

SA's arms dealing underworld

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FRESH evidence of South African arms fuelling civil wars in the killing fields of Rwanda, former Yugoslavia and Angola is threatening to eclipse the long-awaited findings the Cameron Commission is about to present to President Nelson Mandela.

The report Judge Edwin Cameron, appointed last year to investigate irregular arms deals since 1990, is expected to deliver to Mandela next week is described by insiders as "hard-hitting".

But it is becoming increasingly clear that evidence evaluated to date by the commission will expose only a fraction of the underworld inhabited by South African arms manufacturers and dealers.

The Cameron Commission was set up by Defence Minister Joe Modise after revelations last September that a large consignment of rifles and ammunition, brokered by Armscor, and ostensibly destined for Lebanon, was heading for Yemen, a country then in the final throes of civil war.

The commission focused almost exclusively on the Yemen deal – which was aborted about the time it became public – during the first leg of its inquiry. A "second leg" later this year is to look at other post – 1990 deals.

A report released this week by the United States-based Human Rights Watch, and new evidence gleaned from

independent investigations, shows that Cameron's upcoming task will be no small feat.

Evidence points to South Africa's involvement in rearming the defeated Hutu forces held responsible for a million deaths in Rwanda last year; to two shipments of South African arms in 1992 ending up in the former Yugoslav republic of Croatia in contravention of a United Nations (UN) embargo; and to a South African role in arms consignments to Angola's Unita rebel movement, also in contravention of a UN embargo and South African government policy.

Mandela's Cabinet this week asked Modise to investigate the Rwanda charges, which may threaten South Africa's relations with the new Rwandan government.

TERS Ehlers, PW Botha's former private secretary and the man implicated this week by the Human Rights Watch in the rearming of Rwanda's defeated Hutu-led forces, is no stranger to arms deals and international [?]

More intriguing, though, is the US-based human rights group's charge that South African arms consignments to the Hutu forces continued in February and March this [?]

Human Rights Watch said in a report that France, Zaire, South Africa and China had all helped rearm Rwan-

da's Hutu forces, who took refuge in Zaire after their defeat last year by the Rwanda Patriotic Front.

The Hutu army and militias are being held responsible for as many as a million deaths during the genocide in Rwanda. Ehlers is named in the report as having played a role in two flights of arms last June from the Seychelles to Goma, a Zairean town on the Rwanda border and the site of some large Hutu refugee camps.

The report says that Colonel Theoneste Bagasora, a senior Hutu military leader now sought internationally for his alleged role in the downing of the presidential plane that sparked the genocide, met South African officials in May and June last year to arrange [?]

The officials said they could not help directly – South Africa officially stopped supplying Rwanda a year previously – but “offered to help arrange shipments by other parties”.

Bagasora and a Zairean government representative then met Ehlers, after which Air Zaire transported the [?]

Ehlers, a navy commodore tipped to be Chief of the Navy before then – Defence Minister Magnus Malan seconded him to Botha, is known to have remained in the international armaments market, and to have close ties with several African presidents.

Also closely connected to controversial Italian businessman Mario Chiavelli, Ehlers in 1990 became managing director of the South African branch of the Seychelles-based conglomerate GMR, widely held to have played a sanctions-busting role.

The South African branch was established in the 1980s by South African “superspy” Craig Williamson.

Ehlers refused to comment this

week, but it is understood he does not deny involvement in last June's flights to Zaire. The contention is that he was not aware the weapons would have gone to the Hutu forces : he had facilitated a contract strictly between the governments of the Seychelles and Zaire.

The Mail and Guardian has information that Ehlers had originally negotiated with a South African air charter company to fly the weapons, before the contract went to Air Zaire.

More disturbing, perhaps, is the cryptic assertion by Human Rights Watch that “several planeloads of arms” were flown directly from South Africa to Zaire in February and March this year.

The report says no more, but it is understood detailed information exists on how a Zaire-based air charter company with close South African links filed false flight plans from Zaire to Swaziland, only to divert to [?]

Although Armscor this week denied involvement, it said : “It may well be that South African-manufactured arms found their way clandestinely to Rwanda.” Armscor said the last officially-sanctioned South African arms shipments to the Hutu forces, then still in power in Rwanda, had been in February 1993.

