



"We all want an Arms Trade Treaty"

The Arms Trade Treaty: An Unparalleled Opportunity to Improve U.S. National Security

As the world's top conventional arms exporter with one of the most robust export control systems, the United States arguably stands to benefit more than any country from raising global arms trade standards. For too long, buyers barred from purchasing U.S. weapons have used the relatively unmonitored and unregulated international system to purchase and divert weapons to irresponsible end users. **Existing loopholes undermine U.S. law and pose a significant threat to our national and international security.** As states now gather to agree to the terms of a legally binding, international Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), the United States must act urgently to ensure the ATT is robust, effective, and brings all countries into compliance with the highest standards possible.

The United States has long recognized the risks inherent in today's porous international arms trade system, including:

- the supply of weapons to terrorists and others who seek to harm the United States and its allies;
- the hindering of peace-keepers, peace-building, and economic and social development that undermine U.S. and international efforts to improve stability and governance;
- the destabilizing accumulations of arms that inflame regional conflicts;
- the breakdown of international embargoes;
- the arming of regimes that divert weapons, disregard human rights and violate international humanitarian law.

These factors are of grave concern to U.S. security and foreign policy goals. That is why the United States maintains one of the world's most

comprehensive export control systems: to make sure that recipient countries use arms responsibly. Unfortunately, not all countries use the same criteria in arms trade decisions. Nor do some states have the legal system or domestic capacity to enforce such standards.

The United States must use its considerable leverage to bring the international arms trade into compliance with stronger standards of practice. According to recent Congressional Research Service reports, the United States is a partner in two-thirds (by value) of global conventional arms trade agreements and accounts for an even larger portion of agreements with the developing world, where the majority of arms trade now occurs.

"Conventional arms transfers are a crucial national security concern for the United States."

*Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton
October 14, 2009*

Under a robust ATT, the United States will also benefit from higher global standards that work to ensure **illegally obtained U.S. weapons will not be used against American and partner states' soldiers and personnel.**

What Is Needed in an ATT

The text of an ATT **must establish a legally binding set of standards** that all countries consider in making arms trade decisions. These standards should be derived from existing international obligations and norms that the United States already takes into account, including: **human rights, terrorism and proliferation records, the desire to prevent destabilizing accumulations of arms, and strict adherence to existing arms embargoes.**

A strong treaty must include brokering, financing, and the transporting of arms within its mandate, as well as encourage states to provide technical and financial assistance to countries seeking to improve

their national systems. The importance of **strengthening foreign national laws and capabilities** is a key lesson learned in the global effort to combat the spread of weapons of mass destruction under UN Security Council Resolution 1540 and other endeavors. Those lessons should be applied for the ATT.

In order to best promote U.S. and international security, the ATT must also encompass a **broad scope** of conventional arms, from major weapons systems to small arms and light weapons. By providing greater transparency into the transfer and re-transfer of arms in the legal arms trade, an ATT would make it easier to follow where weapons are going and monitor potentially destabilizing accumulations. By delineating the legal from the illegal market, **an ATT would also shed light on and better enable states to combat the illicit international trade and irresponsible use of arms.**

Such steps are widely recognized as critical by U.S. officials. Ellen Tauscher, Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security stressed this point in February 2010, saying the ATT “must ensure that members effectively implement national laws that criminalize such transfers and allow for the monitoring of commerce. Without this, it won’t necessarily deter or stop terrorism.” Even earlier, Congress directed President Clinton in 1999 to negotiate an international regime to promote “global transparency” of arms sales and restrict transfers to states violating “fundamental values of human liberty, peace, and international stability” in the International Arms Sales Code of Conduct Act.

Now the United States is actively engaged in shaping an ATT. In February 2010, Under Secretary Tauscher noted, “Irresponsible transfers can support terrorists, enable genocidal [warlords], and create, sustain, and compound proliferation nightmares.” In October 2009, **Secretary of State Clinton said, “The United States is committed to actively pursuing a strong and robust treaty that contains the highest possible, legally binding standards for the international transfer of conventional weapons.”**

Multilateral negotiations can be difficult, but an overwhelming majority of states have voiced support for strengthening global standards and practices. **The United States has wisely indicated that it will not support a treaty that results in low standards and legitimizes irresponsible behavior.**

The opportunity to create a strong, legally binding ATT is of unparalleled importance to U.S. national security. American leadership is essential to transform that opportunity into a reality. ■

For more information, please visit:

Arms Control Association ATT Resources:

<http://www.armscontrol.org/subject/116/date>

**“U.S. Policy and the Arms Trade Treaty,”
briefing paper 2010:**

<http://www.armscontrol.org/pressroom/ATTRoundtableFeb2010>

**Statement of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton,
October 14, 2009:**

<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/10/130573.htm>

**Remarks by Under Secretary of State Ellen Tauscher,
February 18, 2010:**

<http://www.state.gov/t/us/136849.htm>

***The International Arms Trade*, Rachel Stohl and
Suzette Grillot (2009).**

**“Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations,
2001-2008,” Congressional Research Service,
September 2009.**

Arms Control Association

The Arms Control Association, founded in 1971, is a national nonpartisan membership organization dedicated to promoting public understanding of and support for effective arms control policies.