

The Turtle Bay Security Roundtable: Opportunities to Prevent the Proliferation of Conventional Weapons

An event hosted by the Permanent Missions of Japan, Poland, and Turkey to the United Nations in cooperation with the Stimson Center

Date: May 21, 2012

Location: Japan Society in New York, New York

On May 21, 2012, the Permanent Missions of Japan, Turkey, and Poland to the United Nations hosted the *Turtle Bay Security Roundtable: Opportunities to Prevent the Proliferation of Conventional Weapons*. The meeting was assembled in cooperation with the Stimson Center, a civil society think tank focused on global security. The half-day forum aimed to provide relevant stakeholders, such as UN Member States, members of the UN Panel of Experts of Security Council subsidiary organs, experts from think tanks, academics, and members of civil society with a forum to deliberate on how to address the burgeoning proliferation of conventional weapons. At this third and most recent installment of the roundtable, representatives discussed the far-reaching consequences of the thriving illicit trade in conventional weapons. Particular focus was given to the supply sources of weapons, the mechanics of the trade, and the financial flows of the operation. The conference also featured a discussion on how to develop innovative and pragmatic approaches to curbing conventional arms proliferation. In total, more than 100 participants representing 44 UN Missions as well as leading nonproliferation experts attended the conference. Below is a brief summary of the event.

OPENING REMARKS

Ambassador Lincoln Bloomfield Jr., Chairman of the Stimson Center, opened the conference by remarking on how crucial the control of conventional weapons is to international peace and security. Though weapons of mass destruction often grab most of the attention from the United Nations and the media, the Ambassador noted that the vast majority of harm to society by non-state actors is done with conventional weapons. It is therefore appropriate to study the issue in detail.

Ambassador Tsuneo Nishida of Japan stated that it was gratifying and critical to have such a diverse group of panelists and participants, as a meaningful discussion could only be had with people from every corner of society. He particularly acknowledged the importance of the press, who has the power and responsibility to relay information on this key issue to the public. The Ambassador further stressed, however, that talk in New York must translate into action on the ground.

Ambassador Witold Sobków of Poland declared that an effective arms trade treaty that would prevent the destabilization of society and protect human rights was urgent, as non-state actors and arms dealers are

becoming increasingly sophisticated. Furthermore, the Ambassador stated that the international community must work to control both aspects of the arms trade, both legal and illegal and at both the international and national levels.

Ambassador Ertuğrul Apakan, too, acknowledged the importance of taking action against arms trafficking, noting that the small arms trade was the least regulated of all weapons trading and



that Turkey has suffered from conventional arms proliferation. He emphasized that everyone present had a responsibility to intervene on this issue, and urged participants to act on this responsibility over the coming months.

THE THREAT OF CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS PROLIFERATION: PATTERNS, METHODS, AND CONSEQUENCES

Ms. Rachel Stohl of the Stimson Center moderated the first session, which examined trends of the current international arms trade, by encouraging panelists to look at the underlying threats of the trade and to explore the variety of ways in which arms flow. Panelists included Christian Caryl of the Legatum Institute/Foreign Policy, Paul Holtom of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Alex Vines of Chatham House, and Irwin Nack from the Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi UFJ, Ltd.

Mr. Caryl began by describing the impact of small arms on societies in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Africa. According to Mr. Caryl, when discussing societies emerged in or coming out of conflict, we often discuss concepts such as democracy, the making of a constitution, economic development and so forth. Yet we rarely talk about the devastating effect the influx of small arms has on all of these processes and their assault on previously functioning societal structures. Many societies remain unaware of the devastation small arms bring to their society until a generation later. Though the arms trade is often compared with the drug trade, Mr. Caryl dismissed the notion that they are analogous. While drugs can be quickly consumed, arms last much longer and can have effects that resonate for decades.

The panel continued on to examine the sources of supply of arms, the brokers and shippers involved in the trade, and the illicit financial flows of the business. Mr. Holtom lamented the poor reporting track record of many countries on their legal arms trade and the decrease in reporting over the past few years, but ventured that transparency and data collection would soon increase thanks to the presence of information technology and the promise of a new Arms Trade Treaty. The panel pointed out that the influx of military surpluses as a potential source of an unregulated flow of arms. In particular, Mr. Holtom noted that trade in secondhand arms, though not frequently reported on, was still robust. The panelists also indicated that the relationship between arms suppliers and importers, including brokers, is likely to change given that many countries are developing their own arms industries and many regions, including Asia and Latin America, are becoming suppliers in their own rights.

Mr. Vines espoused the conviction that a legal definition of an arms trade broker in the upcoming Arms Trade Treaty was essential, as brokers often handle multiple aspects of transactions. To effectively thwart these brokers, enhanced processes must be enacted such as strict record-keeping, quality end-user certificates, and cross-checking documentation. The United Nations must also work to make it easier to pursue states that abuse the arms trade by selling arms to both sides of a conflict. Mr. Vines reminded attendees that arms dealers are often simultaneously involved in other illicit activities, including drugs and human trafficking, and called upon UN Member States to pass improved domestic legislation that targets arms dealers and makes them easier to prosecute.

