Antitank missiles for Syrian rebels part of existing US arms trafficking mechanism

It is well-known in the intelligence community that the business of the US defence establishment is making war, and making sure that the world remains insecure for the sake of continued corporate profit.

The international arms market supplies terrorists and insurgents in a dozen African conflicts along with transshipment into stockpiles inside the EU and elsewhere. One country that has a special role in this mechanism is former Soviet Georgia. The convenient location sandwiched between competing hotspots and proxy wars is used as a transit point for advanced weapons, often from the US, that enter the unregulated international market.

US President Dwight Eisenhower is often quoted as fearing what would happen if the Military-Defense Establishment got out of control, and his portents are especially relevant in this day and age. For instance, the recent downing of at least two helicopters in Ukraine has many frothing at the mouth over the potential corporate and political profits to be gained from this action, especially those for some members of NATO, who need Russia to be perceived as the bad guy.

It is now beyond doubt that the overthrow of Assad in Syria is being treated in the same way. That conflict has become yet another proving ground for US weaponry.

A late April Washington Post article, ‘Syrian Rebels who Received First U.S. Missiles of War See Shipment as “an Important First Step”’ describes how the “Friends of Syria” have delivered surface to air missiles to the “U.S.-backed alliance of Western powers and Persian Gulf Arab states supporting the opposition Free Syrian Army.”

This article presents itself as a mild exposé, but it does not go nearly far enough. There is a lot it does not say, but should, as it is proven fact.

For instance, we are told not to worry about these arms supplies because this delivery was made on condition that the rebels will abide by an honour code “to return the canister of each missile fired, to not resell the weapons and to protect them from theft.”

Making such stipulations is on the same level as asking a hardcore heroin addict not to share needles and to practice safe sex to avert the spread of HIV and other blood borne diseases. If you give people arms, they will use them to achieve whatever ends they want and deal with questions later. Sooner or later such arms, whatever the model of the week, will have unintended consequences - call it blowback!

The article also fails to point out that the same sort of language is used on each and every end user certificate issued with an arms shipment. However, it is these same end user certificates which fuel war and mayhem and add to the corporate and political bottom line.

They are necessary because there are laws about who you can sell arms to, and for what purpose. Obviously therefore “rebel” or “terrorist” groups can only acquire them if a fake end used certificate is used. These cost money, but not as much as will be made from the sale.
Therefore fake end user certificates are a reliable source of lucrative cash for the individuals and countries willing to produce them. Democratic countries don’t do such things in the open, but they pay dependent patsies elsewhere to do them for them, and be the fall guy when appropriate. For every third world minister jailed for corruption there are many more who own houses in wealthier countries which they could never have bought with their declared income.

It should also be understood that, often, the real intention of these arms supplies is not even to support the latest “cause”. It is to make sure that various weapons and technology leak to other hotspots. The ramping up of the ongoing crisis in Ukraine is directly proportional to the potential for high tech weapons getting into the hands of the Kiev government, delivered from third parties either invisible or the “official” recipients of these supplies.

US Homeland Security has already documented weapons transfers

The mechanism for the covert supply of weapons to people who are forbidden from having them is well established. The cook book for doing so dates back to the days of Iran-Contra, and the same recipes are being followed when supplying to Turkey, Syria and a long list of other war zones. That is how everyone involved knows what is really going on, and the rules they have to follow. There is still honour amongst thieves, because there have to be trustworthy rules to get anything done.

The evidence is now in black and white. Documents obtained from Homeland Security itself state that US Defence Contractors have an established link with illegal weapons shipments in regions friendly to the United States, and that considerable effort has been made to refine the mechanism of these.

One among many examples is US HOMELAND SECURITY DOCUMENT No. 87352. This was intercepted by Georgian Officials and an American investigative journalist. It describes in detail how US weapons systems are covertly delivered using Ilyushin-76 cargo airplanes, belonging to a company called Air West Georgia, and accompanied by shady documents, AKA fake end user certificates.

