Forum: Disarmament Committee

Issue: Strengthening transparency in the arms trade with particular focus in LEDCs

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Introduction

Corruption has been an unresolved issue that the global arms trade has been facing for the past few decades. Corruption in the global arms trade has led to many issues such as population disparities, human rights violations, and most inevitably: poverty. The lack of transparency in this trade has not only had a detrimental affect on all those individuals involved but also almost every human being in the world, due to the huge debt that corruption in the global arms trade has caused. This is extremely problematic as in the 21st century, globalization has been on the rise, and the trade has expanded enormously. To efficiently tackle this issue, it is essential to solve all of the targets related. Both conventional arms and non-conventional arms will be discussed within this topic. Thus, it is vital to focus on the root problem caused by the corruption and that is to tackle the issue of poverty. Poverty is a running, pressing issue that all Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs) face today. Therefore, it is appropriate to begin reflecting on the corrupted activities in the arms trade in such labeled countries.

Definition of Key Terms

Arms industry

The arms industry is defined as a global business that manufactures weapons and military technology and equipment.

Arms trade

The arms trade is defined as the movement of weapons of war across countries and between countries, parts thereof, ammunition, support equipment, and other commodities designed for military use. The building of defense production facilities and licensing fees paid as royalties for the production of military equipment are also involved. Military services such as training, supply operations, equipment repair, technical assistance and construction are included where data are available.
Arms Trade Treaty

On 2 April 2013, the General Assembly adopted the landmark Arms Trade Treaty (ATT); regulating the international trade in conventional arms, from small arms to battle tanks, combat aircraft and warships. The treaty will foster peace and security by putting a stop to destabilizing arms flows to conflict regions. It will prevent human rights abusers and violators of the law of war from being supplied with arms. And it will help keep warlords, pirates, and gangs from acquiring these deadly tools.

Conventional arms

The terms conventional weapons or conventional arms generally refer to weapons that are in relatively wide use that are not weapons of mass destruction (e.g. nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons). Conventional weapons include small arms and light weapons, sea and land mines, as well as (non-nuclear) bombs, shells, rockets, missiles and cluster munitions. These weapons use explosive material based on chemical energy, as opposed to nuclear energy in nuclear weapons.

Corruption

Corruption is defined as spiritual or moral impurity or deviation from an ideal. Corruption may include many activities including bribery and embezzlement. Government, or ‘political’, corruption occurs when an office-holder or other governmental employee acts in an official capacity for personal gain.

Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs)

A Less Economically Developed Country, or a LEDC, is a country that contains comparatively lower indicators of socioeconomic development, when compared to More Economically Developed Countries (MEDCs). Some of the indices that are used to measure an LEDC are the Human Development Index, the conditions of extreme poverty, the extent of political corruption, and lack of social stability. An example of an LEDC currently struggling with corruption in the global arms trade is Afghanistan.

Transparency

Transparency, as used in science, engineering, business, the humanities, and in social context more generally, implies openness, communication, and accountability. Transparency is operating in such a way that it is easy for others to see what actions are performed. Transparency in the global arms trade is specific to making arms trade visible to other nations, and following the rules stated in the Arms Trade Treaty. Communication and documentation should be accessible to the public.

Background

History of the global arms trade

The history of trade in arms and warfare technology overlaps with the history of war itself. During the
early modern period, the Netherlands, England, France and Germany because the first few nations to be apart of the arms production. The modern arms industry presented advanced military equipment such as battleships, artillery pieces, and rifles to foreign firms. In 1885, France decided to ban weapon exports. This framework led up to the First World War, and was characterized by a laissez-faire policy. After the WWI, the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 officially began the international conversation of disarmament and more transparency in the trade. However, this treaty was not effective. The volume of the arms trade increased in the 20th century, and was being used as a political tool. This was particularly evident during the Cold War.

The connection between the global arms trade and poverty

The poorly regulated arms trade impedes socio-economic development. It is estimated that armed violence costs Africa $18 billion per year. This large amount of money is equivalent to the annual sums of development aid to the entirety of Africa itself. Armed conflicts and the corruption that comes with these conflicts shrink Africa’s economies by at least 15%. Outside investment is discouraged due to violence and instability, as well as rising crime levels. Additionally, nearly one million of the eight million firearms produced every year are lost or stolen. This kind of corruption leads to the defense industry losing up to $20 billion per year. The US Department of Commerce estimates that corruption in the arms trade accounts for around 50% of all corrupt transactions globally, despite the fact that the value of arms traded annually does not exceed 1% of global trade. In conclusion, corruption in the arms trade has led to an enormous cost. In 2010 alone, the arms trade spent $1.6 trillion on defense, and that rounds up to approximately $235 for every person on the planet. This spending has led large groups of individuals into poverty.

