

# ARMS FOR APARTHEID



South African Airforce Mirage Jets

UN/Contact

by Sean Gervasi

*The UN arms embargo against South Africa has in no way deterred Western countries, notably the US, Britain, Italy and France, from selling major weapons systems to South Africa. The following Special Report outlines the basis for this claim by providing Southern Africa readers with an edited version of Sean Gervasi's testimony before the Subcommittee on Africa, Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, 14 July, 1977. Gervasi, an economist who has worked for the Office of the Commissioner for Namibia at the UN, called on Congress to investigate US arms sales to the apartheid regime, and received a particularly sympathetic hearing from Congressmen Diggs, Whalen and Bonker.*

*A telex from the Rand Daily Mail to a correspondent in Washington dated 14 July, 1977, relays a South African Defense Department request suggesting that South Africa is more than a little concerned about the information provided by Gervasi. The Department requested no publication of the report, noting that "...any publicity given to this testimony could result in embarrassment to countries friendly to South Africa and therefore affect South Africa's security."*

Evidence has recently come to light which makes it clear that the United

Nations arms embargo against South Africa, instituted through resolutions 181 and 182 of 1963, is in practical fact non-existent. An exhaustive examination of both governmental and confidential industry sources reveals that a thriving international trade in arms to the apartheid state has been underway for nearly a decade. As a result, South Africa has been able to build a powerful modern military machine based on foreign weapons—the very outcome the UN embargo was designed to prevent.

According to American journalist Jim Hoagland (*Washington Post*, 16 January, 1977) the South African government has in recent years been spending the equivalent of two-thirds of its annual defense budget on military imports. With a defense import bill of \$450 millions and more than \$800 millions in 1973 and 1975 respectively, South Africa's projected defense import bill for 1977 is, according to US Senate sources, in excess of \$1,200 millions.

## Prepared to Pay the Price

Almost all of this money has been spent, and is being spent, in Western countries, or in countries used for the trans-shipment of Western arms, who have been willing to sell South Africa almost anything it wants for a price. Prepared to pay that price, South Africa has been purchasing every kind

of weapon and type of equipment, from tanks and radar to helicopters and self-propelled guns.

It was generally believed until now that France had supplied South Africa with most of its imported arms in recent years. However, this now seems doubtful. While figures on the value of the arms trade are not yet available, it appears that Great Britain, the United States and France have accounted for the bulk of sales to South Africa since 1963, with Italy as a fourth principal supplier. As the South African defense import figures indicate, the volume of the arms trade with South Africa has been far larger than it was thought to be, with French sales accounting for only a part of that trade. It goes without saying that, for the most part, western arms sales to South Africa, in particular, those involving Britain, the US, and Italy, have been shrouded in secrecy.

A thorough analysis of this "invisible" trade must begin with an accurate description of the present South African arms inventory. The difficulty up to now has been that published figures on this inventory were inaccurate. Specifically, data generally regarded as authoritative published by the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) and indicating the quantities of different kinds of military equipment held by most countries has provided a misleading view of

**TABLE A**  
**DELIVERIES OF WEAPONS KNOWN TO BE IN SERVICE**  
**WITH THE SOUTH AFRICAN DEFENSE FORCES**  
**(END 1976)**

ITEM	Manufactured/ Licensed by	Numbers	
		Deliveries	IISS*
Mirage III fighter/bomber trainer/recce	France	95+	57
Mirage F-1 all weather multi-purpose fighter	France	48+	16
Aermacchi MB-326M Imapala I strike/trainer	S.A./Italy	300	145
Aermacchi MB-326K Impala II strike	S.A./Italy	100	22
Aerospatiale Alouette III armed attack helicopter	France	115+	40
Aerospatiale/Westland 330 Puma assault helicopter	France/UK	40+	25
Centurion Mk 7 heavy tank	UK	150	141
Daimler Ferret Mk 2 scout car/ anti-tank armored car	UK	450	230
M-3A1 White armored personnel carrier	US	400	n.s.
Saracen FV603 and FV610 armored personnel carrier	UK	700	n.s.
T-17 E1 Staghound armored car	US	450	n.s.

