General Assembly 1

The question of the export of weapons to conflict areas

Research Report

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"let us sing songs of freedom together"

Forum: General Assembly 1

Issue: The question of the export of weapons to conflict areas.

Position: President of the General Assembly

Introduction

Complex geopolitical tensions abound in our contemporary world, often leading to armed conflict. Many people and countries question whether armed conflicts and wars are ethical and responsible. Many countries have their own opinions on whether it is actually ethical to export mass weapons to conflict zones, and this question raises a profound dilemma.

Mass weapons can do a lot of good, but also a lot of bad. Therefore, there are many advantages and many disadvantages to exporting weapons to conflict zones. The dilemma of exporting weapons to regions already torn apart by violence affects both the sovereignty of nations, the lives of many victims and the responsibility of international communities to maintain peace and stability. Supplying arms to areas already riven by conflict only exacerbates the situation and, in doing so, also puts lives at risk. Therefore, it is crucial to take responsibility and take thoughtful measures to use these exports only in beneficial situations.

Exporting arms to conflict zones raises questions about the moral obligations of nations, the potential escalation of violence, and the impact on global peace and security. In this complex discussion, we must consider both the potential benefits and serious consequences of such exports and strive to balance national interests with international responsibilities. This issue forces us to reflect on the ethics and responsibilities involved in managing the arms trade, and to seek ways to contribute to peaceful solutions to conflict without contributing to further destruction.

We must also recognize the economic dimension intertwined with the export of weapons to conflict zones. The arms industry, often a significant player in a nation's economy, faces the moral dilemma of supplying weapons that can potentially perpetuate violence and instability. On one hand, it can provide jobs and economic growth, while on the other, it may indirectly fuel the conflicts that harm innocent civilians. This economic aspect of the arms trade complicates the ethical considerations surrounding exports to conflict zones and underscores the need for careful examination and accountability in the decision-making process.

Balancing economic interests with ethical responsibilities further underscores the complexity of this issue. Nations must grapple with the competing demands of job creation, economic stability, and international security, all while striving to adhere to principles of human rights and peace.

Definition of Key Terms

Weapons of mass destruction

A weapon of mass destruction is a nuclear, radiological, chemical, biological, or other device that is intended to harm a large number of people. These weapons have the potential to cause death at low doses and with serious long term health effects in survivors. These weapons are designed to cause widespread death, destruction and harm on a massive scale.

Conflict areas

Conflict areas are geographical areas where ongoing or recent armed conflicts, violence, or tensions exist between different groups, whether they be countries, ethnic or religious groups, political factions, or other entities. These conflicts can take various forms, including armed conflict, civil war, insurgency, terrorism, or even diplomatic disputes that have the potential to escalate into violence.

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) is an independent international research institute based in Stockholm, Sweden. SIPRI was founded in 1966 and is dedicated to the research and analysis of global security issues, particularly those related to arms control, disarmament, and conflict resolution. SIPRI's primary mission is to conduct research and provide data and analysis on various aspects of international security and peace.

Russian-Ukrainian war

The Russo-Ukrainian War, which began in 2014, is an ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine. It was triggered by Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and escalated into a full-scale armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, primarily in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, where pro-Russian separatist groups declared independence. The conflict has resulted in thousands of casualties, displacement of civilians, and significant humanitarian challenges. It has also strained Russia's relations with Ukraine and Western countries, leading to sanctions and diplomatic efforts to find a peaceful resolution. The war continues to have far-reaching political, economic, and security implications for the region and beyond.

Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is an international treaty aimed at preventing the spread of nuclear weapons and encouraging disarmament. Established in 1968, it divides signatory nations into nuclear-weapon states and non-nuclear-weapon states. Nuclear weapon states commit to pursuing disarmament, while non-nuclear weapon states pledge not to acquire nuclear weapons but have the right to access peaceful nuclear technology. The NPT has played a vital role in limiting the number of countries with nuclear weapons and is a cornerstone of global nuclear non-proliferation efforts, contributing to global security and stability.

