ADVENTURES OF A WOULD-BE ARMS DEALER

I HAD TAKEN REFUGE IN KIGALI’S STADIUM—THE UN’S HEADQUARTERS DURING THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE.

I HAD BEEN Hired TO ORGANIZE AN ILLICIT ARMS DEAL AS A WAY OF TESTING THE STRENGTH OF EXPORT CONTROL SYSTEMS.

AS I FLEw INTO KIGALI, MY THOUGHTS FLOATED BACK TO THE HORRORS OF 1994.

I HAD BEEN AMONG THE PRIVILEGED FEW... BUT NOW I WAS BACK ON A SPECIAL MISSION.

MY FIRST TASK WAS TO MEET CHARLES—AN OLD CONTACT WHOSE PICKUP I HAD RENTED IN '94. I WAITED IN THE BACK OF A BAR.

SORRY I'M LATE, RED. MY WIFE... SHE'S THREATENING TO LEAVE ME. I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO. I NEED A DRINK!

SHE SAYS MY DEFENCE MINISTRY SALARY IS A DISGRACE, THAT I'M A DRUNK, THAT SHE WANTS NEW CLOTHES...

NOW, NOW...

WHERE IS HE?

I NEED ANOTHER BEER, RED
After he had produced a mountain of empties, I made my move...

Take this, Charles.

Charles blinked and then nodded. If he decided to rat on me, I would argue that he'd been so drunk he misunderstood me.

You can have three more of these if you bring me a blank, signed end-user certificate tomorrow night.

My next beer run proved futile. Charles had already passed out.

I'll get you a cab, buddy.

I spent the next day anxiously pacing around my hotel room.

When I arrived at the bar that evening, Charles was already there.

As I brought over the ritual beers, Charles placed an envelope on the upturned crate next to my stool.

Inside the envelope was the EUC as I had requested it: on Ministry of Defence letterhead, signed...
WITH THE EUC TUCKED SAFTLY IN MY INSIDE POCKET, I HANDED CHARLES THE PROMISED CASH.

I BOUGHT ANOTHER ROUND FOR CHARLES AND THE BARTENDER AND KEPT A DISCREET EYE ON THE TIME.

THE NEXT DAY—ON MY HOTEL BALCONY IN CYPRUS—I BEGAN TO FILL IN THE EUC BLANKS.

THEN I CAUGHT THE LAST PLANE TO CYPRUS. PHASE II COULD BEGIN.

WITH THE EUC, I COULD PRETEND THAT THE RWANDAN ARMED FORCES HAD HIRED ME TO SOURCE MUNITIONS FOR THEM. WHY NOT 2 MILLION ROUNDS OF AMMUNITION?

I have an EUC made out to my company from the Government of Rwanda.

I knew that Ampro, a Bulgarian ammunition producer, had supplied Rwanda in the past. I sent a fax requesting a quote.

Please advise availability, price, and packaging for 2,000,000 rounds of 7.62 x 39 mm ex. Bulgarian port.

A speedy response.

TIME OUT.
THEN I WAITED AND WAITED I NOTICED THAT THE AMOUNT OF AMMO I'D REQUESTED WAS ENOUGH TO KILL EVERYONE IN CYPRUS TOURISTS INCLUDED.

TWICE OVER.

AMPRO'S REPLY CAME THAT SAME EVENING.

Further to your request, please find below the required data:

- 7.62 x 39 mm rounds
- Quantity: 2,000,000 rounds
- Year of manufacture: 1978
- Price: USD 401.000 per FOB Bulgarian port
- Packing: 2 metal boxes x 700 = 1,400 pcs in one wooden case
- Case dimensions: 450 x 360 x 160 mm
- Gross weight: 30 kg
- Volume: 0.024 m³
- Number of cases: 1,409

WAS IT BECAUSE THEY WERE MANUFACTURED IN 1978 AND NOT GETTING A BIT OLD AND LESS RELIABLE?

AMPRO PRICED A SINGLE BULLET AT USD 0.064.

WHY SO CHEAP?

AND WHY DIDN'T AMPRO'S FAX SPECIFY THAT THE ORDER WOULD BE EXPORT LICENSABLE ONLY IF IT MET EU CODE OF CONDUCT CRITERIA?

CRITERION FOUR

Preservation of regional peace, security and stability

Member States will not issue an export licence if there is a clear risk that the intended recipient would use the proposed export aggressively against another country or to assert by force a territorial claim.

When considering these risks, EU Member States will take into account inter alia:

- the existence or likelihood of armed conflict between the recipient and another country:

THE ANSWER IS NO, RED NO.

BOSS, THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT WHETHER AMPRO IS WILLING TO TURN A BLIND EYE - I NEED TO PAY A DEPOSIT TYPICALLY 20%.