\*The Military Balance 1976-1977  
n.s. = not specified

South Africa's strength in two respects:

First, the IISS publication, *The Military Balance, 1976-77*, fails to list many major weapon systems currently in use in South Africa, including Centurion Mk 10, Patton, Walker Bulldog and AMX-13 tanks; Staghound and Shorland MK 3 armored cars; M-113A1, V-150 Commando, Piranha, Short SB 301, and M3A1 armored personnel carriers; and Sexton 88mm, M-7 Priest 105mm, and M-109 155mm self-propelled guns. Not listed among South Africa's combat aircraft and helicopters are Impala II jets, F-104G Starfighters, F-51D Cavalier COIN, and Iroquois and Gazelle helicopters.

Second, the IISS figures on weapons which it does list often understate the quantities actually in use. This is the case with regard to Centurion tanks, Ferret sct/armored cars, Saracen and Ratel armored personnel carriers, Mirage II strike interceptors, and several types of helicopter.

#### Large Quantities Not Reported

From the evidence now available it is clear that suppliers have been selling far larger quantities of certain weapons to South Africa than is generally reported, and have been selling South

Africa many items of equipment, not generally believed to be part of the South African inventory.

Table A provides some details on the sale of "extra quantities" of equipment to South Africa, and the sources of that equipment.

Table B indicates that many important arms deals have been kept entirely secret until now. It lists weapons systems now in the South African inventory which are not credited to South Africa by standard sources such as *The Military Balance*. With one exception, all of the arms listed have been delivered to South Africa since the arms embargo began, and many have been delivered within the last eight or nine years. Orders for some are still on the books in Great Britain, Portugal and Italy.

The data set out in these Tables show that France, the US, the UK and Italy have failed altogether to heed the Security Council call for an arms embargo against South Africa. While there may be "arms export control" regulations of some kind on the books in various countries, they have not stopped the flow of Western arms to South Africa over the whole of the last decade.

The breakdown of the arms embargo

has had very serious consequences. Perhaps the most serious is that South Africa has been able to build a modern military force on the African continent, a force which in the present circumstances gives it formidable power.

When the arms embargo began, South Africa had a relatively small military establishment, with less than 13,000 men in the Permanent Force and total military expenditures of approximately Rand 120 million. The Air Force had few modern aircraft and only a few helicopters. The Army had a collection of old British and American tanks, armored cars and artillery.

Lacking even a small mobile attack force, the apartheid regime had an essentially defensive capability.

#### Awesome Military Capability

Today the situation is completely different. South Africa now has an awesome military capability. The Air Force possesses more than 600 combat aircraft, including nearly 150 Mirage III and Mirage F-1 aircraft, as well as some 300 Aermacchi MB-326 strike-trainer and strike jets, 40 Lockheed F104G fighter-bombers and 50 North American F-51D Cavalier counter-insurgency strike aircraft. It also has more than 200 helicopters. There are well over one thousand aircraft in service with the South African Air Force.

The army possesses more than 500 tanks. A large number of these are Centurion Mk 10's, with a 105mm gun and better armor and engine than the Mk 5 and Mk 7 models which South Africa is usually listed as having. The Patton tanks are an improved model fitted with a British 105mm gun.

The army also has nearly 200 Panhard armored cars fitted with 90mm guns. These are made in South Africa under French license. In addition, it possesses several hundred other armored cars and nearly 1,000 armored personnel carriers. Some of the latter are very recent American and British models. It has a large number of self-propelled guns—medium and heavy artillery, of 88mm, 105mm and 155mm, mounted on tank chassis.

Table C indicates the extent to which *The Military Balance* generally underestimates South African power, giving figures for each type of major weapon actually in service. Weapons systems now known to be in the South African inventory at the end of 1976 include four times the number of combat aircraft, twice the number of helicopters, three times as many tanks, as well as more armored cars and personnel carriers than the IISS lists, and self-propelled guns not listed at all.

### Now A Dominant Influence

The new data on South African arms make it clear that in terms of real military capability, South Africa's strength, generally compared with that of Nigeria, Poland and Argentina, ought in fact to be compared with Iran, Brazil, Egypt and Japan, all significant military powers with a dominant influence in important regions of the world (see Table D).

Although it is true that South Africa has a relatively small standing force, its actual manpower pool, according to South African sources, contains some 450,000 trained personnel. More importantly, South Africa can mobilize large numbers at relatively short notice by calling up the Citizen Force reserves, units composed of men with military experience, who are re-trained every year. At the present time, Citizen Force units are being rotated continuously through the standing forces, those on active duty, in order to maintain a high degree of readiness.

