance Board (IPAB), which granted its approval in all but one of these.<sup>33</sup>

## Private training

Training is often delivered by private military and security companies or defence

contractors working in the region. For example, much of the UK training of Saudi forces is delivered through BAE Systems, as the Prime Contractor in the MoD Saudi Armed Forces Project (MODSAP) contracts. The company has been in Saudi Arabia since 1973, and currently employs nearly 4,700 people across at least seven sites.<sup>34</sup> Key clients of these projects include the three main branches of the military (Royal Saudi Air Force, Royal Saudi Navy, Royal Saudi Land Forces), but also the Ministry of Interior and the National Guard.<sup>35</sup> Total personnel employed by MODSAP since 2010 average at around 200, with over half of these classed as 'civilian' and the majority of the rest drawn from the RAF.<sup>36</sup> Training is a key aspect of these projects, and in January 2015 the company launched BAE Systems Saudi Development and Training (SDT) as a separate asset, to coordinate and grow this arm of the business.<sup>37</sup>

Other UK defence contractors are active in the region, providing security alongside local forces and engaged in training and assistance programmes aligned to broader UK objectives. This is perhaps unsurprising, given the revolving door between the UK military and private defence and security sectors. For example, Lt Gen Sir Graeme Lamb, former director of Special Forces and commander of Field Army, is a Non-Executive Director of Aegis Defence, which has an office in Bahrain.<sup>38</sup> Lamb is also a special advisor to G3 (Good Governance Group), a PR company which received £1.5 million from Bahrain to coordinate a 'media campaign to support the Kingdom of Bahrain's stance before the international community.' Lamb has taken this to heart, questioning a focus on Bahrain as 'a harsh spotlight' for a 'a country that enjoys the 10th freest economy in the world and was the first Arab country to institute unemployment benefit' in a Guardian comment piece in 2012.<sup>39</sup>



Likewise, G4S runs operations throughout the Gulf region. In Saudi Arabia, G4S has a joint venture, Almajal G4S. The company provides 'manned security services' and in November 2012, The Guardian reported that 'the company's support for the regime during popular protests earned local staff a two-month bonus.'<sup>40</sup>

Olive Group provides offshore security in the Gulf of Aden and the Horn of Africa from an operational headquarters in the United Arab Emirates. This involves deploying 'specialist maritime teams comprised of a number of highly skilled individuals with diverse field expertise acquired from military and maritime service throughout the

region'.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, Control Risks provides 'strategic consultancy, expert analysis and in-depth investigations, handling sensitive political issues and providing practical on-the-ground protection and support.' A previous investigation by War on War revealed that many of the key management positions within the organisation are held by ex-members of UK and US military and intelligence services.<sup>42</sup> Control Risks has offices in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Saudi Arabia.

### Quashing unrest

Many of the training and assistance programmes provided by UK state and corporate actors are directly focused on



## The King of Bahrain attends the Sovereign's Parade at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst



© Justin Goff UK Press via Getty Images



internal security. For example, Bahrain's police force has hired former Metropolitan Police assistant commissioner John Yates. Yates has focused on building local capacity to manage public disorder, including through the use of kettling and other 'containments' tactics. According to Yates, the protests in 2011 which led to the deaths of protesters were simply 'vandalism, rioting on the streets, acts of wanton damage that are destroying the economy', and the Bahraini authorities were facing 'extraordinary provocation' during the pro-democracy protests.<sup>43</sup>

Training provided by the College of Policing dovetails nicely with Yates's strategy, with hundreds of staff deployed to the region to build capacity in, among other areas, crowd

control and surveillance. Details released to us from the College show that the regimes receive training in dealing with public disorder, as well as a range of covert investigation techniques, open source intelligence gathering and managing 'communications data' investigations.<sup>44</sup>

