

# DISEC Briefing Paper

## The issue of the international arms trade

### Background:

War has always been part of human history, and the trade of weapons and arms has been integral to that process. As our world has modernised, the way arms trade takes place has changed with it, and has grown through the years. Today, the international arms trade is valued at \$112 billion.

However, this number does not account for illegally traded arms - in reality, this valuation is much higher. Firearms composed 42% of the total listings on the dark web, all of which remain untraced. Global operations by cartels and gangs facilitate further untraced movement of weapons of firearms.

Moreover, the firearms trade is almost entirely unregulated, even legally. The ATT (Arms Trade Treaty) was passed in the UN general assembly in 2013 to combat this after years of campaigning from NGOs such as Amnesty International. It introduced strict regulations on international arms transfers; however, major arms producers such as America and Russia have not ratified it and even countries that are party to the treaty do not follow the regulations set out in it.

Arms are being transferred to countries that may use them against civilians to repress dissent or commit genocide, and bad actors that use arms to terrorise and to protect their illegal operations. More than \$18 billion worth of arms have flooded the Yemeni theatre, for example, where numerous human rights violations have taken place.

What are some specific weapons and what has been their impact? Some weapons that have been used in theatres of war include cluster bombs, landmines and chemical weapons. Cluster bombs have been used in the Ukrainian War by Russia, which spread submunitions indiscriminately. Landmines automatically detonate when someone or something steps on them. 120000 casualties of landmines have been registered between 1999-2017. Chemical weapons have been used by Sudan and Iraq against their own people. In the case of Sudan, 200-250 people have died as a result. This destruction was enabled by the international arms trade, both illegal and legal.

The flow of arms drives violence, which leads to the unnecessary deaths of both militants and civilians, and regional and national instability. For example, around 213000 guns produced in US have entered Mexico, where the death rate due to gun violence sits at around 30000 per year, and the influence of cartels in the country remains strong. This

## DISEC

gun violence forces many refugees to head to safety - often in the north, leading to refugee crises at the US-Mexico border. Gun violence, exacerbated by the arms trade, leads to mass migration, hardship and suffering - another indirect impact.

By controlling and limiting the flow of arms, both legal and illegal, we get closer to our eventual goal of a controlled arms trade, limiting unnecessary loss of life and protecting innocent civilians.

### Key issues:

The United Nations considers the negative impact of the international arms trade to stem from lax regulation. There is no international law on the number of weapons that can be traded, nor is there substantial restriction on the types of weapons that can be traded. In fact, responsibility and oversight over the arms trade rests with national governments rather than with the UN; hence, the language of the Arms Trade Treaty placing emphasis on individual responsibility rather than that of the collective. Perhaps there is reason for change to this system and increased UN scrutiny over the workings of the arms trade. Moreover, discretion over the trading of arms themselves lies with national governments - would the UN be better placed to make decisions about where these arms go?

How does one enforce these regulations? Occasional inspections at borders and checkpoints that require countries to declare all weapons may be a solution: however, this may violate national sovereignty, to which the UN has already committed itself. And of course, the illegal arms trade does not lend itself to being regulated. It is driven by bad actors and militant groups who seek to protect their own interests. Restriction of these operations is fought fiercely, therefore, and forces countries to dedicate resources to fight them: think border control. These resources, however, may be better spent tackling the causes of this crime, rather than the crime itself, thereby limiting arms movement.

Corporate interests drive production and trade of arms into theatres of war, fuelling conflict. According to Amnesty International, "every year corporate actors supply large volumes of military equipment to some of the most violent and unstable parts of the world". There is an element of inequality to this - manufacturers of arms in HICs profit off the sales of arms, which make their way into LICs, which may cause instability and violence in those countries. Governments and transnational organisations may be able to introduce due diligence procedures and regulations on gun production to reduce the impact of arms trade into unstable regions.

### Stakeholders:

Corporate interests + producers of guns, militias, gangs and cartels, governments, the UN, civilians, bad actors, NGOs

DISEC

Key questions:

Does the UN have jurisdiction over the arms trade?

How can the UN and nations enforce these regulations?

How far should one go with restrictions and regulations?

How can the illegal arms trade be stemmed?

How can one control the arms trade at the international, national and regional levels?

How does one tackle the negative impacts of the arms trade?

Is the ATT still useful, or should we amend (or even repeal) it?

How can the influence of NGOs be used to regulate the arms trade?

# DISEC Briefing Paper

## The Question of The War In Yemen

### Background:

Since 2004, The Houthi movement has been leading an insurgency against the military in Yemen. The movement is known officially as Ansar Allah. In 2014, tensions between Houthis and government forces escalated into outright civil war.

Protests around the 2011 Arab Spring had pressured Yemen's President Saleh to hand power to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. As security forces withdrew from outlying provinces, the Houthi rebels took advantage and captured territory in the north. They also had growing support from Yemenis tired of Saleh's decades-long regime.