There is no question that South Africa has achieved overwhelming military power south of the Sahara even while it continues to lack the capacity to produce sophisticated modern arms economically. Thus as South Africa prepares for war it knows that it has a tremendous advantage over its weaker and poorer neighbors—an advantage achieved largely because Western countries have been willing to violate the arms embargo and sell it aircraft, tanks and other military equipment.

### Acquired In Last Ten Years

Those who insist that the Western equipment in the South African inventory is largely old or shipped to South Africa before the arms embargo began are incorrect. Although some of the Western equipment still in service, such as the Walker Bulldog tank and the Staghound armored car, is quite old, much of it is still serviceable. More importantly, other equipment, such as the Patton tank, has recently been re-conditioned and improved. And most of the major weapons now in service with the regular Air Force and the Regular Army have been delivered in the last ten years.

Table E shows that almost all the first-line armor of the regular South African army has been imported from Western countries within the last ten years, with important items such as the M-113A1 armored personnel carrier and the M-109 self-propelled gun imported very recently. Given this equipment, all of the front-line states combined could not hope to match

**TABLE B**  
**DELIVERIES OF WEAPON SYSTEMS**  
**NOT GENERALLY KNOWN TO BE IN SERVICE**  
**WITH THE SOUTH AFRICAN DEFENCE FORCES**  
(END 1976)

ITEM	Manufactured/ Licensed by	Deliveries
Lockheed F-104G Starfighter fighter/bomber	US/ex-Luftwaffe	40
North American F-51D Cavalier counter-insurgency strike	US	50
Aerospatiale/Westland 341 Gazelle general purpose helicopter	France/UK	2 (?)
Agusta-Bell 205A Iroquois utility/s.r. helicopter	US	25
Lockheed P-2 Neptune anti-submarine patrol	US	12
Centurion Mk 10 heavy tank	UK	240
M-47 Patton main battle tank	US/Italy	100
M-41 Walker Bulldog light tank	US	100
AMX-13 light tank	France	80
M-113A1 armored personnel carrier	US/Italy	(400)
Commando V-150 armored personnel carrier	US/Portugal	(300)
Piranha armored personnel carrier	Switzerland	(100)
Shorland Mk3 armored car	UK	(200)
Short SB 301 armored personnel carrier <sup>1</sup>	UK	(300)
Sexton 25 pdr self-propelled gun	Canada	200
M-7 105mm self-propelled gun	US	200
M-109 155mm self-propelled gun	US/Italy	(50)

Figures in brackets indicate orders on which delivery continues.

1. In service with the South African Police

**TABLE C**  
**ARMS INVENTORY:**  
**SOUTH AFRICAN DEFENSE FORCES**  
(END 1976)

	IISS*	Gervasi
combat aircraft	133	625
helicopters	92	215
tanks	161	525
armored cars	1,050	1,430
armored personnel carriers	250	960
self-propelled guns	not listed	294
medium and light artillery	n.a.	390

\*The Military Balance 1976-1977

n.a. = not available

South Africa's firepower on the ground.

Although the US declared its intention to adhere strictly to the UN embargo from the very beginning, and has consistently maintained that it is doing so, it is now clear that a great deal of US military equipment has found its way into the South African

Defense Forces. Major items about which we know at this time include the following:

- M-3A1 armored personnel carriers
- T-17 E1 Staghound armored cars
- M-47 Patton main battle tanks
- M-41 Walker Bulldog light tanks
- M-113A1 armored personnel carriers

- Commando V-150 personnel carriers
- M-7 105mm self-propelled guns
- M-109 155mm self-propelled guns
- Lockheed F-104G Starfighter jets
- North American F-51D counter-insurgency aircraft
- Agusta-Bell 205A Iroquois helicopters
- Lockheed Hercules C-130B transport aircraft

These weapons, made in the US or in other countries under US license are all in service with South Africa's regular forces or the Citizen Force. Most of the US weapons have been sold to South Africa since the arms embargo began. More importantly, deliveries of some items of US equipment were continuing in early 1977.

