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SNP Quango Gave £18.4M to Defence Firms Despite Ban

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A Scottish Government economic agency has handed out nearly \$24 million to defence companies over the past five years, despite ministers repeatedly insisting that public funds should not go toward firms involved in munitions production. The revelation has triggered accusations of hypocrisy and deepened tensions over the Scottish National Party’s (SNP) inconsistent stance on national defence and industrial support.

Scottish Enterprise, a taxpayer-funded agency responsible for economic development in Scotland, confirmed in response to a parliamentary inquiry that it awarded £18.4 million

(about USD 24 million) in grants to companies connected to the defence sector since 2020. This includes major players such as BAE Systems and Thales UK, firms known for producing weaponry, naval ships, and surveillance systems. The agency claims the funds were tied specifically to upskilling workers and civilian technology projects. Still, the firms' primary operations in military production have raised serious questions about the SNP's adherence to its policies.

Despite repeated public statements from SNP ministers declaring that the Scottish Government does not support the manufacturing of munitions, grants were issued to projects like BAE Systems' naval shipbuilding operations on the Clyde and Thales UK's high-tech security development. Another recipient, Chemring Energetics UK Ltd, which manufactures explosive materials and detonating cords, received public funding for manufacturing research.

This financial support stands in stark contrast to the SNP's recent refusal to back a Rolls-Royce training centre in Renfrewshire tied to Royal Navy submarine development, a move widely condemned across party lines. Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer labelled the decision "staggering," while United Kingdom Defence Secretary John Healey said he could "hardly believe" a devolved government would obstruct vital defence skills development.

Scottish Labour Deputy Leader Jackie Baillie, who submitted the inquiry that revealed the funding figures, accused the SNP of "utter hypocrisy." In a statement, Baillie said, "It is right that we support Scotland's defence industry and the high-skilled jobs it provides, but the SNP's inconsistent flip-flopping does the industry no favours."

While Scottish Enterprise defended its actions by noting the funds supported specific local projects rather than direct weapons manufacturing, critics remain unconvinced. The agency stated it aims to maintain relationships across industries, including the defence sector, which supports tens of thousands of Scottish jobs.

A Scottish Government spokesperson attempted to clarify the contradiction by noting that "engagement and funding are limited to projects at Scottish sites and do not include support for munitions manufacturing." However, with millions flowing to firms rooted in weapons production, many see the statement as political backpedalling rather than meaningful clarification.

The controversy underscores ongoing divisions within the SNP over how to balance ideological stances with economic realities, particularly when it comes to supporting high-skill industries tied to national defence.

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