In March 2016 it was revealed that elite Royal Navy commandos had travelled to Bahrain to provide week-long training courses in the use of sniper rifles, despite the fact that snipers were used to put down pro-democracy protests in 2011. Working from a naval frigate docked at HMS Juffair, the specialist commandos trained 'multiple groups' of Bahraini snipers, and have already been asked to run a follow-up course for further units.<sup>45</sup>



**John Timoney, former U.S. Miami Police Chief and John Yates, former assistant commissioner of Britain's Metropolitan Police, and Lt Hamad al-Meer, Ministry of Interior, Manama, Bahrain**





# 4 Repressive technologies

**In terms of monetary value, the most significant UK arms deals to the Gulf in recent years have been for 'big ticket items'. More than £6 billion worth of licences since 2010 have included the sale of military aircraft and warships, with the largest a series of multi-billion pound sales of combat aircraft to Saudi Arabia.<sup>46</sup> However, equally important for UK strategy has been the systematic export of a series of 'repressive technologies', designed to assist regimes with ensuring internal security.<sup>47</sup>**

Most important amongst these have been technologies designed for riot control. Tear gas has been used systematically by the Gulf authorities to suppress dissent, to an extent rarely witnessed elsewhere. An investigation by Physicians for Human Rights found that the extensive and persistent use of tear gas in Bahrain was 'unprecedented in the 100-year history of tear gas use against civilians throughout the world.'<sup>48</sup> Authorities used it extensively to disperse protests, firing canisters at very close range to cause maximum damage. Bahrain Watch has recorded 'over 39 deaths from excessive use of teargas and part of these deaths are direct body shots on the head and neck.'<sup>49</sup> State forces also used it to attack Shi'a civilians inside their homes and cars, throwing canisters through the windows, doors and air conditioning vents of family homes.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, regimes have used snipers, birdshot and a range of other small arms ammunition to target organisers of protests, and the protests themselves.<sup>51</sup> Surveillance of dissident groups is widespread, with opposition politicians, human rights workers and trade unionists all subjected to eavesdropping and monitoring. For example, Freedom House has concluded that 'surveillance is rampant in Saudi Arabia; anyone who uses communication technology

is subject to government monitoring, which is officially justified under the pretence of protecting national security and maintaining social order.'<sup>52</sup>

The UK government plays a key role in supporting and promoting British companies that wish to meet the public order and surveillance needs of the Gulf regimes. This task is coordinated by the Defence and Security Organisation (DSO), which has identified Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE as 'priority markets' for the export of UK arms.<sup>53</sup>

DSO works closely with the ADS Group – an industry lobbyist for the UK's defence and security sectors – to organise and fund arms trade fairs and security exhibitions across the region. In 2016, this includes Milipol in Doha, Qatar and INTERSEC in Dubai, UAE.<sup>54</sup> Likewise, in October 2015, the Emirates Security Exhibition and Conference in Dubai (EmSEC) – 'a premier platform to showcase technologies and solutions for law enforcement and security markets'<sup>55</sup> – saw DSO host a reception for all participating UK firms and consultants.<sup>56</sup> According to information released to Reprieve under FOI, the UK Government spent £12,000 on encouraging British companies to attend this event.<sup>57</sup>

While internal security is not the only aspect of these fairs, it is certainly central. EmSEC was sponsored by the Dubai police force, which has repeatedly been accused of torture.<sup>58</sup> The sponsors distributed a 'requirements list' to participants beforehand, listing 'audio recording', 'communication monitoring', 'covert security and surveillance', 'public order equipment - electronic' and 'surveillance' as the products and services required by the Dubai Police Force.<sup>59</sup> Likewise, a recent IDEX exhibition – 'the only international defence exhibition and conference in the Middle East and North



©Fadi Al-Assaad/REUTERS

Africa region demonstrating the latest defence technology across land, sea and air’ – saw nearly 100 companies attend with products for ‘internal security and 80 UK companies from the UK defence and security industry.<sup>60</sup>