It accounts for almost 40 per cent of corruption in world trade. The very small number of people who decide on multibillion dollar contracts, the huge sums of money at stake and the veil of secrecy behind which transactions take place (in the interests of ‘national security’) ensure that the industry is hard-wired for corruption. The formal, large government-to-government deals and illicit or black market trade are inextricably intertwined and function on the basis of collusion among politicians, intelligence operatives, listed corporations, bankers, money launderers, go-betweens and common criminals. This shadow world of money, corruption, deceit and death operates according to its own rules, bringing enormous benefits to a chosen few and misery to millions. The trade corrodes our democracies, weakens already fragile states and often undermines the national security it purports to strengthen.

The need for all member nations to sign on to the Arms Trade Treaty

With such a clear connection of corruption and poverty, it is vital to observe how the Arms Trade Treaty has been put into action to fight this issue. Every day, millions of people suffer from the direct and indirect consequences of the irresponsible arms trade: thousands are killed, others are injured, many are raped, and/or forced to flee from their homes, while many others have to live under constant threat of weapons. The poorly regulated global trade in conventional arms and ammunition fuels conflict, poverty, and incidences of human rights abuse. The problems are all connected by the increasing globalization of the arms trade; arms are being sourced
from all across the world. Domestic regulation of the arms trade has failed to adapt to changes concerning production and distribution.

While existing national and regional controls are important, they are simply not enough to stop irresponsible transfers of arms and ammunition between countries. This is why member states of the United Nations must pass the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) to help save lives, prevent human rights abuses, and protect the livelihoods of people around the world.

The Treaty is an international, legally binding instrument based on States’ existing obligations under international law. It is designed to minimize the human cost in this corruption within the global arms trade and to encourage transparency overall.

Problems caused by lack of transparency include general safety of the country in which the weapons remain and the countries that border or are around the particular country. The arms trade is also a major cause of human rights abuses, as some governments spend more on military expenditure in order to combat illegal weaponry as a result of lack of transparency, than on social development, health, and communications infrastructure combined. It is every nation’s right to ensure its security, and the first step is to be transparent in the global arms trade. This will minimize corruption and ultimately, civilian casualties and poverty in many Less Economically Developed Countries and More Economically Developed Countries that are all in the global arms trade.

The economic drawback of this issue is corruption. This is a major cause and a result of poverty around the world. It is extremely difficult to measure and compare the impact of corruption on poverty, instead, the effect of inequalities that are structured into the law and the policies that are adjusted are great. By encouraging transparency in the global arms trade, corruption can be minimized, especially because the spending on military expenditure is so great in many nations.

Major Parties Involved

Brazil

Brazil is one of the world’s most significant exporters of arms. Brazil has been actively engaged in the discussions about an instrument that minimizes the negative human and material consequence of the uncontrolled circulation and trade of such weapons. It is vital to notes that Brazil is not considered to be a LEDC, and also not a MEDC. It is an emerging economy.

Malawi

Malawi is a peaceful country that is geographically landlocked that are suffering significantly under the effects of small arms and weapons, making it a target for the transit of arms and weapons. There is a lot of development needed in this area, as it continues to be undermined by crime, insecurity and increase the potential for violent conflict. Malawi is a LEDC.
North Korea (DPRK)

Pyongyang is believed to maintain biological and chemical weapons; also missiles in forms of ballistic missiles and cruise missiles. The largest threat this country poses in the global arms trade is their nuclear weapon capacity, which is essentially active at all times since the Korean War is still present. North Korea is not apart of any control regimes, nonproliferation initiatives, or safeguards. Due to lack of transparency in political, economic, and social status, DPRK is not considered a LEDC or MEDC as well.

Transparency International (TI)

Transparency International (TI) is a non-governmental organization that monitors and publicizes cooperate and political corruption in international development. Originally founded in Germany in May 1993 as a non-profit organization, Transparency International is now an international non-governmental organization.

Russia

The country of Russia contains biological and chemical weapons, as well as missiles in the forms of: ballistic, submarine launched ballistic, and cruise missiles. Russia also owns submarines and strategic bombers. Russia was previously engaged in the Conventional Arms Trade. Russia is a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime, Nuclear Suppliers Group, International Atomic Energy Agency Addition Protocol, Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, and other regimes.