Meanwhile it has emerged that Francois Bararwerekana, consul of the former Rwandan regime in South Africa and procurer of arms for the Hutu forces, was granted political asylum by the Department of Home Affairs in November last year “as he will be persecuted” in [?]

A representative of the new Rwandan government, which has good relations with South Africa, this week charged that Bararwerekana was

“connected with the genocide”.

COMPELLING evidence suggests two 1992 shiploads of Armscor weaponry ended up in Croatia in contravention of a United Nations arms embargo against the former Yugoslav states embroiled in civil war.

Like the aborted Yemen arms shipment last September that led to the Cameron inquiry, elusive Middle-East arms dealer Eli Wazan had a hand in the 1992 transactions. And like the Yemen consignment, the stated destination was Lebanon.

The armaments, including mines, thousands of mortar rounds and tens of thousands of rounds of shotgun and rifle ammunition, left South African ports aboard the Anke in February 1992 and the Sky Bird in June that [?]

Investigations by Danish newspaper *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten* last week – confirmed by Lloyd’s Maritime Information Services – discovered that neither ship had gone to Lebanon.

The Anke sailed from Durban to the Croatian port of Rijeka, where it docked on March 13. Sky Bird left Cape Town on June 13 and docked in Marseilles on July 3 before arriving at the tiny Italian port of Marina di Carrara on July 8.

The Sky Bird’s cargo would have been clandestinely diverted to Croatia from Marina di Carrara or en route to the Turkish port of Iskendrun, the ship’s next port of call. The UN tightened its arms embargo on Croatia in May 1992 – between the two shipments – which would have prevented the Sky Bird from delivering its cargo

Details of the shipments emerged in March this year when the Cameron Commission heard testimony in Switzerland from Danish-American shipper Michael Steenberg and Joseph der

Hovsepien, a Lebanese arms dealer based in Germany.

Der Hovsepien said Wazan had bought the consignment, which included both shipments, from Armscor and “the arms were transported from South Africa to a country by Steenberg”. Neither Der Hovsepien nor Steenberg would reveal the country.

Exhibits handed to the commission include a copy of the Sky Bird bill of lading, which denotes the port of discharge as Beirut, and the port of loading as Singapore-previously used by Armscor as decoy.

Armscor said : “Armscor at no stage until after the completion of the transactions suspected ... that the weapons were destined for Croatia. It does, however, appear from information that later came to the attention of Armscor that the weapons that were shipped to Lebanon could possibly have landed up in Croatia.”

A CLANDESTINE call at “Unita’s port” by a vessel that previously carried Armscor weapons adds to mounting evidence that South Africans have continued supplying Angola’s rebels in contravention of government and UN [?]

The Sky Bird, also implicated in a June 1992 Armscor shipment that appears to have landed in Croatia, left Cape Town on October 13 1992, the same day Foreign Affairs Minister Pik Botha met Unita leader Jonas Savimbi on a last-ditch “rescue mission” as Angola slipped back into full-scale civil war.

Heavy fighting had erupted in the capital, Luanda, two days before when Unita rejected its defeat in UN-supervised elections.

Investigations by the M and G and *Morgenavisen Jyllands – Posten* reveal

that Department of Customs and Excise documentation – which denotes the Sky Bird’s cargo as “nil” and the port of destination as Luanda-conflicts with its true mission.

PortNet documentation shows that the Sky Bird docked at Cape Town’s container terminal where 33 containers were loaded. Lloyd’s Maritime Information Services records show that the vessel never called at Luanda; instead it docked at Matadi, a Zairean port on the border with northern Angola.

Experts on the Angolan situation this week pointed out that Matadi has been known to be used by Unita. Zaire, an active supporter of Unita, allowed

free cross-border

Jorgen Pouosen, the Danish operator of the vessel, this week denied the vessel had ever been to Matadi, claiming Lloyd’s records would back him up. Pouosen is internationally known as an arms shipper, and was also the agent for the Arktis Pioneer, the vessel involved in last year’s aborted Armscor shipment to Yemen that led to the Cameron Commission of inquiry. He was fined by Denmark in the 1980s for shipping arms to South [?]

Armscor this week said it had “nothing to do” with the Sky Bird’s October 1992 voyage.