It is not possible to delink the export of sniper rifles and tear gas, and the training of security forces by the UK, from the violent crackdown on pro-democracy protests across the region.<sup>61</sup> The UK Armed Forces Minister has admitted that ‘it is possible that some members of the Saudi Arabian National Guard who were deployed in Bahrain may have undertaken some training provided by the UK military mission.’<sup>62</sup> There is evidence that birdshot sold by three UK companies –

Gamebore, Eley Hawk Ltd and Hull Cartridge – was used to suppress Bahraini protesters, with cartridges bearing company logos found at protest sites.<sup>63</sup>

**The UK Government plays a key role in supporting and promoting British companies who wish to meet the public order and surveillance needs of the Gulf regimes.**



Our research identifies that nearly 500 British companies applied for export licences to the Gulf between 2011 and 2015. This included licences for the sale of paramilitary police goods (coded PL5001 in the Export Control List). More than 120 licences, valued in total at £45.6 million, were approved by the UK, which included the sale of items specifically designed for aggressive crowd control, such as tear gas agents and ammunition, CS grenades, water cannon and acoustic devices designed to cause severe discomfort and thereby disperse crowds.<sup>64</sup> In addition, 20 open licences were approved for the transfer of these goods on an ongoing basis (such as one to Oman containing ‘crowd control ammunition, CS hand grenades and tear gas agents’).

## Riot control

Although the way in which arms export data are released by the UK Government often makes it difficult to identify the value of the export of specific technologies, our investigation has revealed the value of riot control goods in more than 40 of the largest individual licences to the region. Some of the largest sales include:

- £16.5 million worth of goods to Oman for ‘tear gas/irritant ammunition’ in August 2015;
- £6.1 million to UAE for ‘crowd control ammunition and tear gas/irritant ammunition’ in March 2014;
- £1.7 million to Saudi Arabia for ‘crowd control ammunition, tear gas/irritant ammunition and training crowd control ammunition’ in December 2012;
- £1.7 million to Oman for ‘acoustic devices for riot control’ in two licences dated March and June 2012.

There is a wide range of UK companies involved in the sale of riot control technologies and ‘public order’ training, often working alongside British government security officials. For example, in both 2013 and 2015 **BAE Systems Global Combat Systems Ltd** requested licences to sell electrified riot control vehicles to Saudi Arabia. This came despite the fact that BAE-manufactured trucks had been used by the Saudi security forces to protect state key installations and infrastructure. This allowed the Bahraini forces to concentrate on dealing with the February 2011 protests. British manufactured BAE Tactica armoured vehicles were also used to transport Saudi troops, and an export licence for Tactica components was issued in June 2011, while Saudi forces remained in Bahrain.<sup>65</sup>

Likewise, **Civil Defence Supply** is a Lincolnshire-based company casting itself as ‘pioneers in the development of less lethal technologies’, and providing a range of public order training and products.<sup>66</sup> The company’s website describes the provision of public order training to the Saudi Arabian National Guard as part of the British Military Mission, and makes clear that ‘experienced senior instructors from the British military, police and special forces compliment [sic] the company, enabling Civil Defence Supply to deliver cost-effective and achievable solutions.’<sup>67</sup> Since 2011, the company has applied for 11 export licences to supply anti-riot equipment to UAE.

**Drum Cussac** is a Bournemouth-based ‘travel risk management specialist’ with a team of practitioners bringing ‘hands-on experience from the military, intelligence services and police’.<sup>68</sup> The company has exported technologies marketed as ‘Long Range Acoustic Devices (LRADs)’ used for the defence of large yachts,<sup>69</sup> but described





## Spent tear gas canisters, stun grenades and rubber bullets piled up in Pearl Square, a day after Bahraini police clashed with demonstrators trying to occupy Manama's banking centre

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© James Duggan / AFP/Getty



in the UK's Export Control List as 'acoustic devices for riot control'. In 2012, the company applied for two export licences to sell acoustic devices to Oman, with a third in 2013. Licensing data show that three different licences were granted in 2012 to sell these to Oman for riot control (total value £1,925,000), and on 25 June 2014 a fourth licence was approved for the sale of £750,000 of acoustic devices for riot control to Oman.