United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA)

UNODA was established in January 1998 as the Department for Disarmament Affairs, which was part of the Secretary-General’s program for reform in accordance with his report to the General Assembly (A/51/950). It was originally established in 1982 upon the recommendation of the General Assembly's second special session on disarmament (SSOD II). In 1992, its name was changed to Centre for Disarmament Affairs, under the Department of Political Affairs. At the end of 1997, it was renamed Department for Disarmament Affairs and in 2007, it became the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs.

The office promotes nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, strengthening of the disarmament regimes in respect to other weapons of mass destruction, and chemical and biological weapons, and disarmament efforts in the area of conventional weapons, especially landmines and small arms, which are the weapons of choice in contemporary conflicts.

United States of America

The US is a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime, Nuclear Suppliers Group, Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, Proliferation Security Initiative, and other regimes. This MEDC is largely known for its powerful political, economic, and social stance amongst the other members of the UN. The US supports transparency in the global arms trade.
Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The most outstanding attempt at resolving the issue concerning encouraging transparency in the global arms trade was the binding Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) that began in 1997 following a call for a code of conduct on international arms transfers by a group of Nobel Peace Laureates. On July 27th, 2012, the full UN Diplomatic Conference took place that discussed the treaty, and resulted in the US based Arms Control Association pointing fingers specifically at the US Government. The ACA argued that the obstacles present in the industry all fall back to the ill leadership of President Barack Obama. On the other hand, the United Kingdom was one of the first 90 countries to sign the treaty and urged the other member states to sign on as well. Alistair Burt said in an open letter to Oxfam: “Treaty will need broad – ideally universal – participation. Our judgment is that the text provides enough to work with. Whilst it reflects the compromises necessary to bridge the wide variety of national positions, it is robust and if still adopted, would bring about a very significant improvement on the current situation.” The ATT has been implemented in many areas of the world and is in effect.

On June 11, 2013, the staff at the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs in Geneva met with a delegation of students from the Anglo European School in Essex, UK. These students were exposed to a plenary session and resources that promote learning about the UNODA and the works that the organization does. There is also currently a website that offers publications, films, and podcast interviews in which experts talk about present-day disarmament issues. This has promoted awareness in modern disarmament greatly. The website is mentioned in the Appendix. This solution has been effective, but only to a certain group of young individuals who have gained access to the Internet. The groups of young adults that live in LEDCs, and countries that are exposed to such violence from conflict in the global arms trade are not receiving the education and awareness of the ATT’s future aims and possible solutions they need on this issue.

Possible Solutions

- One of the aspects of the problem that must be tackled is the enforcing of legislation that all member states should be aware of. National and regional laws and the Arms Trade Treaty should be regularly implemented and those member states that have not signed the ATT should heavily consider other laws that might be better suit and will not infringe on their national sovereignty.
- An inevitable aspect to solving this issue is increasing accountability in the path from production to distribution of weapons in every country involved.
- Another aspect that could be tackled is the general raising of awareness for this issue, as currently the education and advertisement of the corruption in the global arms trade is not thoroughly known. Knowledge on the topic can help prevention of future corruption. The public should be in understanding of the causes and consequences of corruption in the arms trade, and have a heightened awareness of the role of the government and disarmament transparency in individual countries.
- An important aspect to keep in mind is encouraging an annual report to keep track of the progress of improvements in the issue itself, particularly the amount of money that each human being on the planet still
“owes” to the industry. The goal is to minimize this number. The industry ideally should be a self-sufficient system between militaries, not individuals or social groups. Public reporting is a key means to genuine transparency, and will help build confidence amongst States, allowing States to demonstrate that they are implementing the ATT.

- In the long run, the most direct way to combat corruption in any industry is to ban production and distribution of the product. While history has proven it is impossible to disarm all nations, it can be encouraged to minimize the production and widespread distribution of arms, especially to the general public. A treaty between countries to limit arms production is suggested.

- The rubric of national security facilitates the emergence of a small coterie of brokers, dealers and officials with appropriate security clearances. It is important that this blurred line is to be eradicated, and these brokers, dealers and officials be placed whether in the government or removed from the industry altogether. All persons involved in the industry is to be encouraged to be solely affiliated with the government to ensure that the individual has their nation’s best interest at heart.

**Appendix**


**Bibliography**


