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# Parallel worlds – conflicting goals: how arms policy is infiltrating the 2030 Agenda

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Bonn, 30 May 2016. On 29 May, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon looked back on 60 years of armed UN peacekeeping missions. The first mission took place in May 1956 during the Suez Crisis. He also pointed out that this UN tool had received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1988. These are two facts of which the general public is largely unaware.

## Fatal developments

The Yearbooks on Armaments, Disarmament and International Security published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) each December since 1989 show that arms manufacturing and exports are the main factor hindering the success of sustainable, global peace strategies at transnational level. The many other problems in structural relations between states and societies and the associated debates in numerous forums aside, arms policy trends have become embedded in a parallel world, the realities of which go largely unnoticed by the general public and are shrugged off by the few that do perceive them.

However, in order to achieve many of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda, states need to do more than simply establish healthy (non-corrupt) and functioning (effective) governance structures. They must be able to develop and use sustainable business cycles, and establish and foster political relationships that benefit their populations.

Specifically, SDG 16 ('Peace, justice and strong institutions') of 2030 Agenda calls for the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies, a noble goal which most countries are a long way from achieving. There are many reasons for this, one of which is a highly dynamic global arms policy which forms a key part of a fatal, reverse trend.

## Arms policy: a back-room business

The United States, Russia, China, France and Germany have developed exceptional capabilities in the arms policy sector, especially in the last 15 to 20 years. In that order, these states are the world's top five arms manufacturers and exporters, followed in sixth to tenth place by the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, Ukraine and the Netherlands respectively. That being said, seven of these countries are democracies with an unblemished record when it comes to subjecting their arms policy activities and arms contract award processes to parliamentary control. Nonetheless, the arms industry has highly effective lobbying structures in these seven democracies, with its influence reaching deep inside their parliaments and its "policy advice" based heavily on the mantra that refusing arms contracts puts thousands of jobs at risk.

At the same time, these nations have developed a very lucrative source of income which guarantees considerable returns for their own treasuries. Governments, in some cases with and in other cases without parliamentary approval, sell licences for their own production lines to licensees who then manufacture the arms for them locally in crisis countries. In many cases, parliaments and export control authorities are very liberal in their response to this practice and only too willing to give their approval.

## Conflicting goals

State-led arms policy indirectly leads to a complete loss of control over the end user of the supplied weapons. This is because the sale of arms to partners and subsequent resale to third parties has given rise to a parallel world of illegal arms trading activities falling outside of the (still) legal practice of arms transactions and licensing. The result is that, in most of the world's crisis regions, weapons stockpiles of parliamentary democracies and autocratic states alike are being used to engage in violent conflict and wage hot war.

This setting of growing arms production, managed and subsidised by political actors, and a globally interwoven arms trade has been repeatedly fuelling violent conflict for decades. Looking at the operations of UN peacekeeping missions in conflict hotspots and interventions by country missions of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and other regional associations of states to put a stop to violent conflicts, there is little cause for optimism.

## Overcoming the proliferation of arms: an opportunity for the 2030 Agenda?

All 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda require that resources be allocated as efficiently and equitably as possible and in the most environmentally sustainable manner. This represents an opportunity for civil society, which is after all expressly called upon to play an active role in shaping the agenda. However, requiring arms policy actors to provide greater transparency to the international community is likely to be one of the toughest tasks between now and 2030. This is because selling the fatal consequences of armament and arms policy to the general public is a difficult task. And directing too much public attention to national arms policies could also put a strain on political and diplomatic relations between the ten largest arms exporting countries.

On 24 May, the UN opened the Global SDG Action Campaign Center in Bonn. Let us hope that this office becomes a key factor and actor for civil society, thereby also providing a starting point for bringing global arms trends to international public attention at long last.