The Arms Trade Treaty

The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) is a multilateral treaty established in 2013 with the aim of regulating the international trade in conventional arms. It seeks to promote responsible and transparent arms transfers while preventing the illicit trade of weapons to actors that could use them for human rights abuses or conflict exacerbation. Under the ATT, participating countries commit to assessing the potential risks associated with arms exports, including the risk of contributing to conflict or human suffering. By providing a framework for ethical arms trade, the treaty strives to enhance global security and minimize

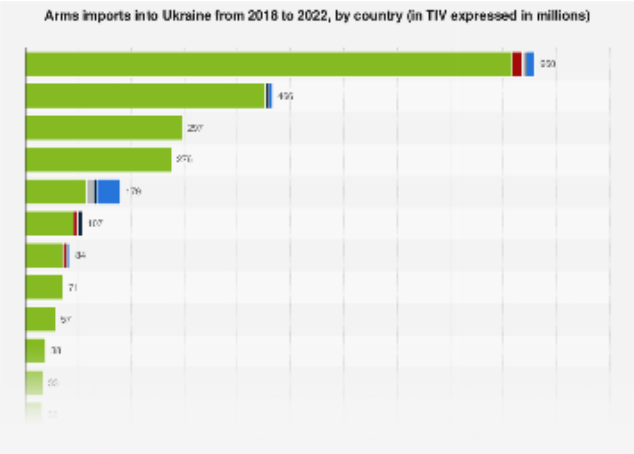
the impact of weapons on civilian populations caught in conflict zones, ultimately contributing to international peace and stability.

General Overview

Despite Europe being the most peaceful continent, you can't ignore it anymore. There is a war raging between Russia and Ukraine. Within Europe this is a major conflict, only there are many more around the world. Consider the tensions between the Kurds, Turkey and Iraq. The level of peace on our planet deteriorated as early as 2022 for the ninth year in a row. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its consequences were one of the main reasons for this. Many European countries have sharply increased their imports of weapons as self-defense and as precautionary measures.

Benefits of arms exports

For several decades, the trade in weapons has been among the most lucrative businesses in the world with predictable increases year after year. The export of weapons also helps to keep the production lines open, help to smooth production rates and companies in business in times of limited domestic demand. Exporting arms can also be very good for forming alliances. If you, as a country, give arms to a conflict zone, then they are in your debt, so to speak. Ukraine, for instance, has allowed to receive a lot of arms from various countries around the world. By giving something like this, alliances are strengthened and there is more confidence for the future. You can see on the diagram, that multiple countries have exported and given an amount of the weapons in their possession to Ukraine. These countries did this not only out of charity, but also so that Ukraine would do the same if they needed it.



Arms imports into Ukraine from 2018 to 2022 by country in TIV expressed in millions.

Disadvantages of arms exports

"Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. The world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children… This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron."

~ Former U.S. President, Dwight D. Eisenhower, in a speech on April 16, 1953

The quote from the former US president reflects well how many people and countries feel about arms exports. Arms trade is a major cause of human rights violations. The use of arms in conflict zones tears poor, innocent families apart and are forced to flee. Some governments are very corrupt and spend more on their own interests and military expenditure than on the social development of the people and their health. While every nation has the right and need to ensure its security, in these changing times the requirements and purchases of arms may also have to change. All these disadvantages could lead to the fact that many people don't feel secure in their country and flee. If a country has large possession of weapons, and has enough alliances that export weapons to them, this can often lead to abuse of power. Abuse of power, for example, can lead to oppression of communities, corruption, and thus political instability, and in the worst cases, it can lead to wars.

