

**Political Satire**

## **Stocking up on weapons for the holiday season**

By Paul Harris

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The United States invaded Iraq to locate and capture Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Since they couldn't find any, and since the U.S. refuses to accept Iraq's claims that the weapons were all destroyed pursuant to United Nations resolutions, the buggler must have sold or given them away to someone else. Common sense dictates that they were given away, since weapons make such great gifts.

As the end of another year approaches with its holiday season, and to encourage an all-out effort to bolster the world-wide economy, all the nations of the world should go out and buy some weapons. They can exchange them amongst their friends in the time-honoured ritual, or use them for surprise gift-giving. Weapons make great presents and it's hard to think of anyone who wouldn't be pleased to receive a sporty new weapon from a friend, or even as a surprise from people they hardly know.

They're the ideal gift for that hard-to-shop-for nation, there's a great supply of them in every shape and colour and potency imaginable, and you usually don't have to worry about wrapping them. Be cautious in your selections, though: if you do send them to some other nation as surprise gifts, be sure you know what you're buying because the vendor usually won't take them back if the recipient doesn't like them.

International trade in weapons has never been better and there is almost nothing that can't be bought with enough money. And we all know that when money talks, nobody criticizes its accent.

As this sector of the economy begins to revitalize, weapons are finding their way to the world's Malls of Mayhem from exciting new sources. It used to be that you could only count on a few reliable suppliers, like Britain and the United States; but now it's definitely a buyers' market. Following the breakup of the former Soviet Union, one of its former states has become an active and sizeable exporter of fine weaponry: Belarus. The buyer is urged to put aside any concerns over the hard-line leadership in Belarus and its close ties to Hussein's Iraq, and several other not-so-nice nations.

In the spirit of globalization, many arms manufacturers have decentralized their operating facilities. For instance, there is a particularly effective German assault rifle that is now manufactured in seventeen countries, most of whom do not have stringent export controls. So not only can you find the weapons to buy, with a little diligence you can usually avoid any import/export duties or pesky paperwork. This is 'globalized free trade' working as it was intended.

Reverse engineering has become a favorite way of avoiding the headaches and hassles of

having to develop your own products; just steal or buy someone else's stuff and take it apart to see how it is made, then build your own. Common wisdom has it that the North Koreans and the Chinese are especially good at this, once they figured out how to dismantle it without exploding it in their own faces. It is said that if you have the capability to build an automobile, you can probably build tanks and a whole lot of other weaponry as well.

But still, no one comes close to the United States in the manufacture and sale of weaponry; the best is still the best. The U.S. nets billions of dollars annually from arms exports, more than double the earnings of their closest competitor, Britain. In fact, the U.S. delivers almost half the weapons bought on the world market. Mind you, the purchaser knows that you get what you pay for: American weapons are top-notch and are fully field tested under all sorts of conditions, almost continuously, throughout the world.

For the most part, the United States does not sell weapons directly to the less savoury buyers: shady little transactions like the arms-for-hostages deal with Iran or the weapons sold to Iraq when it was useful to do so are not 'business-as-usual' for the Americans. But despite all the evidence to the contrary, American leadership is not stupid; they know full well that what is sold to the so-called friendly nations is very often just a sale to a middleman before the arms find their way into the hands of less friendly countries, or even less friendly terrorists. So you have to know that the U.S. don't see this as being a problem, at least not until it comes back to bite them in the butt.

It's an ever changing world out there with alliances that shift, develop, evaporate faster than most politicians can redefine the truth. A result of this is a lot of hand-me-down weaponry spread around the world. For instance, when the U.S. attacked Afghanistan in 2001, they were met with U.S.-made Stinger missiles left over from when the United States was supporting the Afghans against the Soviets. Iraq managed to invade Kuwait in 1990 using weaponry bought, at least in part, from the U.S. Sometimes these things, especially those laced with deadly depleted uranium, become the gifts that keep on giving, sort of like a meal at Taco Bell.

So long as there is profit to be made in the killing of someone somewhere, you can assume that weapons will continue to circle the globe and keep us on our toes as we enjoy an ever-shifting dance on the precipice.

According to a report released early in October 2004 by Oxfam, world-wide peace nuts are stepping up their efforts to develop a solid, workable, enforceable international arms trade treaty. They are concerned that arms sales have shown a dramatic increase since 2002. In fact, the increases are the largest expansion of the arms trade in over a decade as the world has finally got over the silly notion that the fall of the Soviet Union should have produced some sort of 'peace dividend'.

One of the concerns of a group which includes Oxfam, Amnesty International, and IANSA (International Action Network on Small Arms) is that a failure to control the sale of arms encourages worldwide lawlessness. The Director of IANSA, Rebecca Peters, says: "We know that an increase in the arms trade also means a rise in black market sales, as many small arms are diverted to human right abusers, warlords, terrorist groups and common criminals."

While it is clearly important to ensure that weapons remain in the hands of responsible paying customers who will kill only the right people, we should stand firm against efforts to curb the sale of arms. If weapons are not readily and freely available, our options for blowing each other into small bits are seriously curtailed and the entire economic infrastructure of mass murder could collapse. That sector of the economy has been in the doldrums over the past 15 years and is only now beginning to recover.

So do your part: urge officials in your country to get out there and buy some weapons. And once you have them, you might as well use them. Hell, there must be somebody out there you hate or who just needs to be taught a good lesson.

*Legal Disclaimer: For those of you who may be really stupid or who are humour-challenged and can't easily recognize satire squatting hoof-in-mouth right before your eyes, let me assure you I don't really want you to go out and buy weapons. If anyone gives you some, see if you can exchange them for a sweater or something. And for those of you who celebrate Christmas, here's hoping you wake up on that morning to the cheery sound of someone saying 'Merry Christmas' rather than someone screaming out 'Incoming!'*

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