

## **Purple Shovel Exposed in Illegal Weapons Smuggling Operations**

*v4vapid (71) in weapons-smuggling • last year*

ANA\_soldier\_with\_RPG-7\_in\_2013-cropped.jpg

In my previous post, we looked at private contractors Orbital ATK and the Chemring Group who are involved in a large scale weapons smuggling operation originating in Eastern Europe and extending to destinations all across the Middle East.

Depleted Uranium and White Phosphorus Part of Massive Weapons Smuggling Operation Involving US Contractors

Silkway Airlines Diplomatic Flights Used to Ship Billions Worth of Weapons from Eastern Europe to the Middle East

The story of weapons being smuggled from countries such as Bulgaria and Serbia through western private contractors and by way of Silkway Airlines was first reported on by Bulgarian Trud reporter Dilyana Gaytandzhieva. Dilyana's investigative work was bolstered by leaks made on Twitter by Anonymous Bulgaria.

Anonymous Bulgaria on Twitter hacked Azer Embassy in Bulgaria. Full backup files diplomatic emails. Military Cargo on SilkWay for terrorists <https://t.co/jtLuD1bKns> .png

Diplomatic Flights Carry Weapons for Terrorists

Previously, we explored how private contractors supplied "non-standard" weapons and ammunition to SOCOM (Special Operations Command) and US allies. In this piece, I will examine the role of another US based private contractor at the heart of this story - Purple Shovel LLC.

PurpleShovel\_A\_Full\_Lockup\_F2\_2 (1).png  
<http://www.purpleshovel.com/>

Purple Shovel is a Veterans Administration (VA) certified Service Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) founded in 2010. Purple Shovel affords its clients a single point of contact to transport materials and aid anywhere in the world, including remote regions inaccessible to others.

### **Purple Shovel Quick Facts**

CEO & Founder: Ben Worrell  
Incorporated in Delaware 2010  
Company designated as SDVOSB - Service Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business  
Company's big break - 2 Major SOCOM contracts in 2014 worth \$50 million

1. Equipment and Training - \$23.5 million
2. Foreign Weapons and Ammunition -\$26.7 million

One of the most interesting aspects about Purple Shovel is that the company seems to come out of nowhere and win major contracts with SOCOM despite being an obscure and relatively unknown company. When Purple Shovel won the SOCOM contracts the company had only six employees and an annual revenue of less than \$2 million.  
Equipment Training

The first of the two major contracts was designated "sole source" (no bid contract). The

justification being that the products were only available from a single vendor.

Purple Shovel Llc Government Contracts(5).png

Insidegov.com

According to government records from the DoD, it appears that Purple Shovel is the only contractor able to provide the following:

- Individual Equipment
- Replenishable field medical kits
- Kits and Outfits
- Hand Tools

No bid contracts prevent competitive bidding that usually encourages better pricing for the government. Another item that the company provided to SOCOM as "sole source" was "Arabic keyboards". It's highly doubtful the majority of these items were unavailable from other sources. Furthermore, Federal law usually discourages no-bid contracts.

(Source: Buzzfeed]  
Foreign Weapons Ammunition

The equipment Purple Shovel and its subcontractors were supposed to buy for the Syrian rebels, according to documents and sources familiar with the procurement operation in Bulgaria, included 12,640 armor-piercing rocket-propelled grenades, of a type called the PG-7VM, along with hundreds of shoulder-mounted launchers. Then there were 6,240 even longer-range anti-tank grenades called PG-9Vs, which are fired from launchers called SPG-9s. (Insiders pronounce it "spig-nines.")

Subcontractors used by Purple Shovel to obtain the RPGs encountered serious problems procuring the weaponry. They were able to find RPGs & grenades made by a Bulgarian company, the only problem was that these weapons had been collecting dust in a warehouse since 1984.

"1984 is way past its shelf life," one arms expert told BuzzFeed News, "unless it's been refurbished." But sources say these grenades had not been refurbished. The problem is that components can degrade, making the weapons either unstable, so they can blow up in a soldier's hand, or inert, so that soldiers can't fire the weapons, leaving them vulnerable in battle.

Three of those sources said that SOCOM turned down batches of the grenades that were supposed to be given to the rebels, because they were too old and unreliable. They say that slowed down the operation for the Syrian rebel effort.

Source: Buzzfeed

Outdated weaponry can indeed be deadly as we shall see later on.

Government records dating from January and March, 2017 show that Purple Shovel has contracts to supply both RPGs and AK-47s.

Purple Shovel Llc Government Contracts(6).png

Dealing with a Dictator

Beyond RPGs, the US government sought to arm Syrian rebels with even more potent weaponry

including 700 Russian-designed Konkurs missiles (anti-tank weaponry). However, the Russian missiles proved to be quite difficult to acquire as Bulgaria had no stock and the Ukraine was locked in conflict with Russia over Crimea. Thus, they turned to Belarus, a country that is normally off limits to US arms dealers, and also known as the last dictatorship in Europe.

Belarus has been ruled by president Alexander Lukashenko for over two decades and has been accused of rigging elections and 'disappearing' his political opponents.

This year [2015], a United Nations special rapporteur found that "the situation of human rights in Belarus has not improved, and that widespread disrespect for human rights, in particular civil and political rights, continues."