**Chemring Group**, headquartered in Hampshire, provides aerospace, defence and security markets with a range of specialist technology services and products.<sup>70</sup> The company made significant profits during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan,<sup>71</sup> but as the

defence budgets of NATO countries have been cut, the Middle East has been identified as a 'target growth market'.<sup>72</sup> In 2015, the company won a record contract worth in excess of £100 million to supply 40mm grenades to an unnamed country in the Middle East.<sup>73</sup> Between 2011 and 2015, Chemring requested 78 export licences to sell weapons, ammunition and equipment to Gulf states.

The sale of tear gas, through its operating company **Chemring Defence**, has been particularly controversial in recent years. In December 2011, it was revealed that Chemring manufactured tear gas was being used to suppress pro-democracy protesters in Egypt's Tahrir Square.<sup>74</sup> In September 2014, peaceful



protesters in Hong Kong were also subjected to Chemring manufactured tear gas.<sup>75</sup> The British government had granted six export licences for the crowd control weapon since 2010, in sales worth £180,000. In 2012, Chemring applied for three export licences to sell ammunition and equipment that includes smoke canisters to Saudi Arabia. Data show that in 2012 one licence was granted for the sale of CS hand grenades to Saudi Arabia, worth £469,215.

In 2012 it was reported that security forces in Kuwait used plastic bullets, smoke bombs, tear gas and shot guns to put down a demonstration by stateless protesters.<sup>76</sup> Some of the discharged plastic bullets were manufactured by the UK-based company **Haley and Weller**. In 2001 Haley and Weller became part of PW Defence, a group now part of Chemring.<sup>77</sup>

**Deenside** is a Northampton-based manufacturer, providing 'civil and military protective equipment used by police, prisons and military throughout the world'.<sup>78</sup> Its products include riot gear, batons and public order tactical vehicles armed with water cannons. The company applied for two licences to Bahrain in 2011 and 2012.

## Sniper rifles

In addition to the sale of riot control technologies, our investigation has uncovered hundreds of licences for assault rifles, sniper rifles and other guns some of which have been used to suppress protests and assassinate government critics. No fewer than 99 separate licences to the region were approved between 2010 and 2015, which included the export of sniper rifles and their components.<sup>79</sup> Of the 13 export licences destined for Bahrain, only one was revoked after the events of February 2011. In all, our analysis shows hundreds of units were sold by UK companies across the region, ensuring that the sniper training by Royal Commandos had enough well equipped clients.

More than 20 of these licences were applied for by **Accuracy International Limited**, a Portsmouth-based company which prides itself as 'one of the foremost suppliers of high-accuracy, robust and reliable sniper rifles in the world, with customers in more than 60 countries that include many of the most prestigious and influential military and law enforcement agencies'.<sup>80</sup>

**Primetake Ltd**, based in the West Midlands, is a 'manufacturer of specialist ammunition and public order solutions.' The company makes ammunition for Omega sniper rifles, cartridges designed to breach doors and walls,<sup>81</sup> and irritant ammunition which 'can be fired at ranges of up to 35m through doors and windows (including most types of glass) and produces an immediate large cloud of fast-acting CS dust...'<sup>82</sup> The company also specialises in 'products designed to be used in riot control operations or where less than lethal force is necessary,' including baton rounds, crowd control ammunition, CS gas and a range of training courses.<sup>83</sup>

Between 2011 and 2015, Primetake requested 30 export licences to sell its equipment to the Gulf, including 2012 licence applications for the export of ammunition to Saudi Arabia and UAE. Data show that two export licences were approved for the sale of crowd control ammunition to Saudi Arabia, worth £2.15 million in total, with a third on 22 March 2012 for the sale of £23,153 worth of tear gas/irritant ammunition to UAE. Reports have suggested that Primetake ammunition was used by Saudi forces in the assassination of a Shi'a dissident, Abdul-Rahim al-Faraj.<sup>84</sup>

