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Establishing Effective Regulations of the Global Arms Trade

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Introduction

In an age where geopolitical tensions, militarization and international conflicts are ever growing, establishing effective global arms trade regulations is a paramount priority. The trade of conventional arms (armoured combat vehicles, helicopters, warships, SALW, ammunition and artillery, etc) easily pushes towards international instability, encourages countries towards conflicts, results in human right abuses and undermines peace-constructing efforts. The proliferation of SALW is a huge global threat and results in circa 200,000 deaths per year.

Competition for arms between conflicting states (or parties) can destabilise peace and prolong conflicts. The arms trade can also contribute to illicit arm trading organisations and encourages terrorism. In times of conflict, human rights are abused and the majority of the time, women and children are the ones to bear the burden of the humanitarian impact of armed conflict (displacement, trauma and casualties). In addition to that, unrestrained military spending on arms can lead to national poverty, underdevelopment and the evolving debt of a country.

Throughout history this issue has been spotted and if remained unresolved, led to war. An example of this would be World War I, where multiple countries within Europe had been militarising and eventually, would be one of the main causes of the outbreak of war. Another example of this would be the Cold War where the Soviet Union and United States of America competed between themselves for the development and stockpiling of weapons (nuclear, ICBMs and other) in case the other would attack. The surplus of weapons produced during the Cold War (majority by the Soviet Union) is still flowing today and is a massive contributor to global instability, illicit arm trade organisations and violence in conflict affected areas.

It is highly important that diplomats come together to establish secure regulations to prevent further and current conflict.

Key Terms

SALW: Abbreviation for small arms and light weapons.

Proliferation: Fast increase in the number/amount of an item.

Illicit trade of arms: The illegal transfer and dealership of weapons (and parts of them) that go against national and/or international regulations.

ITI (International Tracking Institute): This refers to an institute that tracks illicit arms.

ATT (Arms Trade Treaty): Aimed at reducing armed conflict, fostering a safe environment for humanitarian actors and peacebuilding. Multiple countries have signed this treaty.

SSR (Security Sector Reform): The aim of this is to reorganise and enhance security organisations like the police, intelligence and military to ensure that they are more responsive and effective to the needs and wants of society.

DDR (Demobilisation and reintegration): Programs that assist ex-combatants (former fighters) in leaving armed organisations and adjusting into society by providing them with training, education, and other support.


Peacebuilding: Measures that are implemented to create or hold peace (mostly in an area suffering from conflict).

NGOs (Non governmental organisations): Non-profit organisations that don't operate under a government.

Conventional weapons: Weapons other than weapons of mass destruction. Widely used in armaments and crime conflicts.

General Overview

The global trade of weapons causes multiple issues not only nationally, but also internationally. Said issues can include danger of international security, humanitarian rights and undermining peacebuilding missions and efforts. Proliferation of weapons (this



includes small arms, light weapons, conventional weapons and highly advanced military technology) leads to a global threat of war and should be taken with the utmost importance and seriousness. As more arms become available and circulate globally, illegal organisations (including terrorist organisations) raise their number of weapons and disrupt national peace, leading to an increase in humanitarian crises, especially for women and young children.

Weapons originate from a number of places such as government owned manufacturers, private defence companies but also illicit arm trafficking. Many countries have government owned factories and companies where arms are produced legally, however countries may also have illicit trading and smuggling of arms organisations at play. As mentioned above, the Cold War resulted in a surplus of weapons, most of which are still circulating globally, especially in the Middle East. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the export controls becoming lighter and therefore making it easier to smuggle illicit arms past regulations.

Even weapons that are sold initially legally may find their way to illicit market places through theft, lax controls and/or government corruption. This undermines the regulation of global arms trade effort. Countries may also decide to donate weapons to other countries in need according to their alliance as part of a military or security aid. An example of this is the United States who has donated around 45 billion dollars in arms and military aid toward Ukraine since the Russian invasion in 2022. The donation of weapons can further fuel armed conflict if not careful.

The Arms Trade Treaty was created as a result of growing concerns of the impacts of unregulated arm trade such as humanitarian crises. The treaty led to a solid framework to stabilise international arms transfers. It was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on April 2nd 2013 (majority of member states voted in favour) and was enacted on December 24th 2014. This treaty exhibits the international support to regulate the global arms trade.

Major Parties/Countries Involved

United States of America: The United States of America is the largest exporter of arms in the world. It accounts for 40% of the volume of international weapon transfers 2018

-2022. 8.6% of the weapons went to Japan, 8.4% went to Australia and 1/5th went to Saudi Arabia. Additionally, the United States is helping Ukraine by sending arms (as mentioned above). In 2023, the sales of military equipment to foreign governments rose to 16% and a new record of \$238 billion was achieved.