Belarus is on a special "International Traffic in Arms Regulations" list published by the U.S. State Department, of countries with bans or special restrictions. The State Department has to license almost every deal involving US companies, and arms dealers say they are almost always prohibited from buying weapons from Belarus, because it is on that list.

Despite restrictions on procuring arms from Belarus, Purple Shovel and its subcontractors used a Bulgarian company as an intermediary in order to obtain the Konkurs missiles.

Asked if it knew that the 700 Konkurs missiles specifically came from Belarus, the SOCOM spokesperson answered, "Yes. USSOCOM is required to know all sources of equipment procured for use." SOCOM and the Office of the Secretary of Defense would not provide further comment on the issue. The U.S. State Department, which licenses private arms deals, also signed off on the transaction, sources say. The State Department declined to comment.

[Buzzfeed]

The document leaks from Anonymous Bulgaria also detail May 12th, 2015 transport of RPGs and an assortment of weapons originating in Bulgaria, on to Turkey and destined for Azerbaijan via the Azerbaijani Air Force. However, the shipment never made it to Azerbaijan and instead was off loaded in Incirlik, Turkey. Purple Shovel was the consignor and the Azerbaijan Ministry of Defense was the consignee.

Документ4 1.jpg JPEG Image 2200 × 1700 pixels Scaled 36 .png  
Документ4 2.jpg JPEG Image 2200 × 1700 pixels Scaled 36 .png  
Документ4 3.jpg JPEG Image 2200 × 1700 pixels Scaled 36 .png

The documents leaked from the embassy include a shocking examples of weapons transport. A case in point on the 12th of > May, 2015 an aircraft of Azerbaijan Air Forces carried 7.9 tons of PG 7V and 10 tons of PG 9V to the supposed destination via the route Burga (Bulgaria) - Incirlik (Turkey) -Burgas - Nasosny (Azerbaijan).

... According to the documents, however, the military cargo was offloaded in Incirlik military base and never reached the consignee. The weapons were sold to Purple Shovel by Alguns, Bulgaria, and manufactured by Bulgaria VMZ military plant.

[Trud]

The Death of Francis Norwillo

In June 2015, an American national and Purple Shovel employee Francis Norwillo was killed in an explosion near the town of Anevo in Bulgaria.

[Norwillo] was killed in a blast when a rocket propelled grenade malfunctioned at a military range.

[Trud]

Norwillo was a former navy veteran and an expert armorer who later entered the private contracting world and was hired by a subcontractor of Purple Shovel called SkyBridge Tactical.

They say he told them he would be in Bulgaria for a week and a half. There, sources say, Norwillo was supposed to receive training meant to familiarize him with the rocket-propelled grenades so that he would be prepared to train American soldiers who would, in turn, train the Syrian rebels.

The family was told little about the cause of the accident. "All we know is a weapon went off and he got blown up," said Joe Norwillo, his father, in a phone interview from Texas.

[Buzzfeed]

What is clear about Mr. Norwillo's tragic death is that it directly relates to the outdated, and deadly, weaponry Purple Shovel acquired in Bulgaria and ultimately destined for Syrian rebel forces.

Purple Shovel & American made AK-47s

With high demand for Russian Ak-47s throughout conflict zones and the Pentagon's preference for durable and cheap weaponry to arm groups aligned with US foreign policy and objectives, Purple Shovel is looking at partnerships with US manufacturers as a possible alternative. Inter Ordnance is an American company based in Florida that provides the American made AK-47 assault rifles to Purple Shovel.

Purple Shovel is the exclusive government distributor of the company's AK-47s.

Purple Shovel, named for a child's beach toy, already has more than \$110 million dollars worth of contracts with U.S. Special Operations Command, headquartered at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, for "small arms, ordnance and ordnance accessories manufacturing," according to federal procurement documents.

Worrell and Wiegand are prohibited by law from talking about those contracts. SOCOM, citing "operational sensitivities," declined to comment on what types of weapons Purple Shovel is providing.

But SOCOM has a strong interest in American-made Soviet-bloc weapons.

A year ago, the command sent out a market research request regarding what it calls "non-standard weapons." This includes Russian-designed guns like the AK-47 and other similar assault rifles, as well as sniper rifles like the Dragunov, light machine guns like the PKM, and heavy machine guns like the DShK and the KPV. They are weapons preferred by U.S. allies and foes alike for their relatively low cost and simplicity of operation.

SOCOM, tasked with training and equipping commandos and synchronizing the war on terror, provides weapons to allies at the behest of commands like U.S. Central Command. CENTCOM, also based at MacDill, has overall control of U.S. military operations in the Middle East.

Source: Defense News  
Summary

As we have seen, Purple Shovel:

Garnered no-bid "sole source" contracts from the DoD

Provides Foreign Weapons and Ammunition to SOCOM (eb. arming rebels in Syria)  
Procures weapons from Dictators  
Purchases unreliable, outdated, and deadly arms from Easter Europe  
Disguises and falsifies claims as to the origin of their arms shipments  
Is involved in large scale illegal weapons smuggling in conjunction with Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry

Images The Baltic Times, Buzzfeed, Wikipedia

V4vapid1.png

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