The Georgian authorities have previously been provided with secret tapes and transcripts of the negotiations concerning similar shipments, which have even been published on Youtube. This document confirms that these follow the same well-established pattern, the accepted rules of the criminal game, and are not therefore the actions of rogue individual dealers. They are only done, and can only be done, with the full knowledge of a range of respectable democracies, including Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The transcript of the negotiations about one particular shipment, included in this document, shows the sender saying the following:

“Ah, the scheme of shipping one [container], I was pushing it onto Panalpina, or [another freight forwarder, local] who is ready to accept it [goods] and deliver it to the actual end user. From the time of dispatch from Europe the goods [are to] arrive in a rather timely fashion. So, in principle, the delivery time is eight to ten days. “ah, Ba... Baku or Tbilisi - Tbilisi; so forth, and... so on....”

The document then talks about an incident in which a number of men conspired to rob a number of containers in order to fulfil the supply order. Their leader was Zurab Gabunia from Poti, and the other members Zviad Kvikvinia, Noshrevan Kvirkvelia (they may have been relatives), Platon Silogava, Malxaz Alasania, gia Kukania, Temur Bolkvadze, Kandid Gagua, Zaal Gogia, Levan Shurgaia and Ednar Shavishvili.

Besik Kviraia worked as a driver at the Barwil Georgia terminal in Poti. According to court documents he fed the other gang members the necessary inside information. The robbery took place in 2009, on January 30, and was not the first undertaken by this gang. One of the Kamazi trucks used to extract the containers from the terminal was owned by Zurab Kvikvinia, the other owned by Kandid Gagua.

On January 31 these containers were found, the first in the yard of Noshrevan Kvirkvelia’s house in Poti and second at the junction of 8th March and Chaladidi Streets. Both Kamazi trucks were then found abandoned nearby. On August 7, 2009, the court sentenced all the gang members to ten years in prison, and a 4,000 GEL fine.

The court documents on this case say that the first container held 27,000 kg of black copper, and the second 27,430
kg of the same material. It also says that those arrested “did it for the money”, but “there is a real suspicion that [someone] needed this material for some different goal.”

Of course they did. The containers containing black copper were abandoned because they were the only ones without weapons in them. The Homeland Security document confirms that they were the “front” part of a US-sponsored arms shipment. The other containers involved were delivered to the final destination on schedule.

How does the mechanism work?

This document concerned a sale by an American company to the Barwil Freight Forwarding Company, which was run by the enforcers of the previous Georgian government, who are now mostly either under arrest or on the run themselves. Barwil is a CIA-backed company, with a historic link with the former Eduard Shevardnadze regime and various American East European arms traffickers, including some with known links to Mexico and the State of Arizona. Dillon Aero: M134 Gatling Gun, Miniguns, M134 Gun Systems, Naval Mounts, Helicopter Mounts, Vehicle Mounts

The details of the mechanism for making shipments, previously well-documented by local investigators and people working at the port, are confirmed by this document. There are two options a shipper can take, which are described in detail.

One option is to either present an end-user certificate from a different country, which is most often not a possibility. The other is for the shipping agency to manufacture one themselves, which will cost a couple more bucks but is highly effective, as it is also the mechanism which controls the flow of a massive slush fund used by those the US government most favours, including the Mikheil Saakashvilli regime in Georgia, which succeeded that of previous US favourite Shevardnadze but is now out of office, officially, for the time being.

As the undercover tapes reveal, this was a legal shipment from the United States but it was illegal for the destination country to receive it.

The transcript included in the document reads: “So in those documents which must be entered, the end-user must be clearly stated, because he is the payer ... and we need these documents. We must appear because ... that document which is included must be accurately drawn up in that regard, because not only did we pay, but we will be paid also.

“Customs procedures are different, you should understand that. They will only pay us money in two cases: if ah ... the final destination and the end-user of the goods will be right – the ones provided to customs.”

More snips of the transcript

It gets worse. Read on:

“The paperwork for Dillon [a US based arms dealer masquerading as an airline supply company which makes big donations to US politicians] is still going to have to be falsified.

But your customs doesn’t need to see the same paperwork. There are two sets of documents, but one that goes to Dillon. It is the typical contraband approach, that is, he says they will prepare two packets of documents; the product leaves with one and arrives with the other. In your set everything will be correct, just as you asked.

