

International

South Africa blocks arms sales to Saudi and UAE in inspection row

South Africa defense industry heavily reliant on Gulf exports

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa is blocking arms sales to countries including Saudi Arabia and the UAE in an inspections dispute, endangering billions of dollars of business and thousands of jobs in its struggling defense sector, according to industry officials. The dispute centers on a clause in export documents that requires foreign customers to pledge not to transfer weapons to third parties and to allow South African officials to inspect their facilities to verify compliance, according to the four officials as well as letters obtained by Reuters.

Officials at major South African defense groups Denel and Rheinmetall Denel Munition (RDM) said the dispute was holding up their exports, as did a third big defense company which asked not to be named. RDM said some of its exports to the Middle East had not been approved since March. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which account for at least a third of South Africa's arms exports and are engaged in a war in Yemen, have rejected the inspections which they consider a violation of their sovereignty, the sources said.

Oman and Algeria have also refused inspections and seen their imports from South Africa blocked, the industry officials added. Government officials in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Oman and Algeria did not respond to emails and phone calls from Reuters seeking comment, nor did their embassies in South Africa. Asked about the inspection clause issue, Ezra Jele, South Africa's director for conventional arms control in the defense ministry, said that authorities considered criteria including human rights, regional conflict, risk of diversion, UN Security Council resolutions and national interest when evaluating applications for export permits.

He did not comment on specific cases. The Aerospace, Maritime and Defense Industries Association of South Africa (AMD) says the dispute could threaten the sector's survival. "We've got one clause that's disabling us from

exporting 25 billion rand (\$1.7 billion) worth of value today, right now," Simphiwe Hamilton, the head of the AMD said. The industry body estimates the export blocks put an additional 50 to 60 billion rand in future business at risk and could cause the loss of up to 9,000 jobs at defense firms and supporting industries.

Yemeni conflict

Since democratic rule was established in 1994, South Africa has sought to reform its defence industry - once a pillar of the racist apartheid regime - by making export approvals subject to human rights considerations. Saudi Arabia is leading an alliance of Arab states, including the UAE, to try to restore the government of Yemeni President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, who was ousted from the capital Sanaa by the Iran-aligned Houthis in 2015.

In February, Amnesty International accused the UAE of diverting arms supplied by Western and other states to militias accused of war crimes in Yemen. In the same month, a CNN investigation said Saudi Arabia and the UAE had transferred American weapons to Yemeni fighters, breaking the terms of their arms sales with the United States. The UAE did not respond to the Amnesty allegations. The Saudi military coalition did not respond to CNN's allegations, but a senior UAE official denied it violated end-user agreements.

The South African defense industry has become increasingly reliant on exports, which have grown more than 12-fold since 1990 as domestic defense spending has declined. Exports now make up the bulk of revenues for

major defense companies including Denel, Paramount Group, Hensoldt South Africa and RDM, which is a joint venture between Denel and German industrial giant Rheinmetall. Saudi Arabia and the UAE alone represented a third of South Africa's 4.7 billion rand of authorized arms exports in 2018, according to data compiled by the National Conventional Arms Control Committee (NCACC), a group of ministers and deputy ministers that approves the exports.

'Encroaching on sovereignty'

Requiring buyers not to transfer weapons to third parties is common practice in the international arms trade, stipulated in export documents known as end-user certificates. Requiring inspections, though uncommon, is not unheard of. Germany, for instance, requires them for small arms sales to certain countries. The industry officials told Reuters that South Africa had long included a clause in its end-user certificates requiring on-site visits, though it was rarely acted upon.

Clients regularly amended or deleted the clause, and the NCACC still granted export permits, they said. But in 2017, arms control officials moved the clause to the front page of the certificates, and some countries refused to sign them, according to the officials. The clause requires customers to grant "access and permission to South African Government Authority's representative(s) to verify they are in compliance with

South Africa's defense export regulations.

"This is what's making some of these countries uncomfortable," Hamilton said. "You are encroaching on their sovereignty, and they cannot allow that." An NCACC official, who was not authorized to speak publicly, would not comment on the reason for the new format, and industry officials said they had not been told. Matters did not come to a head until this year because arms contracts are often signed years before the anticipated delivery date, the company officials said.

Some companies have already indicated that they will need to cut more than 500 employees if they can't export their products soon, trade union Solidarity said. On July 3, Solidarity and other unions wrote to Public Enterprises Minister Pravin Gordhan stating that failure to resolve the impasse would lead to "job losses on a massive and irreversible scale".

"Customers in the UAE have already begun firing trials with China, India as well as Serbia with the intention to replace RDM as a preferred supplier of ammunition," said the letter seen by Reuters. Three weeks later, Norbert Schulze, RDM's CEO at the time, wrote to the NCACC urging it to take action. In his Aug 5 response, also seen by Reuters, NCACC chairman Jackson Mthembu said the body would not grant an exception.

