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Arms Sales and Obfuscation: the Hypocrisy of France

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Publication date: Thursday 18 June 2020

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Madame Florence Parly, Ministre des Armées

Saintes, 18 June 2020

Copies to the President, the PM, etc, and to the media

Subjects:

France's Arms Sales to Nations at War

Mme Parly's reply to Christophe Bouillon MP

French Nuclear Strategy

Madame la Ministre,

We thank you for surrounding yourself with such brilliant exponents of obfuscation.

M. Christophe Bouillon, MP for Seine Maritime, had asked you a question about arms sales to Saudi Arabia (Written Question N° 24666 published in the JO on 26 November 2019, page 10216). That question was well-argued, clear and precise and only 1212 characters long (including spaces). It called for a reply no less clear and precise.

It took your collaborators and yourself over 6 months and exactly 4280 characters (including spaces) to fail to reply, indeed to muddy the issue (Reply of 9 June 2020 in the JO, page 4028). Referring to the war in Yemen, M. Bouillon had requested "the suspension of arms transfers to the countries in the Saudi-led coalition" because this coalition was using the weapons "against civilian populations, the first victims of the conflict in Yemen since 2015, a conflict described by the UN as 'the worst humanitarian crisis in the world'". He asked also that the "government's means of monitoring exercised by parliamentarians should be able to be applied on the basis of more transparent reports on arms contracts."

So, in the matter of the war in Yemen, you succeeded in suggesting that when France granted export licenses to Saudi Arabia and the UAE (United Arab Emirates), involved in the conflict since 2015, this was to help them protect their populations from aggression which "could come from Yemen or elsewhere" - yet the only examples you quote are hostile acts against their material interests committed by Iran in 2019!

As for the fact that Saudi Arabia and its allies have used French weapons against the Yemeni population, you do not

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deny it, you don't even mention it, but you pretend to exonerate France by assuring us of "particular vigilance", of "particular attention" for "risks of exported arms being diverted to third parties, and risks linked to arms use against civilian populations or under conditions contrary to international humanitarian law."

You mention in conclusion the "transparency" of the "annual report on arms exports" which is supposed to enable Parliament to monitor these activities a posteriori. But what Bouillon blamed the government for was precisely its lack of transparency, and the reply received, in which no word was said of past arms contracts with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, or of the use they made and continue to make of these arms in Yemen - is certainly not a reply that could convince us otherwise.

In return for this sinister silence, the UAE was accredited as a sponsor of the "Peace Games" at the 2nd Paris Peace Forum, on 12 November 2019. At this stage it is more than bad faith, is it cynical complicity in crimes against humanity!

You are mocking us all, Madame la ministre, just as you did when you praised (in a tweet on 24 March 2020) the "commitment" or an "A330 Phénix" of the air force in transporting coronavirus victims from the Mulhouse hospital to that of Brest, and then used the same plane on 31 March to simulate a nuclear strike in the skies of Brittany, along with other planes, one of which was armed with a 300 kiloton missile (20 times bigger than Hiroshima) !

How many million deaths abroad will France's military gain authorisation for on the basis of the transport of a few patients during the pandemic? - and by retaliation in France in the "after-world"? For how long will France's taxpayers have to keep on financing this criminal folly"!

Cf. ["A New World? April Fools!"](#)

Christophe Bouillon is not the only MP to raise these questions. In a 6-minute video which you should watch, Madame la ministre, Sébastien Nadot MP denounces "State Deception" in France's arms sales. Deception that matches France's nuclear strategy, a fabric of lies and myths which your predecessor M. Paul Quilès continues to denounce.

You are, Madame la ministre, a fine example of French double language, duplicity, hypocrisy and cynicism concerning respect for international humanitarian law, as also in disarmament matters, conventional or nuclear. There is nothing there to be proud of. As citizens we are ashamed of that France.

In the "after-world" we are entering, Madame, the government you belong to needs to urgently change its discourse and its posture, put France's defense in line with her commitments, her Constitution, her republican values, and simply in line with reason.

"This is not a prayer, it is an order that must rise from the peoples to the governments, the order to choose between hell and reason" (Albert Camus, *Combat*, 8 August 1945)

For ACDN
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Question submitted on 26 November 2019

M. Christophe Bouillon, MP, asks Mme Parly (France's "ministre des armées") about France selling arms to countries where they can be used against civilians. France has decided to halt arms exports to Turkey in view of the conflict in the north of Syria. Nevertheless, French arms sales continue to some countries with controversial practices, notably Saudi Arabia and the UAE (United Arab Emirates). Several elements seem to prompt a strong suspicion that French weapons are being used by the Saudi regime and its allies against civilian populations, the first victims of the fighting in Yemen, which began in 2015 and which the UN has described as "the worst humanitarian crisis in the world". In October 2018, the conflict in Yemen led Germany to freeze arms exports to Saudi Arabia; in June 2019, the UK did the same. Bouillon therefore asks the minister to suspend arms transfers to the countries in the coalition led by Saudi Arabia. He asks also that parliamentarians should receive the ability to monitor the government's decisions on the basis of more transparent reports about arms transfers.

Reply released on 9 June 2020

Concerning Turkey, when the Council met on 14 October 2019, the foreign ministers of EU member states debated the action led by Turkey in north-east Syria and reached several conclusions. One of these was a commitment by member states "in favour of strong national positions concerning policies for arms exports to Turkey, based on the common position statement 2008/944/PESC about the monitoring of arms exports, including strict application of the fourth criterion, which concerns regional stability". France for her part had decided, on October 12, to adopt restrictive measures about exports of arms that could be used by Turkey in its offensive, suspending nearly 500 valid licences, and also refusing future licensing.

Concerning the war in Yemen, one must recall that Saudi Arabia and the UAE are obliged to defend their territories against territorial aggressions, and against their civilian populations. These aggressions can come from Yemen or elsewhere, as is seen in the Iranian attacks on a major oil facility in Arabia, and the mining of several ships off the coast of the Emirates. In this context, these two nations benefit from the support of other western partners in their struggle against terrorism and to ensure their own security. It therefore seems totally legitimate to authorise certain exports and to consider, if needed, remediation measures for inappropriate use, in conformity with the relevant rules and principles set by international law. In this matter France is particularly vigilant about the risk of arms being diverted to third parties, and the risks linked to arms use against civilian populations or in conditions contrary to international humanitarian law. Generally speaking, particular attention is paid to all risks and potential negative consequences whenever a request is made for authorisation to export arms, and this is in conformity with France's international obligations. This instruction rests on a systematic case-by-case analysis of all requests for licences. Indeed a study is done for each type of equipment, based on strengthened criteria, in order to respect international humanitarian law. The only requests granted are those concerning the meeting of the legitimate needs of the countries in question, and not contravening France's international obligations - the common position statement 2008/944/PESC, adopted by the EU Council on 8 December 2008 defines the common rules controlling the exporting of technologies and military equipment, as does the Treaty on Arms Trading which entered into force on 24 December 2014.

The issuing of export permits thus takes account of many considerations that form part of our international commitments and our respecting of arms embargos imposed by international organisations. It also takes account of the issues of regional or international stability and security, and the protection of our forces and those of our allies. Finally, the annual report on arms exports, which has been provided to MPs since the start of the 21st century, presents, with documentation, the arms export policies established by the government for each nation dealt with and for each category of equipment considered. This report details in particular the permits issued, the chief agents, the principal contracts, and the exports completed. This exercise in governmental transparency towards elected representatives therefore enables parliamentary monitoring to take place a posteriori, notably in the context of the National Assembly's debates in the National Defense and Armies Commission, after this annual report is presented.