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Industrial interests and weapons manufacturers do not always have the last word. A case in point occurred last October, when the president of Renault Trucks, Stefano Chmielewski announced the cancellation of the contract signed between the French-Swedish corporation (Renault Trucks is fully owned by Volvo in which Renault has a majority stake) and the Sudanese Giad

Motor Company to assemble trucks in Sudan. Television footage shows that government troops used such trucks during the repression against Darfur rebels.

According to Chmielewski, who made this statement at the Milipol 2011 World Internal Sraes Security Exhibition which took in place in Paris last October, the contract with GIAD was terminated by Renault Trucks at the end of 2008. And Renault Trucks President stressed that the decision was made “without external pressure”.



Chmielewski’s statement came after accusations by a consortium of NGOs that his company and the German trucks manufacturer MAN violated the UN arms embargo on “all non-governmental entities and individuals including the Janjaweed” imposed in 2004 by Security Council resolution 1556 which was extended a year later to all belligerents in Darfur including the Khartoum government. For the government of Sudan, it means that it is not allowed to transfer arms directly into Darfur without prior approval of the UN Sanctions Committee. The consortium, which brings together the Belgian-based International Peace Information Service (IPIS), TransArms from Chicago and the French-based Action Sécurité Éthique Républicaines (ASER), also claims that in addition, two European Common Positions on Sudan were also violated by the truck manufacturers. One adopted in 1994 imposes an embargo which prohibits EU member states from supplying arms, munitions and military equipment to any entity in Sudan. This embargo was expanded in 2004 to include a ban on technical, financial, brokering, transport and other assistance relating to military activities and equipment, says the report.

Accordingly, Janjaweed militias used in 2008 Renault Midlum 210.13 4×4 trucks assembled by Giad Automotive Industry Company, a joint venture set up by the Sudan Master Technology Engineering Co. Ltd (76%) and the Military Industry Corporation of Sudan (24%). Renault Trucks can hardly deny therefore the military nature of this operation. Moreover, states the report, Renault Trucks markets its vehicles as “militarisable” in flyers it distributes at Milipol or at similar industry events. The report also mentions the use of two Renault Trucks vehicles during the attack on Tourgoun, Tabo Fotto, Duwayr and Dibi villages, in Darfur, by a Janjaweed column on 25 March 2010. Two years before, in 2008, a Channel 4 documentary on Darfur included images of Giad manufactured Renault Midlum trucks by the Sudanese government-backed Janjaweed.

Nevertheless,
Stefano
Chmielewski
claims that these
trucks are not
weapons. Renault
Trucks argues that
the Red Cross and



the UN also use this kind of trucks for operations in Southern Sudan or Darfur. The French Foreign Affairs ministry also replied to IPIS that these trucks were not on a list of military items which need an export license. But the authors of the report are not satisfied with the answer and consider these facts as a violation of the EU and UN embargoes and also blame the French authorities for having a too narrow interpretation of what can be considered as a military item. In their report, the NGOs remind that Renault Trucks itself admitted in an e-mail to IPIS on the 30 June 2008 that “it was aware that in Sudan trucks are used to wage warfare”.

The report also reveals that Giad has assembled Man trucks under license and that in 2006, Sudan order 2,700 Man M2000 trucks to the German manufacturer. A UN Panel of Experts disclosed in a report published in 2009 that it had identified a Man truck mounted with an anti-aircraft gun, deployed by the

Sudanese Armed Forces in Darfur. Nonetheless, the German firm claims it has never authorised the militarization of its trucks, neither has it been informed by Giad about it. The company says it has decided since then to halt all business with its Sudanese partners.

However, these trucks are still being used by the warring parties in Darfur. The NGOs maintain their point of view that both Paris and Berlin should have prohibited from the start these exports, instead of interpreting in a loose way the UN and EU embargoes. Besides, beyond the legal aspects of the matter, the NGOs consider that the German and French–Swedish firms should have carried out a preliminary due diligence investigation before selling their material and authorising Giad to assemble the trucks under license. According to the NGOs, the European manufacturers should have known that there were high probabilities that their material could be used in the Darfur conflict.

Now, even assuming that Renault Trucks and Man do not supply anymore vehicles which end up in the hands of the Sudanese Armed Forces or Khartoum–backed militias, the problem remains. Indeed, as reminded the Khartoum daily Sudan Tribune, on the last 23 October, Giad is now militarising Toyota and Nissan trucks on behalf of the Sudanese army. One should remind of the disastrous impact of the Toyota jeeps and trucks, transformed into ‘technicals’ by the Somali militias who saw their power of destruction enhanced... Darfur civilians have still reasons to worry.

François Misser

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