## Surveillance

**Gamma Group** is a UK company which provides 'advanced technical surveillance, monitoring solutions and advanced government training'.<sup>85</sup> The company will be

exhibiting at Milipol arms fair in Qatar in October-November 2016.<sup>86</sup> Gamma Group developed a system called FinFisher IT Intrusion, which allows users to spy on Skype conversations, monitor emails and access 'live' surveillance through the microphone and webcam.<sup>87</sup>

There is evidence that the surveillance software distributed by Gamma Group has been used to spy on Bahraini pro-democracy protesters.<sup>88</sup> In August 2014, leaked internal documents from FinFisher showed that spyware had been installed on 77 computers, including those of human rights lawyers and opposition leaders.<sup>89</sup> It had previously been

revealed that that the UK-based company offered to sell its spying software to the Egyptian security services prior to the popular uprising.<sup>90</sup>

**QinetiQ** is a UK company and formerly part of the MoD. One of its areas of expertise is cyber security, providing 'comprehensive 24 x 7 monitoring and alerting'.<sup>91</sup> The company recently opened an office in Abu Dhabi to provide 'technical advice and support to a broad cross-section of defence and security clients – primarily within UAE, but also in neighbouring Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries including Oman'.<sup>92</sup>



## Police use water cannons and tear gas in Manama, Bahrain





**This report exposes the strategic ambitions of British imperialism in the Persian Gulf. The expansion of the UK's military, strategic and corporate commitment is clearly intended both to secure the uninterrupted flow of oil from the region, and to protect access to other key markets and resources. Central to this greater commitment – coordinated by a secretive 'Gulf Strategy Unit' – are new partnerships designed to facilitate a permanent British military presence.**

Joint investment in building new military bases is a core element of the strategy. A prominent example is a multi-million pound joint UK and Oman venture to build a port at Duqm. The project is designed to guarantee the UK a strategically important military base long term in the Gulf.

Ensuring stability and internal security is also vital, which is why the UK is putting such effort into building the military and police capacity of the Gulf States, despite significant human rights concerns. Providing training and equipment also helps corporate interests directly: this report details training delivered by private military and security companies (PMSCs) or defence contractors working in the region. Companies familiar from War on Want's previous Mercenaries Unleashed report are running training operations throughout the Gulf, often directly focused on internal security. Once again, the revolving door between UK police or military forces and PMSCs is clearly evident.

The report also details the increase in exports from UK companies designed for riot control and suppressing dissent such as tear gas, sniper rifles, birdshot and covert surveillance equipment. Exports of such repressive technologies to the Gulf regimes are designed to assist with ensuring internal security, and are promoted through UK government agencies. These exports are linked in turn with

the violent crackdowns on pro-democracy protests that have spread across the region as social movements rise up to challenge longstanding authoritarian rulers.

Yet the UK has export licencing criteria that should prohibit exports of military and dual-use items, including police technology where there is a risk of items being used for 'internal repression' or 'serious violation of international humanitarian law'. The exports, backed by a UK government strategy which prioritises access to natural resources over human rights and democracy, play a clear role in the repression recently witnessed across the region.

War on Want is calling for an immediate ban on all UK arms exports where the technologies risk being used in internal repression. This would include many regimes identified in this report. We are also calling for transparency on the details of the shadowy Gulf Strategy Unit and an inquiry into the role of UK military and police forces in providing training to repressive regimes.

## Take Action!

**Please ask your MP to write to the Prime Minister calling for:**

- an immediate ban on exports of arms and repressive technologies where there is a risk of use for internal repression or human rights violations;
- detail on the personnel, objectives and activities of the government's secretive Gulf Strategy Unit;
- an official inquiry into the role of UK military and police forces in providing training to countries where there is a risk of use for internal repression or human rights violations

**And please send us any responses you receive.**

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