

„Shut Down Heckler & Koch“ in Nottingham

by Roman Deckert

**Translation from the newsletter of the German Action Network to Stop Small Arms (DAKS),
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On October 14th, 2008, activists of „Nottingham against Militarism and the Arms Trade“ in the Mid-Eastern English city protested against the British subsidiary of the German small arms producer Heckler & Koch (H&K). About forty protesters staged a colourful demonstration at the gate of the industrial Eastern Park to demand: „Shut Down H&K“.

The Campaign „Notts Anti-Militarism“ has been organising such protests for more than a year and is doing so now on a monthly basis. The presence of H&K in Nottingham causes particular outrage since the city is notorious for its high rate of gun crimes. It is all the more grotesque that the peaceful demonstrators are frequently confronted by a massive number of police equipped with H&K weapons. The activists react to the photo-surveillance that the „security forces“ exercise by publishing photographs of the police observers on the internet.

According to the organisers the police and the H&K press department have repeatedly warned local media against reporting about the demonstrations – with the alarming line of reasoning that criminals could be inspired to break into the company's premises. However, H&K's address is publicly available at „1st Directory“ and other open sources. Even the ground plan of the building is accessible through the online data base of the municipal authorities.

In contrast, the activities of the British branch of H&K are much more obscure. H&K's homepage informs that Heckler & Koch Great Britain is responsible for “international customer sales and customer services outside NATO”. The managing director at H&K Nottingham (NSAF) Mike Thornton has stated in the company newsletter „The Magazine“ (2/2006) that it is „*a small technical / commercial / distribution unit*“.

At least until the 1990s the Oberndorf based armoury used its English branch to get round German export laws. Documents of the British Ministry of Defence at the National Archive give evidence that H&K entered into a partnership with the Royal Ordnance Factories in Enfield in 1970 to gain access to markets like Nigeria and Ghana that were barred from West Germany. During the 1980s H&K submachine guns were delivered via this roundabout way to Yugoslavia. Even the gun friendly magazine „VISIER“ noted in 1993 that H&K used to transfer component kits for assembly to Enfield in order to „*evade German export restrictions*“.

In the same year H&K general director Walter Lamp was taken to court in the town of Rottweil and accused of having transferred rifle kits via England to Dubai without the permission of the German government. However, he was acquitted by the district court which reasoned that he had acted in a legal grey area. The counsel for the defence of the arms manager was Siegfried Kauder, who is now a member of the Federal parliament for the conservative party CDU and who is the brother of the party whip in the Bundestag. The German weekly „Zeit“ reported in 2007: „Volker Kauder, who represents a constituency where H&K is based, has always been a powerful supporter of the company. Any

connection between large-scale donations from H&K to the regional CDU organisation and Kauder's assistance to Heckler and Koch has always been denied.“ In this context it is striking that H&K's main owner Andreas Heeschen who resides in London maintains excellent relations with the British conservative party. The electoral commission registered donations of altogether £ 86.643,68 from Heeschen to the Tories since 2006.

Roman Deckert is an arms analyst at the Berlin Information-Centre for Transatlantic Security (BITS) and Board Member of the Freiburg based Armaments Information Office (RIB).

Origin of H&K G36 rifles in Georgia still undisclosed

by Roman Deckert (RIB / BITS)

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The Federal Government of Germany continues to delay the uncovering of the origin of those Heckler & Koch G36 assault rifles that have been used in combat by Georgian elite troops during the South Ossetian War in August of this year. On October 17th the Permanent Undersecretary of the Ministry of Economics, Dr. Bernd Pfaffenbach, in his reply to the inquiry of the Green Party's faction in the Federal Parliament (Document: Bundestagsdrucksache 16/10435) made clear that there is no official interest in a quick solution of the affair. Asked what the German embassy in Tbilisi, the staff of the German military attaché, German members of international military missions and / or of the intelligence services knew of the matter he answered vaguely: „Indications that G36 rifles might possibly be used by Georgian forces are being investigated by official authorities.“

