

Stories of Peace,

health, equity, art, land, and community

Canadian arms exports

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Special to The Bancroft Times

ENGROSSED IN MY work, the calm is periodically shattered by a loud crash through my headphones - memories of the Exposure Therapy I received last year remain vivid. The therapy, which confronted me with the sounds of danger remembered from war-torn Yemen, was my pathway to peace, allowing me to enjoy fireworks with friends and navigate normal life without adrenaline spikes every time someone dropped a plate or slammed a door.

Seven years ago, I was doing aid work in Sana'a, Yemen. I feared abduction and the bombs that fell. The bombs the Saudi Arabian armed forces dropped were UK and US-made. I'm British and Canadian, so the irony that I could be taken out by a bomb that my own government exported was not lost on me.

Despite Canada's history of arms sales to Saudi Arabia, it committed to the global Arms Trade Treaty in 2019, which bars exports known to facilitate genocide, crimes against humanity, breaches of the Geneva Conventions, or attacks on civilians. Saudi Arabia's pattern of bombing civilians is widely reported. Its blockade of the Port of Hodeidah was described by the United Nations as exacerbating the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

Back in Canada, I met an MP and urged her to halt arms sales to Saudi Arabia. She acknowledged the dilemma, highlighting the jobs at stake. Since that conversation, Canada has attracted more criticism for arms exports to Turkey, after evidence proved the technology made its way into the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

On March 18, the House of Commons passed a non-binding motion to "cease the further authorization and transfer of arms exports to Israel." Since then, government statements have introduced ambiguity, leaving it unclear if existing approved exports will proceed. Language about blocking "approvals" rather than "exports" leaves additional uncertainty.

According to the esteemed peace research institute, Project Ploughshares, Canada's recent arms exports to Israel were worth \$28 million—a fraction (0.004 per cent) of our nation's

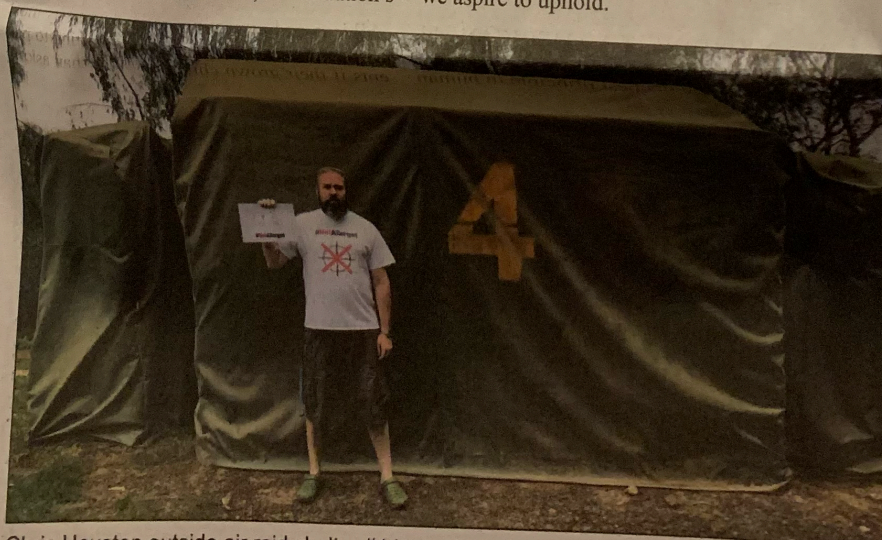
\$753 billion in total annual exports. Ethical ramifications far exceed the minor economic benefits of these arms exports, underscoring the need for policies that reflect Canada's peace commitment over the minimal financial gain. The contrast between minor economic benefits and the severe consequences of human rights violations necessitates a thorough reassessment of Canada's arms export policies. It is crucial to affirm that economic reasoning cannot override the compromise of our ethical standards and international duties. No economic argument can justify the erosion of our ethical standards and international obligations.

With the death toll in Gaza surpassing 33,000, including 14,000 children, reconciling weapon exports with Canada's commitments under the Arms Trade Treaty becomes increasingly challenging.

The pandemic's spotlight on shortages in medical supplies and semiconductors, amidst debates on declining manufacturing productivity, underscores the urgency of prioritizing domestic production. Recognizing the potential for job losses if we cut arms exports, it's vital for government incentives to bolster sectors like sustainable energy and other critical goods we've been challenged to import, aligning with efforts to improve our manufacturing productivity.

The Canadian Peace Museum recently highlighted that 65 per cent of Canadians regard peace as a fundamental element of our national identity. However, our current trajectory threatens not just to compromise this identity but also to violate our shared ethical principles. The rationale for arms exports, especially to nations with questionable human rights records, is not defensible.

As we stand at this critical juncture, the choices we make today will not only define our legacy but also determine our moral direction. We must advocate for a comprehensive review of our current arms export policies and demand increased transparency in arms deals. By doing so, we can ensure that our nation's practices align with our values of peace and justice. Let us commit to a future where we prioritize self-sufficiency, transparency, and a steadfast commitment to peace, thereby ensuring that our actions consistently reflect the ethical standards we aspire to uphold.



Chris Houston outside air raid shelter #4 in the United Nations accommodation, Sana'a, Yemen, Aug. 19, 2017. /SUBMITTED, Chris Houston