Russian Federation: The Russian Federation is the second largest exporter of arms in the world, behind the United States. It accounts for 20% of the global weapons sales. Between 2016 and 2020, the Russian Federation sold \$28 billion worth of weapons to 45 countries. The biggest customer of these arms is India, buying 23% of the Russian Federation's weapons for \$6.5 billion. 49.3% of India's arm imports are from the Russian Federation. The famous AK-47 assault rifle (or Kalashnikov) was developed in Russia in 1947 by the Soviet army general Mikhail Kalashnikov and is cheap and easy to use. The AK-47 is used in more than 100 countries as it is the standard infantry weapon. However, Russian arm exporters are declining as a result of the war with Ukraine.

France: France is the third largest exporter of arms, however, it may soon overtake Russia. France's arms industry is growing as it has started making new deals with India and Qatar. Between 2018-2022, France's share of global arms has increased by 11% compared to the 7.1% it used to from 2014-2018.

Arms Trade Treaty: The Arms Trade Treaty has established strict regulations and guidelines for global trade of arms to reduce humanitarian crises.

Small Arms Survey: The Small Arms Survey is a research institute that researches the proliferation and global impact of SALW. It is located in Switzerland. They are internationally recognized for their accurate and trustworthy published research.

Saudi Arabia: Saudi Arabia is one of the world's largest importers of weapons. It buys its weapons from a range of countries, most prominently the United States, France and the United Kingdom. Saudi Arabia's military is highly armed with advanced weaponry (aircrafts, missile defence systems and more).

UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNPoA): A set of guidelines for action that has been internationally accepted to control the negative impacts of SALW and fight the illicit traffic in these weapons.

Timeline of Key Events

March 5th 1970: The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) was entered into force. This prevents the rapid growth and spread of nuclear weapons. There are some exceptions of states who did not sign.

1983: The Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) was entered into force. Regulates the usage of conventional weapons that could harm civilians or/and peacekeepers.

December 26th 1989: Collapse of Soviet Union. Export controls became lighter and it became easier to avoid arm trade regulations. Surplus weapons are still widely circulating around the globe.

May 2001: Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition. Bans illicit trafficking and trading of arms.

2014: The Arms Trade Treaty was enforced. Most significant treaty regarding this issue.

UN Involvement & Relevant Resolutions

Arms Treaty Trade: The Arms Trade Treaty was signed in 2013 and fully adopted in 2014. It is one of the most significant treaties regarding regulating the global arms trade and the first legally binding instrument to ever be debated in the UN General Assembly. It establishes international regulations and standards for the trade of conventional arms.

Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition: Another legally binding instrument that is against the illicit trade and trafficking of arms (including their parts and ammunition). It was adopted by the UN General Assembly in May 2001. It requires member states to implement anti-crime measures and provisions in their legal systems to combat illicit manufacturing and trafficking of arms.

Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT): International treaty made to limit the spread of nuclear weapons and encourage peaceful uses of nuclear energy and instruments and disarmament of nuclear weapons. Entered into force on March 5th 1970.

North Korea, South Sudan, India, Pakistan and Israel are the notable exceptions of states that have not signed the treaty.

The Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW): International treaty to regulate the use of certain conventional weapons that may harm civilians and peacekeepers. Adopted in 1980 and enforced in 1983. The treaty addresses these specific weapons: incendiary weapons, blinding lasers (although it is not currently in force), clearance of explosive remnants of war and cluster munitions.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Demobilization: Nation-wide demobilisation has already proven to be an effective technique for stopping illicit SALW trafficking and proliferation. The DDR (disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration) program focuses on disarmament and collective security as well as gathering all illicit weapons. The DDR program has given support to Mali, Yemen, Colombia, Central African Republic and Darfur.

United Nations General Assembly Resolution 61/89 introduced by the United Kingdom: Resolution introduced in 2006 which tried to initiate a discussion about making a legally binding instrument about importing, exporting and transferring conventional arms.

International legally binding treaties: There are and have been numerous legally binding treaties such as the Arms Trade Treaty and the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition. Although there is more structure and regulations to trading arms, there are still issues with regulating global arms trade.

Possible Solutions:

Delegates could remind all member states present of the benefits of the Arms Trade Treaty and the enormously needed structure that it provides.

When wanting to enforce a disarmament treaty, delegates must consider needing to implement a reintegration into society program for former combatants. Such a program could be provided by the DDR program or an Amnesty program.

Delegates could request that every member state implement harsher border controls and regulations.

Delegates could request that every member state implement harsher legal punishments, each tailored to the individual state.

Delegates could suggest methods to dismantle black markets where arms may be traded illegally.

Delegates could impose a limit on how many weapons a state may purchase or trade with another state.

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