Reacting to questions about the particular “investigations” – especially about efforts to learn the serial numbers – Pfaffenbach merely referred back to this evading answer. He confirmed, however, that in the case of a violation of the end user certificate all issuing of licenses for arms exports would have to be stopped to the original recipient state which illegally re-exported the G36 to Georgia. This statement thus only strengthens the impression that the disclosure of the identity of the offending country would cause tremendous political problems and is getting protracted for this reason. While pursuing such a strategy of delay in this regard, the German government has recently promised the Georgian government to fund the reconstruction of war damages with 34 Million €. Furthermore, it will contribute another 100 Million € of German tax payers' money to EU-programmes for the same purpose. Hence it appears that the Georgian government does not have to be concerned about getting under possible pressure to disclose the serial numbers which could easily identify the route of the illegal transfer. The German Foreign Office at the same time praises its own leading role in the current discussions about an international Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) to combat international arms trafficking.

Roman Deckert is an arms analyst at the Berlin Information-Centre for Transatlantic Security (BITS) and Board Member of the Freiburg based Armaments Information Office (RIB).

Heckler & Koch's role in the Thai-Cambodian conflict

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Last month open fighting erupted between Thailand and Cambodia claiming the lives of four soldiers. The cause for the clash was a historic border dispute about the temple of Preah Vihear which in July had been declared a world heritage site by UNESCO. Photographs from the fighting scene show that the Thai troops used Heckler & Koch (H&K) Hk33 assault rifles amongst other weapons.

German armament exports to Thailand have got a long tradition. Already back in the 1920s the Berlin based company Fritz-Werner-AG set up the royal Thai arsenal. This cooperation was continued soon after the end of WWII. In 1975 the then state-owned company delivered a complete ammunition plant for Calibre 5.56mm to Bangkok. At the same time H&K set up a license production for the HK33 there. The Foreign Office in Bonn considered it „*inappropriate*“ to deny Thailand what Burma had been granted. The rivalling neighbour country had purchased in 1960 the license to produce the G3 rifle on which the HK33 was based. Before the Thai production of HK33 started, the armoury in Oberndorf supplied the Thai forces with 48.900 HK33 according to documents from the archives of the German Foreign Office. The Thai press reported that H&K paid massive bribes to officials in Bangkok.

Soon after those deliveries the Burmese army confiscated HK33 from insurgents. The small arms expert Dr. Edward Ezell learnt that Cambodian rebels were armed with H&K MP5-submachine guns and the HK33-offspring HK53, apparently from Thai stocks as well. Furthermore, rumours have been confirmed that Thailand violated the end user certificate by selling thousands of HK33 to the Pinochet junta in Chile. In 1995, the then army chief of Ecuador Victor Bayas stated later, 3.000 of those HK33 were supplied by Chile to Ecuador which was at war with Peru at that time.

Moreover, H&K exported MP5 to Thailand, where they were used to execute the capital punishment, as the former hangman Chavoret Jaruboon writes in his memoirs. Remarkably, the regional office of H&K for sales to South East Asia is still in Bangkok. Despite severe conflicts in the Southern part of the country and notoriously frequent coup d'états the German government issued licenses for the export of small arms to Thailand with a total value of more than 11 Million € since 2002. These transfers included large numbers of top-modern G36 assault rifles as many photographs show. Also, in the past few years some pictures have been published of Burmese army soldiers carrying HK33. This has given reason to suspect that Thailand as a main trade partner of Burma may have transferred its old machinery for the production of HK33 to the military dictatorship of Myanmar.

Cambodia on the other side has not received direct deliveries of H&K weapons. But the Asian Human Rights Commission has reported that in July 2008 the journalist Khim Sambor and his son were shot dead in Phnom Penh with an H&K submachine gun. Therefore it only seems to be a matter of time until the first G36 enter the black markets from Thailand.

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