

# Clinton administration bans sale of small arms to British firms

by Jeffrey Steinberg

In April, President Clinton imposed a ban on all sales of small arms to British companies, in what, Washington sources tell *EIR*, is another move by the United States to target Britain's role as the major state supporter of international terrorism. The U.S. arms ban was first reported on the front page of the *New York Times* on April 19. "American pistols and rifles sold to Europe in the last few years," according to the *Times*, "have ended up fueling violent conflicts in places that include Rwanda, the countries that once were part of Yugoslavia, Algeria, and Turkey, and in the hands of street criminals and organized crime syndicates. There are also indications that American firearms have found their way to Iraq and Iran."

On April 22, the Clinton administration formally notified the British government that all pending licenses for the export of American firearms to Britain had been revoked. Among the weapons included in the ban are: handguns, automatic rifles, grenade launchers, and hand-held missile launchers—all favored weapons of terrorists, separatist insurgents, and drug traffickers.

On April 25, *EIR* correspondent Bill Jones asked State Department spokesman Jamie Rubin to explain the administration's action. Rubin was prepared for the question and had a written answer prepared.

"The decision to revoke outstanding munitions licenses for firearms destined to the U.K. was taken in consultation with the U.K. after discussions with them," he explained, adding, defensively, "It was not an action directed against United Kingdom policy." However, he then went on: "The Department, in carrying out its responsibilities under the Arms Export Control Act, continuously monitors the national laws and regulations of recipient countries to ensure that re-transport and import controls are sufficiently strong. When we identify problems, we bring them to the attention of the interested foreign governments and try to address the problems with them through various law enforcement and diplomatic channels. Whenever possible, actions are taken by both countries to align import and export actions, and this can take the form of license revocations. . . . With regard to the United Kingdom, this issue came up because they changed their laws on handguns. So it required us to take a re-look at all the

licenses so that we would be able to re-implement licenses with them."

After that bit of diplomatic tap dancing, Rubin did finally acknowledge that the issue on the table is British involvement in underground weapons trafficking. "What I'm saying to you," Rubin concluded, "is that in general, the trafficking in international firearms as an illegal trafficking is an area of greater and greater concern to the United States, where we're going to be following it closer and closer. With respect to this one area, it was more a function of their change in their laws than it was a particular problem with British companies."

Don Manross, a Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms official, posted at the Interpol headquarters in Lyon, France, put it more bluntly: "When they [small arms] leave the United States, we lose all control over them—that's the bottom line."

The British change in handgun law that Rubin referenced was more a pretext than a motive for the U.S. action. Recently, Britain imposed a near-total ban on the domestic sale and possession of firearms, suggesting that the large flow of small arms from American manufacturers to British distributors is either heading abroad, or into the domestic black market in Britain.

Simultaneously with the U.S. revocation announcement, several scandals broke in the British media, suggesting that both the British Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defense are deeply involved in the black market re-distribution of American weapons.

## Interarms implicated

On April 19, the same day that the *New York Times* reported on the U.S. arms ban, the London *Times* reported that "A secret inquiry into alleged corruption at the Ministry of Defence (MoD) has found that scores of military weapons have fallen into the hands of dangerous criminals and, police fear, terrorists. Among the MoD weapons that have gone on to the criminal black market are Walther PPKs, and 9mm Brownings that are used by the SAS. Both are favoured tools of underworld and terrorist assassins."

The newspaper identified two companies as prime sus-

pects in the black market distribution of arms, formerly used by the Special Air Services (SAS) and other units of the British military; but the article also noted that some Defense Ministry surplus weapons, seized in recent raids on British organized crime gangs, had come directly from the Defense Ministry's Central Ordnance Depot in Donnington. The two firms named by the *Times* were R.E. Trem and Co. and International Armaments Corporation ("Interarms"), a firm headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, but with a vast British subsidiary, Interarms UK, in Manchester, England.

Interarms was founded in the 1950s by "ex"-CIA officer Sam Cummings. It is widely suspected that Interarms has functioned as an intelligence "proprietary" for both American and British intelligence services, funneling covert arms shipments to battle zones around the world. The initial bankrolling of Interarms came from a local bank in Alexandria, then headed by Albert V. Bryan, Jr., who later gained international notoriety as the "hanging judge" who presided over the 1988 Federal railroad prosecution of Lyndon LaRouche.

According to the *Times*, detectives from the Defense Ministry fraud section found that all British Army surplus weapons were being sold to one firm, Trem, and that Trem had in turn shipped a large supply of Enfield rifles to the Virginia headquarters of Interarms. Some of those rifles later were found in the hands of British crime figures. A spokesman at Interarms confirmed to *EIR* that Federal agents had recently questioned them about the Trem rifles deal. He admitted that there was "always a possibility" that some of the weapons had been obtained by criminals or terrorists.

### **Sandline International and the Foreign Office**

On May 3, a potentially even more serious scandal surfaced, in the pages of the *Sunday Times* in London, under the banner headline, "Cook Snared in Arms for Coup Inquiry." "A criminal investigation has been launched," the *Times* reported, "into British-backed military moves to overthrow a foreign government. Senior British diplomats are to be questioned over allegations that they were secretly involved in the illegal supply of weapons and mercenaries to Sierra Leone, a former British colony in West Africa." Among the senior officials of the Foreign Office targeted in the inquiry were Foreign Secretary Robin Cook and Peter Penfold, the British High Commissioner to Sierra Leone.

The crux of the allegations is that the Foreign Office gave tacit approval for a private mercenary firm, Sandline International, to send tons of weapons, and a force of soldiers-for-hire, to supporters of the elected President of Sierra Leone, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, who was overthrown by a military junta last year, and has been in exile in Nigeria ever since.

The Sierra Leone story is complicated by internal factional wrangling in Britain. Lord Avebury, one of the leading terrorist backers in the British House of Lords who has been widely exposed in the pages of *EIR*, has been leading the

charge against the Blair government and Sandline, apparently because he has been a strong backer of the military junta that overthrew Kabbah.

These internal factional machinations aside, the fact is that the British Foreign Office has been caught, deploying an ostensibly "private" security outfit, to conduct covert arms trafficking and military operations. The same firm, Sandline, and an allied company, Executive Outcomes, were caught in a similar scandal a year ago, which brought down the government of Papua New Guinea (see *EIR*, Aug. 22, 1997).

The actions of the British government, and mercenary firms like Sandline, cannot be separated from the fact that London has been singled out by a dozen governments as the center of international terrorism. Last November, the U.S. State Department issued a list of 30 terrorist organizations, banned from any activities in the United States. A review of that list by *EIR* revealed that 26 of the 30 groups were either headquartered in Britain, or maintained major logistical bases there. Independent of the State Department action, the Egyptian government filed a rash of protests with the British Foreign Office over Britain's harboring of the terrorists who ordered the Nov. 17, 1997 massacre in Luxor, Egypt that killed more than 60 people.

And now, it appears that the Clinton administration is turning up the heat one more degree.

**"Long before Paula Jones,  
long before Monica Lewinsky,  
there was a conscious decision, made in  
London, that there would be a full-scale  
campaign to destroy Bill Clinton,  
and to destroy, once and for all,  
the credibility of the office of the  
Presidency of the United States."**

—Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr.



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