



Arms Trade Treaty – Letter to the editor

By Nur Aliza Lalji, PVUNA Intern

Dear Editor,

Final negotiations over a first ever UN international arms trade treaty began one week ago—a huge first step in regulating the global industry. On Saturday, March 23rd, however, the Senate voted on and passed an amendment to keep the United States out of the treaty.

For years, the United States of America has been the biggest arms dealer in the industry and it is of utmost importance that they be a part of the treaty. The UN should work to negotiate a suitable compromise that does not jeopardize the sovereignty of American citizens (or citizens of any nation, for that matter) or their second amendment rights, while still remaining faithful to the basic premise of the treaty.

According to an article published in the New American, the two points of contention within the treaty are that: it would mean the creation of a registry of gun owners, manufacturers, and traders; it would also make it “nearly impossible” for civilians to purchase ammunition.⁽¹⁾

The right to bear arms is fundamental to American democracy. I am not suggesting that this right be revoked; but this should remain a national debate. Instead, the treaty should stay true to its original purpose, which is to create a set of standards for international arms transfers.⁽²⁾

According to the Congressional report on *Conventional Arms Transfer*:

“Recently, from 2008 to 2011, the United States and Russia have dominated the arms market in the developing world, with both nations either ranking first or second for each of these four years in the value of arms transfer agreements. From 2008 to 2011, the United States made nearly \$113 billion in such agreements, 54.5% of all these agreements (expressed in current dollars). Russia made \$31.1 billion, 15% of these agreements. During this same period, collectively, the United States and Russia made 69.5% of all arms transfer agreements with developing nations, (\$207.3 billion in current dollars) during this four-year period”⁽³⁾

In the United States, this is aided by the fact that there exists a prominent revolving door between government officials and prominent members of the arms industry. Perhaps the most illustrative example of this is Dick Cheney’s former company, Halliburton, which received contracts of up to \$3.9 billion under the Bush Administration. ⁽⁴⁾ The lucrative nature of the arms industry and problematic government-arms industry ties mean there is going to be a certain amount of heel-digging involved in terms of an international arms treaty. By focusing on civilian purchases of ammunition, the US is able to appeal to a much wider demographic in support of exclusion. Suddenly, this becomes a constitutional issue; not a human rights one—or at the very least, it will be spun that way. Instead, the insidious nature of arms supplying on an international scale, to areas of conflict and to recognized terrorist organizations must remain the focus of the treaty.

The arms industry—and even more so an unregulated arms industry—is a detriment to human rights, an instigator of conflict, and a scourge on democracy. According to Oxfam, one person dies each minute due to an armed conflict. (5) An International Arms Trade Treaty is an essential start to ending these tragic and unnecessary deaths. It is imperative that this treaty be ratified, and that the United States be a signing member.

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Joe Wolverton, “Senate Votes to Keep US out of UN Arms Trade Treaty,” *The New American*, 24 Mar. 2013, <http://www.thenewamerican.com/usnews/congress/item/14885-senate-votes-to-keep-us-out-of-un-arms-trade-treaty> (accessed 24 March 2013).