“...and deliver ‘em to [named country] if this makes [it] any cheaper for you or any faster for you, just... He is saying, believe me, there are [channels], don’t... don’t worry. This is not the first time we have moved something out, although we never [delivered anything] to that country. “I understand, and this is not our first day in this business either, that’s why we wanted to ... knowing our experience, provide the needed information which we [already] have. What does this entail? “Right... we have now determined that production is in process, transportation is ready, thank God ... and now, what correct entry documents do we need? “This is not going to be an aviation report: rather, it’s going to be an [issue] based on our instructions, [paperwork] has to be filled out clearly. Again, talking about this entire transportation route, which is quite complicated and long... “You’re gonna have the same safety for... for it being delivered this way, as if you did go through Dillon; it’s the same risk, of this part when it reaches Europe. So, I mean, it... it... is there but one in a million chance that something will go wrong, whether you go through Dillon or what... and have an end user certificate or not, there’s a one in million chance! “Don’t misunderstand [me]... well, basically... so... the first part of the answer is that the [end
user certificate] will be properly filled out. Please don’t worry about things that you don’t need to worry about. And secondly, regarding the delivery, don’t misunderstand [me]… whether you shipped it minimum 100% or you totally bought it legally from Dillon, it would still go because the export license from the United States is one of two hundred papers that need to be attached in order to transport it through Europe correctly. “It’s all… Well, it’s going to go according to [various] schemes. That’s why either this way or that, in reality we are still paying [to ensure] that everything turns out all right. Follow all our instructions and… what exactly should be in the customs document like… we are… as a contractor, whatever else, end user number of the contract… you wanted uh… this information to uh… to be given uh… to be put into the contract or just… used to meet with….”

This is but one transaction. As the people organising this shipment say in the transcript included in the document, they have been doing this for a long time. If you want to know where, watch the news, and see where US politicians pop up, supporting some armed struggle or other.

So what is going on now?

All these weapons are being dispatched via one country – Georgia, the regional illegal arms hub. This country has made a select few of its politicians rich by providing fake end user certificates, with the full knowledge of the US manufacturers and intelligence agencies, in deals alleged to brokered largely by Temur Alasania, uncle of former president Saakashvili.

The Washington Post article claimed that the shipment of surface to air missiles was the first advance of American weaponry to be dispatched to Syria since the conflict began, and has “reignited long-abandoned hopes” amongst the rebels that the Obama administration is going to provide significant military aid and, perhaps, help move the battlefield equation back in their favour.

However, it is documented that the Syrian rebels met with Western and local arms traffickers in Georgia prior to the new government coming to power in 2012. This cannot have been a social visit. There have also been other unofficial Georgian links to larger operational and financial mechanisms in Turkey, Israel, Azerbaijan and the Middle East, exactly of the sort described in the intercepted Department of Homeland Security document, which again do not exist, or exist where they do, for no reason.

As previously described in this journal, Omar Gorgashvili, an undercover arms dealer active throughout the region who is Georgian as his name implies, has been proven to be tied in with both the Georgian and American intelligence agencies. This clearly connects the US and Georgia, and other allies, with his activities, as these intelligence services would not let him get away with them unless they were profiting from the enterprise.

It is clear that the decision to supply state-of-the-art U.S.-made antitank missiles to Syria, and the intelligence services of other countries, is part of a larger mechanism. It has been run by the US through compliant partners since, at the very least, the time of Charlie Wilson’s war in Afghanistan, where it was also described in detail.

Why?

The supply of arms to Syria, now finally acknowledged, is part of a much larger mechanism which generates considerable profits for a certain few. Some of these people are politicians, but most are corporate executives. In both cases, they work hand in hand with intelligence agencies, whose necessary participation launders both the supplies and their profits by suggesting that a “good cause”, such as security or humanitarian interest, is what lies behind them.

Some people might think that knowing supplying arms in an illegal way is justified, if they will be used for a good cause. Do the US backed forces in Syria and Ukraine, who we are told are fighting for democracy, have the same understanding of what the word means, or the same understanding as the US?

No one has yet provided evidence that filling the pockets of executives is a cause anyone in Syria, Ukraine or any other trouble spot has ever wanted to fight and die for. Nor have they been asked, and nor will they ever be, if they are still alive to ask.

Henry Kamens, columnist, expert on Central Asia and Caucasus, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”.