US corporations do not, so far as is known, sell directly to the apartheid regime. The preferred channel for getting US arms to South Africa at present appears to be licensed production—an arrangement by which US corporations agree to let a foreign manufacturer produce an American weapon under license. The foreign manufacturer then ships the item in question to South Africa.

In theory, this traffic should be controlled by the Office of Munitions Control in the Department of State. However, the OMC apparently does not control some foreign sales when production takes place under US license. For example, the FMC Corporation has licensed Oto Melara, a major Italian arms manufacturer, to produce a version of the M-113A1 armored personnel carrier.

It is the Oto Melara models which have been recently sold to South Africa. Oto Melara is also producing, or refurbishing, the M-109 self-propelled gun under license and then selling it to South Africa. Meanwhile Bravia Cgaimite, a firm in Portugal, is producing the V-150 Commando personnel carrier under license from Cadillac Gage of Detroit. The Commandos, like other US weapons produced under license, were in the process of being delivered to South Africa earlier this year, and so far as is known, no attempt has been made to stop this traffic.

There is a great deal which is still unclear about the breakdown of the arms embargo. What is clear, however, is that the US, and other Western powers, have allowed vast quantities of arms to be sent to South Africa, and have, for all practical purposes, ignored the UN arms embargo against

**TABLE D**  
COMPARATIVE STRENGTH OF SELECTED ARMED FORCES  
(END 1976)

	Iran	Brazil	Egypt	Japan	South Africa
total armed forces (000s)	281	254	322	236	130 <sup>1</sup>
combat aircraft	450	190	600	500+	625
helicopters	125	50+	160	n.a.	215
tanks	1,990	350+	1,975	750	525
armored cars	n.a.	120	100	n.a.	1,430
armored personnel carriers	1,960	500	2,500	460	960
self-propelled guns	n.s.	n.s.	200	660	294

Sources: *Defense and Foreign Affairs Handbook 1976-77*, Washington, D.C. and London, 1977 and various industry sources.

n.a. = not available

n.s. = not specified

1. Estimate by the author based on South African source material. South Africa can mobilize 200,000 men within 2 days in an emergency.

**TABLE E**  
MAJOR WEAPON SYSTEMS IN SERVICE  
WITH THE SOUTH AFRICAN REGULAR ARMY  
(EARLY 1977)

ITEM	approx number in service	approx date of delivery
Centurion Mk 10 tank	180	1967-1968
Panhard AML 245 H60 armored car	800	produced under license
Panhard AML 245 H90 armored car	170	produced under license
Daimler Ferret Mk 2 with Vigilant ATGW	160	1968-1969
Saracen armored personnel carrier	280	1962-1966
Commando V-150 armored personnel carrier	110	post-1971
Piranha armored personnel carrier	?	delivery beginning
M-113A1 armored personnel carrier	150	1973-1974
		delivery continuing
Sexton 25 pdr self-propelled gun	150	1946
M-109 155mm self-propelled gun	24	1972-1973
		delivery continuing
Shorland Mk 3 armored car	60	1973
		delivery continuing
M-47 Patton tank <sup>1</sup>	70	1971

1. Assigned to the Citizen Force, but major equipment.

South Africa. In so doing, they have helped South Africa to impose apartheid and have encouraged a state whose policies they profess to abhor.

That is, these states, the US included, have taken the side of the apartheid regime and have, in fact, armed the white minority regime for the military confrontation which is now developing in southern Africa. □

#### A NOTE ON SOURCES

Data on arms deliveries to South Africa and weapons currently present in the South African weapon systems provided in the text and tables above have been derived from the following sources:

*The Military Balance 1976-1977*, International Institute for Strategic

Studies, London; *Almanac of World Military Power*, T. N. Dupay and Associates, New York, 1974; *Foreign Military Markets*, South Africa Force Structure, 1976, Defense Marketing Services, Greenwich, Conn.; *Southern Africa: The Escalation of a Conflict*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Stockholm, 1976, Appendix 1; *International Military Aircraft and Aviation Directory*, 1970 and 1976; Aviation and Advisory Services, Stapleford, Essex; *Defense and Foreign Affairs Handbook 1976-77*, Washington, D.C. and London, 1977; *Jane's Weapons Systems*, 1977, London, 1977; diverse government and industry sources.

Reprinted by permission from the August 1977 issue of *Southern Africa*.