

Report reveals Canada violated arms treaty with weapons sales to Saudi Arabia



FILE PHOTO. Saudi troops walk at their base in Yemen's southern port city of Aden. © Reuters / Faisal Al Nasser

New York, August 12 (RHC)-- NGOs Amnesty International and Project Ploughshares accused Ottawa of “willful blindness” and breaking arms trade laws in its multibillion-dollar weapons and equipment exports to Saudi Arabia – despite evidence of their “misuse.”

A new report by the rights groups points to “persuasive evidence” to show that Canadian arms transfers – including light armored vehicles (LAVs) and high-powered sniper rifles – are being “diverted for use” in the Saudi-led coalition’s war in Yemen.

This has “exacerbated the armed conflict” that has been raging in Yemen since 2015, states the report, which accuses the Trudeau government of “misinterpret(ing) or ignor(ing)” key conditions of the 2014 Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). Canada signed the treaty – which regulates global arms trade – in 2019.

Besides “undermining peace and security,” it adds, there is an “overriding risk” that these weapons could facilitate “gender-based violence, forced displacement, and direct attacks on civilian objects.”

In April 2020, Ottawa lifted a limited freeze on arms exports to Riyadh and finalized a Can\$15 billion (US\$12 billion) contract to sell LAVs to Saudi forces. The embargo had been imposed in the wake of prominent Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi’s murder in 2018.

That deal came after a government exports review concluded that there was “no substantial risk” of these military goods being “used to commit or facilitate violations of international human rights law, international humanitarian law, or gender-based violence.”

However, the new report released on Wednesday claims that the official review was “fundamentally flawed.” “Contrary to what the federal government has said, Canada continues to ignore its international obligations to the ATT,” Cesar Jaramillo, executive director of Project Ploughshares, said, adding that the government review “cherry-picks through evidence to paint a picture of a weapons deal that is fully compliant with international law.”

There are very clear conditions in the ATT under which exports can not and should not be made. Those conditions have already been met repeatedly. There is a bit of a willful blindness in [Canada’s] government to Saudi misbehavior and misuse of exports, which is no secret.

Although the billion-dollar LAV deal had been inked in 2014, during former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s tenure, it was only given the green-light last year after renegotiation.

Then-Foreign Minister Francois-Phillippe Champagne touted “significant improvements” to the contract that would create thousands of jobs at the Canadian subsidiary of U.S. firm General Dynamics Corp, which makes the vehicles.

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