?!%*!!!?...

NO!
THIS WASN'T THE END OF MY ADVENTURE, HOWEVER. IT WAS TIME FOR PHASE III. NEXT STOP: GUERNSEY, CHANNEL ISLANDS - GENTEEL TOURIST RESORT...

AND HOME TO A LOT OF REMARKABLY ANONYMOUS FRONT COMPANIES, SOME OF THEM OPERATED BY THE WORLD'S MOST NOTORIOUS GUNRUNNERS.

FROM GUERNSEY, I WOULD HAVE A PLUSABLE AREA CODE WHEN TRYING TO ARRANGE A SHADY SHIPMENT DEAL.

I WASTED NO TIME. I CALLED MAXIM SAMOLETOV, A RUSSIAN AIRPLANE OWNER BASED IN DUBAI, UAE.

MR. SAMOLETOV?

YES.

SAMOLETOV HAD BEEN ON THE UN SANCTIONS COMMITTEE'S RADAR SCREEN FOR OPERATING AN OLD ANTONOV AN-8 WITH CONNECTIONS TO KNOWN ARMS DEALERS.

SIR, MY PRINCIPALS HAVE ASKED ME TO FIND AN AIRCRAFT TO FLY FROM YEMEN TO GPS COORDINATES IN CENTRAL SOUTHERN SOMALIA...

... AND THEN PARACHUTE-DROP AMMUNITION FROM THE AIRCRAFT.

HE'LL NEVER BUY THIS!

WE NEED TO DROP ABOUT FOUR METRIC TONS OF AMMUNITION AND THE FLIGHT OVER SOMALIA WILL NOT BE DECLARED WE WOULD ALSO NEED YOU TO SOURCE CARGO PARACHUTES.
AND MR. SAMO LETOV, SINCE THERE IS NO SURVEILLANCE OF AIRCRAFT IN THE REGION, WE EXPECT THIS WILL NOT BE A PROBLEM FOR YOU.

SEND ME YOUR REQUEST BY FAX, PLEASE.

SURELY SAMO LETOV KNEW THAT A UN ARMS EMBARGO PROHIBITS THE SUPPLY OF ARMS TO ANY SOMALI GROUP, INCLUDING THE TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT.

AND HE DEFINITELY WASN'T GOING TO APPLY TO THE UN SANCTIONS COMMITTEE FOR AN EXEMPTION.

I SENT HIM A FAX WITH QUANTITIES, VOLUMES AND WEIGHTS, AND A DESIRED DELIVERY SCHEDULE.

Dear Mr. Samoletov,

As discussed earlier today, I confirm that my principals are interested in a charter of your aircraft for two flights from an airstrip in western Yemen to GPS coordinates in central southern Somalia, such flights to be undertaken in approximately three weeks’ time. I need to know...

Flight No.

AFTER A LONG, MEDITATIVE STROLL, I WOUND UP IN A GOURMET RESTAURANT—BUT I COULDN'T TASTE A THING.

THE NEXT MORNING I NOTICED THAT A FAX HAD BEEN SLIPPED UNDER THE DOOR.
Dear Sir,

We need to know distance between point of departure and destination to determine alternate airport. We would like to receive in advance total amount $200,000 for aircraft positioning.

The cost of each flight will be $50,000 plus ground expenses and fuel required. Await your reply.

Regards,
Maxim Samoletov

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SAMOLETOV WAS PLANNING TO DECLARE ANOTHER DESTINATION BUT NEEDED IT TO BE THE SAME DISTANCE FROM THE YEMEN PORT.

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NO DOUBT SAMOLETOV'S PLANES WERE REGISTERED UNDER FLAGS OF CONVENIENCE—PERHAPS UNDER SÃO TOMÉ'S...

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DECLARED ROUTE ———— ACTUAL ROUTE

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NO ONE SEEMED INTERESTED IN PREVENTING HIS AIRCRAFT FROM FLYING INTO AND OUT OF CERTAIN AIRPORTS...

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SO WHAT KIND OF A PROFIT WERE WE TALKING ABOUT?

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MY INVESTMENT INVOLVED PAYING POOR CHARLES A MEASLY USD 200.
The purchase and shipping of the Ampro ammo would have cost about USD 160,000...

The transport would have cost no more than USD 350,000...

And since my own travel and hotel costs were minimal, the total investment would hover around half a million dollars.

Assuming a bullet sells for about USD 0.75 in Somalia, the shipment would have sold for USD 1.5 million.

That translates into a tidy profit of... USD 1 million.

No additional ammunition was made, or induced to be made, in the course of this exercise. Names of individuals and companies have been changed.