Conflict areas

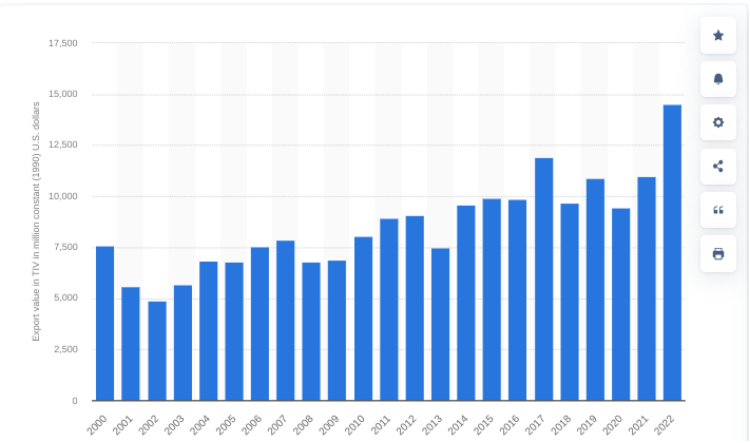
Conflict areas would see the export of weapons nor as a positive thing, nor a negative. It often depends on how the weapons would be used, which is not their choice but the governments. Their stance hinges on how these weapons will be used, a decision outside their control. While weapons can provide a means of self-defense and resistance, they also exacerbate violence and suffering, perpetuating conflict. Conflict areas grapple with a sense of powerlessness, as the ultimate responsibility lies with governments and external actors. This complex view underscores the need for ethical decision-making and understanding the far-reaching consequences of arms exports, as these decisions directly impact the lives of those vulnerable in conflict zones.

Major Parties Involved

United States of America

The United States has dominated global arms exports for decades and has consistently been the largest arms exporter over the past three decades. In fact, during the period between 2013-17 and 2018-22, we saw an impressive 14 percent increase in U.S. arms exports. During the last five years of that period, the U.S. accounted for a whopping 40 percent of total global arms exports. This highlights the prominent role the United States plays in the international arms trade.

Arms transfers and trade serve as important tools in U.S. foreign policy, and they have the potential to provide long-term safeguards for both regional and global security. What makes the United States' approach unique, is that it makes a comprehensive consideration of several factors in determining the delivery of military equipment and licenses for direct commercial sales of defense goods to U.S. allies and partners. These factors include political considerations, military needs, human rights issues, economic aspects, nonproliferation policies, technological security aspects and the ultimate destination and use of the delivered weapons. This ensures that the United States takes a careful and comprehensive approach when making arms supply decisions, with a view to advancing both its national interests and global stability.



U.S. arms exports from 200 to 2022 (In TIV expressed in million constant 1990 U.S. dollars)

Russia

Until 2018, Russia was one of the main suppliers of arms to the international market. However, after that year, Russian arms exports began to decline steadily, with a decline of nearly 20 percent compared to its peak in 2011, which marked the height of the Russian arms industry. This decline can largely be attributed to the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, which has combined several factors to affect Russia's arms trade.

A major cause of this decline is the international outcry and subsequent sanctions imposed by Western countries due to Russia's involvement in the conflict in Ukraine. These sanctions have limited trade opportunities for Russian arms manufacturers and made it more difficult to conduct international transactions.

In addition, many countries have become more reluctant to purchase Russian weapons because of the sensitivity of the conflict and the negative reputation Russian weapons have gained. The association with the conflict in Ukraine has reduced the appeal of Russian weapons, leading to a decrease in demand.

This decreased demand has paved the way for competitors such as the United States and China to increase their market share as they take advantage of the decreased interest in Russian weapons. In short, ongoing political and military tensions in Ukraine have caused a marked downward trend in Russian arms exports and have weakened Russia's position in the global arms market.

Amnesty International

Amnesty International is a tireless advocate for responsible arms sales, with a focus on protecting human rights and preventing violence in conflict zones. Their efforts are critical to ensuring global security and human rights.

They are also heavily involved in the issue of arms exports to conflict zones. The organization advocates for stricter international regulations to reduce arms exports to these areas. They carefully monitor human rights violations in conflict zones, including the use of exported weapons, and use these findings to urge governments to review their arms export policies.