"The NCACC is aware of the possible loss of jobs occasioned by the inability to export in the time being. However, as your organization would appreciate, compliance with regulations sometimes produces negative impact," he wrote. The government is encouraging defense companies to avoid an over-reliance on the Gulf, the NCACC official said. But building up business in new markets would take time. "It's not like selling Coca-Cola. It can take 5-7 years to go into new markets," one defense company official said. "I don't think the politicians are aware how serious this is."—Reuters



Industry warns of billions in lost business, job cuts

UAE in weapons making push as allies restrict sales

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is making a push to develop high-tech military hardware that would give it control over critical defense capabilities and lessen reliance on imports. Wary of threats from rival Iran, and concerned over moves by some allies to hold up arms sales, the UAE is reshaping a military industry already seen as the region's most sophisticated. State defense companies have been brought together to form EDGE, a \$5-billion conglomerate to spearhead development of advanced weapons for the country's military. Those ambitions were put on display at this week's Dubai Airshow where the military handed an EDGE company a \$1 billion contract for guided missiles.

"Like many countries, on specific critical capabilities you want to have sovereignty," EDGE Chief Executive Faisal Al-Bannai said. The UAE's defense industry dates back two decades, built through joint ventures and technology transfer programs. Much of it now sits under EDGE, manufacturing drones, small armaments and providing maintenance. Despite close ties with the West, the oil-rich Gulf nation has had difficulty acquiring some sophisticated weapons.

The United States will not sell armed drones to the UAE under a longstanding export policy limiting their use. Recently, some European countries have blocked sales to the UAE over its involvement in the Yemen war. Meanwhile, the UAE maintains close ties and continues to buy weapons from China and Russia. Abdulla Al-Hashimi, assistant undersecretary for support services at the UAE ministry of defense, said sovereign capabilities were a "necessity" for security and the economy.

Emerging threats

A series of attacks in the Gulf over the summer, blamed on Iran by the United States, highlighted new threats to the security of Gulf states. Tehran denied involvement. Oil tankers off the UAE coast were sabotaged and a swarm of missiles and drones temporarily wiped out half of Saudi Arabia's oil production in a September attack. EDGE could develop directed energy technology, Bannai said, which can be used to counter drone threats. Directed energy weapons emit focused energy in the form of lasers, microwaves, electromagnetic radiation, radio waves, sound or particle beams.

"The Emiratis not only believe that they can make a profit in this sphere but also that they are well-equipped to understand and counter regional threats," said Robert Mogielnicki, a resident scholar at the Washington-based Arab Gulf States Institute. The UAE is expected to spend \$17 billion on defense next year, according to US-based defense analysis firm Teal, up from \$14.4 billion in 2014 when last disclosed by the government. Today, just a fraction is spent domestically. Abu Dhabi, the main petroleum producing emirate, is leading the development of the country's industry.

There, the move is seen as a step not only towards more diversification of an oil-based economy but towards "greater strategic autonomy with regards to foreign and defense policies," said Jean-Loup Samaan, associate professor at the UAE National Defense College. EDGE, which wants to build on joint ventures that developed the country's defense industry, also has eyes on exporting. That could draw new scrutiny. US Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs R. Clarke Cooper said Washington would like the UAE to establish greater oversight as it develops its military industry. —Reuters

Guinea-Bissau: Coups, cashews and cocaine

BISSAU: Guinea-Bissau is a poor and underdeveloped country in West Africa that has suffered chronic political instability, making it vulnerable to corruption and drug trafficking. Here is some background:

Four coups

The former Portuguese colony on Africa's western bulge achieved independence in 1974 after an 11-year armed struggle led by the African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC), today the ruling party. Since then it has been through four successful coups - the last one in 2012 - as well as 16 attempted, plotted or alleged coups. Instability and conflict have battered infrastructure and development.

Political instability

The current president, Jose Mario Vaz, was elected in 2014 for a five-year term that has been overshadowed by a row with the PAIGC over his choices of prime minister. Since he sacked PAIGC leader Domingos Simoes Pereira as

prime minister 2015, Vaz has named a succession of replacements who have been unable to win parliamentary backing. Vaz's surprise sacking of Prime Minister Aristides Gomes in October drew fierce criticism from the international community. Gomes first took office in 2018 after mediation by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) regional bloc, which warned of "risks of a civil war" in Guinea-Bissau and called on Vaz to respect the election due November 24.

High poverty

The tropical country - sandwiched between Senegal and Guinea - is slightly larger than Belgium and includes a scattering of 88 islands in the Atlantic Ocean called the Bijagos. Its population of 1.87 million people (World Bank, 2018) includes a range of ethnic groups, languages and religions. More than two-thirds of the population earn under two dollars a day and more than a third are in extreme poverty (less than one dollar a day), according to the UN. Guinea-Bissau is ranked 177th out of 189 on the UN's 2018 Human Development Index. Largely as a result of poor healthcare services, average life expectancy is 57.8 years.