By the end of 2014, Houthi forces had occupied Yemen's capital city, Sanaa. In early 2015, President Hadi fled Yemen. The UN estimates that 131,000 of the estimated 233,000 deaths in Yemen since 2015 are the result of indirect causes like food insecurity and lack of access health services. Nearly twenty-five million Yemenis remain in need of assistance, five million are at risk of famine, and a cholera outbreak has affected over one million people.

After Hadi appealed to the international community, Saudi Arabia led a coalition of Arab states to try and restore full power to the Yemen Government. However, reported airstrikes and ground offensives from both sides of the conflict have seen an increase in civilian casualties with the UN stating over 150,000 have been killed.

### Key Words:

- Zaidi - a member of an Islamic sect of Yemen that constitutes one of the three major branches of Shi'a
- Sunni - one of the two main branches of Islam, commonly described as orthodox, and differing from Shia in its understanding of the Sunna and in its acceptance of the first three caliphs.
- Shi'a - one of the two main branches of Islam, followed especially in Iran, that rejects the first three Sunni caliphs and regards Ali, the fourth caliph, as Muhammad's first true successor.
- Sanaa - the largest city in Yemen and the Centre of Sana'a Governorate
- Houthi - a Zaidi

## DISEC

predominantly Shia-led religious-political movement that emerged in Yemen in the late 1990s

- President Hadi - a current Yemeni politician and former Yemen Armed Forces field marshal: he has been the president of Yemen since February 2012.

### Key Facts:

- 21.6 million people need humanitarian support.
- 13% of the population is internally displaced.
- 4.5 million people have been displaced since 2015.
- 40% of them are living in unofficial displacement camps and do not have adequate access to basic services

### **Food insecurity is causing the largest number of deaths.**

More than 17.4 million Yemenis are food insecure, with that number projected to reach 19 million by the end of 2023. An estimated 2.2 million children under 5 are suffering from acute malnutrition, and of those, more than 500,000 face severe acute malnutrition. About 90% of the country's food was imported before the Civil War started; commercial trade has been cut off with pressures from the ongoing Russian - Ukraine conflict exacerbating the situation, making it difficult for farmers to buy seeds and fertilizer, and aid agencies struggling to import and transport goods.

### **Volatile conditions have greatly affected healthcare.**

COVID-19 remains a serious health threat in Yemen, with more than 11,800 confirmed cases and 2,148 deaths as of April 2022, with only 50% of health care facilities functional. And at least 26,981 suspected cases of cholera and 29 related deaths were reported in 2021.

### **Children have been greatly affected by the Civil War**

As of October 2021, at least 10,000 children have been killed or maimed since the start of the conflict, with at least 11.3 million children need life-saving aid. More than 2 million girls and boys were out of school in 2021.

### Previous Action:

August 2009 - The Yemeni military launch Operation Scorched Earth to remove the Houthi rebellion in Saada. At this point, Houthi rebels begin fighting with Saudi forces in cross-border clashes. Fighting continues until, after rounds of offers and counteroffers, Saleh's government agrees to a ceasefire with Abdul-Malik al-Houthi and the rebels in February 2010. The Yemeni military simultaneously carries out Operation Blow to the Head, a crackdown on both the rebels and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

March 2015 - After repeated pleas from Hadi, a Saudi-led coalition of Arab states—including the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Bahrain, Sudan, and Kuwait—

## DISEC

initiates Operation Decisive Storm in support of the ousted president. The coalition launches air strikes against Houthi targets, deploys small ground forces, and imposes a naval blockade. The United States announces its intention to aid the coalition's efforts.

April 2016 - The United Nations sponsors talks between the Hadi government and the coalition of Houthis and former President Saleh's General People's Congress.

March 2020 - The Trump Administration announces a freeze on \$73 million in humanitarian aid to Yemen.

April-May 2021 - Strikes and counterstrikes continue and escalate. The UN Security Council and Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammed Javad Zarif voice their support for a ceasefire between the various Yemeni actors.

### Questions to consider:

Should the Yemeni cabinet negotiate with the rebels?

How will regional issues with Saudi Arabia come into play?

Should religious freedom be increasingly tolerated in Yemen?

What would a stable Yemeni state look like?

Will regional powers be able to have a proxy war in Yemen?

### Useful links:

[Displacement in Yemen](#)

[Timeline of the Crisis](#)

[Global Conflict Tracker](#)

# DISEC Briefing Paper

## The Question of Nuclear Disarmament

### Background

Nuclear Disarmament is the act of reducing or eliminating nuclear weapons. According to the UN, nuclear weapons are the most dangerous weapons on earth - one can destroy a whole city, potentially killing millions as well as jeopardising the natural environment and lives of future generations through its long-term catastrophic effects. These dangers arise from the weapons' very existence. Although nuclear weapons have only been used twice in warfare, about 13,080 reportedly remain in our world today and there have been over 2000 nuclear tests conducted to date. Nuclear weapons may be used again, by accident, miscalculation or design. Disarmament is the best protection against such dangers but achieving this goal has been a challenge, to say the least.

Powerful nations like the USA want arms control and disarmament in respect of strategic and medium range nuclear armament and leave aside the question of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction that they possess. Many other nations, however, give first priority to nuclear disarmament followed by arms control and general disarmament.