Amnesty International has an important role in awareness raising and lobbying. They share information with the public and policymakers to increase understanding of the devastating effects of arms exports and pressure for change. In addition, they take legal action against governments and companies involved in arms exports that result in human rights violations.

Oxford Committee for Famine Relief

The Oxford Committee for Famine Relief, now known as Oxfam, has a different focus than Amnesty International, but the two organizations share a shared concern for peace, human rights and the impact of arms exports to conflict zones. Oxfam focuses primarily on humanitarian aid and poverty alleviation, but they understand that arms exports have a direct link to conflict and famine.

Oxfam has repeatedly pointed out the destructive cycle whereby weapons from developed countries are sold to conflicting parties in developing countries. These weapons contribute to escalating conflicts, which in turn leads to humanitarian crises, including food shortages. Therefore, Oxfam supports international efforts to regulate arms trade and calls for greater accountability of arms exporters. Together with Amnesty International, these organizations play a crucial role in connecting the dots between arms exports, conflict and humanitarian crises and advocate for a more peaceful and just world.

Timeline of Events

1961	The United Nations' General Assembly adopts resolution A/RES/1653 (XIV)
1966	The establishment of The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)
1970	The establishment of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)
2013	The United Nations adopts the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)

Possible Solutions

Addressing arms exports to conflict zones requires a coordinated and international effort, along with a willingness to respect ethical and humanitarian values over profit and geopolitical interests. Below you can find several possible solutions on the issue.

Stricter arms export controls

Stricter arms export controls entail nations reinforcing their domestic laws and regulations pertaining to arms exports, establishing a more rigorous licensing process, and ensuring exporters conduct comprehensive assessments before authorizing arms transfers.

These controls are designed to identify and mitigate the risks associated with weapons misuse, encompassing factors such as their potential deployment in conflict zones or involvement in human rights violations. Governments must set stringent criteria and standards that applicants must meet when seeking to export arms. However, the effectiveness of these controls extends beyond national boundaries. Internationally, it is imperative to possess the ability to track and scrutinize which countries seek to export arms, the intended recipients, the reasons behind the exports, and the proposed use of the weapons. This necessitates enhanced transparency, information sharing, multilateral agreements, sanctions, and monitoring mechanisms to ensure responsible arms transfers and deter illicit trade, ultimately contributing to global peace and security.

Arms embargoes

An arms embargo represents a powerful tool in international policy and is an explicit prohibition on the sale and supply of arms to a specific country, region, or group. This embargo can be declared by individual countries but is often initiated and enforced by international organizations such as the United Nations. The primary purpose of arms embargoes is to de-escalate conflict in certain geographical areas by drastically restricting access to weapons. Enforcing such embargoes requires close international cooperation and coordination to prevent illegal arms trafficking and smuggling. This includes sharing intelligence, conducting inspections and imposing sanctions on parties that violate the embargo. Through the combined efforts of countries and international organizations, arms embargoes can play an important role in reducing violence and promoting peace in conflict zones.

Supporting regional stability

Supporting regional stability is a complex undertaking that typically requires a holistic approach consisting of a combination of humanitarian assistance, peacebuilding and development programs. This can manifest itself in various forms, such as providing emergency assistance to address immediate humanitarian crises, such as food shortages or medical care in conflict zones. Moreover, it includes facilitating peace negotiations between conflicting parties to reach lasting solutions and end violence.

It is also crucial to invest in long-term development projects, such as building infrastructure, improving education systems and providing basic health care. These measures aim to improve the population's overall quality of life, create economic opportunities and increase social stability. Promoting education and health care contributes to better understanding and well-being of communities, while investments in infrastructure can boost connectivity and economic growth.

Such efforts, aimed at eliminating the root causes of conflict, help prevent future violent conflict and promote lasting peace and stability in previously conflict-ridden regions.

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