Cocaine, corruption

Poverty and chaotic administration have made the country a fertile ground

'Horror houses' shed light on care crisis for Nigerian drug addicts

LAGOS: The day his wife walked out 10 years ago, Nigerian musician Jagunlabi started taking drugs to make the shadows go away. The drugs came to stay. Today, after suffering a heart attack, Jagunlabi is desperate to end his addiction but has no idea how to get help. "I don't know where to go, I can't trust (rehab) centers here," he said, sitting in a park in the nation's economic capital Lagos. "They can chain you, molest you." Substance abuse in Africa's most populous country has been described as an "epidemic" by the United Nations but there is almost no proper treatment available for those trying to recover.

The grim problem has come to light after a string of raids on so-called rehabilitation centers where hundreds of inmates,

mainly men and boys, have been found chained and abused in atrocious conditions. The unregulated institutes — billed as Islamic schools or run by evangelical churches — are used by desperate families who often send relatives struggling with drugs, drink or mental illness in the hope they will get better.

But the treatment is brutal and relies more on prayer than proven medical interventions. Jagunlabi, who gave only his stage name, recounted how his family had tried to take him to a religious camp just two days earlier. "A week of prayer and fasting... it would kill me. I'm too weak," he said. Once a successful performer who has now seen his career destroyed by addiction, he showed off newspaper clippings about his music from the early 2000s. "I used to be big," he said. "I need medication, I need to sleep".

Just 300 psychiatrists

The scandal over the abusive centers - dubbed "horror houses" by the media - has put pressure on the authorities. President Muhammadu Buhari insisted "no responsible democratic government would tolerate the existence of the torture cham-

bers" and officials have sought to close the worst of them. But moves to clamp down on the facilities have had mixed results. In the city of Kano, in mainly Muslim northern

artificial lung and a candidate for a double lung transplant. "I didn't think that vaping had (anything) to do with getting sick," the 22-year-old computer science student told AFP, two months after the ordeal that brought him to the brink of death in just a few hours. Doctors have attributed it to his constant e-cigarette use.

But emergency physicians in Jamaica-Rodriguez's Queens neighborhood-did not immediately make the connection with vaping. As was often the case at the start of the vaping epidemic, discovered over the summer, doctors initially sent Gregory home with antibiotics, thinking he only had an infection. But then

Rodriguez returned to the hospital, unable to breathe, and admitted to vaping cannabis for the past two years. "At first, I was hesitant to let them know that I vape, because unfortunately THC is still illegal in the state of New York," he said.

On September 18, his body quickly broke down. He was hooked up to a ventilator, but it wasn't enough. His lungs were filled with a viscous substance, like custard, due to extreme inflammation of his respiratory airways. Oxygen could no longer enter his bloodstream. "He was within hours of dying," said Dr. Mangala Narasimhan, the regional director of critical care medicine at Northwell Health, who treated him. —AFP



BISSAU: Two men look at the presidential election candidate list on the eve of the presidential elections in Bissau, in Guinea-Bissau. —AFP

for Latin American drug lords trafficking cocaine to Europe. The UN has praised progress since Vaz's election in fighting drug trafficking, but in 2018 expressed disappointment about flagging efforts. In September, police seized some 2 tons of cocaine which had arrived in Guinea-Bissau from Colombia - the largest such haul in the country's history. Guinea-Bissau was ranked 172nd out of 180 countries by Transparency International in 2018 for perceived levels of corruption.

Cashew cash-in

The country's main export is cashew nuts, which financed nearly half of the 2017 national budget. It is Africa's third-largest cashew producer after Ivory Coast and Tanzania. Economic growth reached 5.9 percent in 2017, but slowed to around 3.8 percent in 2018 after a drop in cashew production because of poor weather and a fall in prices, according to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. Growth is forecast to reach 4.3 percent in 2019. —AFP



KADUNA: Some of the 300 male students of 'different nationalities' are pictured in the Rigasa area of Kaduna in northern Nigeria after being rescued by police from an Islamic seminary where they were tortured and sodomized. —AFP

bers" and officials have sought to close the worst of them. But moves to clamp down on the facilities have had mixed results. In the city of Kano, in mainly Muslim northern

Nigeria where most of the abusive institutes have been uncovered, many relatives have refused to pick up those freed from the centers. —AFP

22 years old and on the brink of death from vaping

WASHINGTON: With a raging fever, vomiting and diarrhea, Gregory Rodriguez thought he had some kind of bug when he checked himself into the emergency room at a New York hospital in September. Two days later, he was unconscious, hooked up to an