In actual practice, the biggest hindrance in the way of disarmament and arms control in the contemporary era of international relations happens to be the difference in approach of several nations towards this objective. Addressing these issues will require cooperation and dialogue between countries, as well as the involvement of civil society and international organisations.

### Key Issues

Measures for disarmament are pursued for many reasons, including to maintain international peace and security, uphold the principles of humanity, protect civilians, promote sustainable development, foster confidence and trust among States, and prevent and end armed conflict.

### **Faith in Armaments**

Armaments are viewed as an essential means for the exercise of power of the state. States continue to depend upon armaments and are not likely to give them up or accept serious restrictions on these until alternative means of serving their interests and purposes have been established.

### **Ratios of Strength**

Agreement on disarmament presupposes agreement on ratios of strength among weapons and armed establishments of various nations. There exists no scientific basis for fixing the ratios among the weapons. Armaments and armed establishments which the different states possess, makes it very difficult to make a decision regarding the allocation of different quantities and types of armaments to different nations within the agreed ratio.

### **Implementation of Agreements on Ratios**

Even if there may be an agreement on the ratios of power that prevail among the states seeking disarmament, there would still be great obstacles to disarmament. Different states have more or less power in international relations, due to the fact that the military factor is always dependent on several other factors. Nations with allocated ratios of armaments and military power are bound to be motivated differently in favour or against war. Hence, even the fixation of ratio of strength of armaments cannot fully solve the problem of disarmament.

### **Continued Distrust among Nations**

The existence of strong distrust among several nations makes it difficult for the international community to go in for disarmament and arms control. Disarmament plans, which from time to time, are offered by various nations are mostly based upon fear and distrust and that is why these always contain several reservations and “Joker Clauses” which some nations can never be expected to accept. “If there were perfect trust among nations, arms would be unnecessary, and disarmament would not be a problem” - Schleicher.

### **Sense of Insecurity among Nations**

Armament is considered to be a source and a symbol of security, and disarmament is regarded as a condition which can lead to insecurity. Things like tanks, planes, rockets and bombs all make it easier for statesmen to display power of the state and their achievements. Countries with nuclear weapons often argue that they need them for national security reasons, and that giving them up would leave them vulnerable to attack. Addressing these security concerns is a key part of any nuclear disarmament effort.

### **Verification**

One of the main challenges of nuclear disarmament is verifying that the countries are actually eliminating their nuclear weapons. This requires a robust system of inspections and monitoring, as well as the full, honest cooperation of all parties involved.

### **Geopolitical Rivalry and Disputes**

Nuclear weapons have historically been used as tools of geopolitical power, and some countries may be reluctant to give them up in fear of losing their influence on the world stage. Political rivalry and disputes among nations has been a source of armament race in



## DISEC

international relations and therefore has acted as a roadblock in the way of disarmament and arms control.

### **Technical challenges**

The process of dismantling and disposing of nuclear weapons is technically complex and expensive, and it can be difficult to ensure that the materials and technology are not diverted to other uses.

### **Timeline**

The United Nations has sought to eliminate such weapons ever since its establishment. The first resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1946 established a Commission to deal with problems related to the discovery of atomic energy among others. The Commission was to make proposals for, inter alia, the control of atomic energy to the extent necessary to

ensure its use only for peaceful purposes. The resolution also decided that the Commission should make proposals for “the elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and of all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction.”

A number of multilateral treaties have since been established with the aim of preventing nuclear proliferation and testing, while promoting progress in nuclear disarmament. These include the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests In The Atmosphere, In Outer Space And Under Water, also known as the Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT), the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), which was signed in 1996 but has yet to enter into force, and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which entered into force in January 2021.

The NPT is possibly the most poignant, signed in 1968 and ratified by 190 countries. It seeks to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and technology, and to promote disarmament. It has been successful in preventing the spread of nuclear weapons to new countries, but progress on disarmament has been slower. The NPT has three main objectives:

#### **Non-proliferation**

Treaty aims to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons technology to countries that do not already possess them.

#### **Disarmament**

Treaty also calls for negotiations aimed at achieving nuclear disarmament by the nuclear-weapon states, as well as general and complete disarmament.

#### **Peaceful use of nuclear energy**

The NPT recognises the right of all parties to the treaty to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and obliges the nuclear-weapon states to provide assistance to other parties in the development of peaceful nuclear technology.

## DISEC

A number of bilateral and plurilateral treaties and arrangements seek to reduce or eliminate certain categories of nuclear weapons, to prevent the proliferation of such weapons and their delivery vehicles. These range from several treaties between the United States of America and Russian Federation as well as various other initiatives, to the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the Missile Technology Control Regime, the Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation, and the Wassenaar Arrangement.

### Questions to consider

1. What economic impact would nuclear disarmament have on your delegation and other nations?
2. How could nuclear disarmament be implemented in a way in which security among nations is a given?
3. What are the potential implications of nuclear disarmament on the security of your delegation?
4. What can be used as a replacement for nuclear weapons as a show of countries' geopolitical power?