Mr. Nack explored the relationship between the private sector, particularly financial entities, and the arms trade. Mr. Nack cautioned that illegal transactions often pass through multiple jurisdictions, thus making it difficult for any financial entity to identify a transaction as illicit in nature. At the same time, he argued that private companies, especially in financial services, could become even more useful in the search for illegal arms dealers if employees were trained in how to recognize red-flag transactions made by their customers. Many countries have varying export



rules, and financial entities must be taught these differences. Mr. Nack stressed the importance of a more substantive dialogue and exchange of information taking place between the private sector and respective governments.

CONVENTIONAL ARMS PROLIFERATION CHALLENGES: PRAGMATIC AND INNOVATIVE APPROACHES

Mr. Brian Finlay of the Stimson Center chaired the second session, which debated current and future mechanisms aimed at controlling the arms trade, and introduced panelists Jeff Abramson of Control Arms, Alejandro Alvarez of the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery of United Nations Development Programme, David Bosco of the School of International Studies of American University, Antonio Evora of the Conventional Arms Branch of the UNODA, and Petr Litavrin of the 1540 Committee Expert Group.

Mr. Abramson opened the second panel by reminding participants that both the legal and illegal arms trade needed to be addressed during the Arms Trade Treaty negotiations, and even championed the view that countries should be held accountable for the repercussions of its legal trade. He rejected the view that there was a lack of political will among countries to control the arms trade, saying that the true problem was that many states require assistance in drafting reports. The immediate gains to be had from an Arms Control Treaty would be the ability to finally hold countries accountable and the creation of global norms—the power of which should not be underestimated, according to Mr. Abramson.

Expert panelists from the UN Secretariat, including Mr. Evora and Mr. Alvarez, reiterated that UN peacekeepers and humanitarian and development workers often become victims of the small arms trade along with civilian populations. Mr. Evora noted that armed groups in conflict areas are beginning to use heavier categories of weapons against civilians in addition to small arms, and expressed the hope that the Arms Trade Treaty would cover a wide array of conventional weapons. Mr. Alvarez reminded participants that if countries better controlled their arms trade, money currently being spent on security could be funneled into social development programmes. He then continued on to discuss current efforts to overcome the divide between the discussions on arms control and development, and



stressed that in addition to national efforts to control the illicit flow of arms, more localized efforts to curbe the spread of armed violence are crucial.

Petr Litavrin led the panel into a discussion on what lessons and similarities could be found between implementation of Security Council Resolution 1540, which introduced measures to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and curbing the conventional arms trade. He pointed out that, as it is based on Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, resolution 1540 contains stronger language than many other instruments, leading to a good reporting system. The resolution has also been useful in aiding states to strengthen their own domestic arms control by encouraging them to build capacities and enact stricter border controls. Since both issues of proliferation of conventional weapons and WMD will require robust export control and border security measures, Mr. Litavrin argued that national implementation of WMD non-proliferation can benefit Member States' effort to tackle illicit trade of conventional arms.

Mr. Bosco, along with his fellow panelists, emphasized the need for the future Arms Trade Treaty to set high standards and set strict criteria if it is to become truly effective. He contended that a water-downed agreement would not only become ineffective but also harm Member States' efforts on arms control as such an agreement would suffocate the existing and functional mechanism in this field. Mr. Bosco cautioned the audience by pointing out some of the challenges related to multilateral rule making process as many Member States face various domestic constraints that would not allow them the flexibility to agree to a strong agreement. The entire panel also discussed the difficulty of creating a universally-accepted yet robust and effective treaty

that fully addresses the issue of conventional arms proliferation.

There was an emerging view among the panel as well as the audience on the following elements that would strengthen legally binding instruments on conventional weapons trade, especially the future Arms Trade Treaty:

- › Strong export controls already seen in some major arms-producing countries
- › The inclusion of brokering
- › A strong reporting model
- › Measures to ensure international cooperation and assistance

KEYNOTE ADDRESS: STEPHEN BRAUN

In his keynote address, Mr. Braun, national investigative correspondent and former National Security Editor of the Associated Press, described the negative consequences that illegal arms trade can bring upon a society through the example of Mr. Viktor Bout. Mr. Braun described how arms dealers were previously able to operate brazenly while eluding capture or charges, exploiting legal loopholes and the lack of attention paid by governments to their movements until recently. According to Mr. Braun, after the end of the Cold War, many powerful countries had also reduced their presence in states no longer seen as ideological battlegrounds, allowing arms dealers to deliver weapons frequently without detection. Current domestic legislation often covers weapons transport, but fails to target the logistics of that transport, the part of the process in which brokers are most active. It is therefore critical, Mr. Braun declared, for governments to enact tougher laws that can directly pursue arms dealers in real time, not years later. He also foresaw an evolution

in the arms trade business, predicting that the next wave of arms trades would be driven by states and not independent individuals. His remarks were met with keen interests by the audience, and the session was followed with active discussion between the speaker and the attendees.

CLOSING REMARKS:

At the end of the event, Ambassador Apakan, Ambassador Sobków, and Ambassador Nishida delivered the closing remarks. Ambassador Apakan expressed the belief that the day's discussions would be useful for the upcoming UN processes on arms control and hoped that a legal groundwork on the arms trade would be complemented by other processes in economic and social fields. Ambassador Sobków agreed with Ambassador Nishida that the Turtle Bay Seminars had become a valued and useful tradition among UN Member States and civil society.

Thanking all attendees for their contributions to the event, Ambassador Nishida recalled the grave seriousness of the risk proliferation presents, reminding participants of the threat to Japan, its neighbors, and the world posed by the nuclear and missile program of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. He welcomed the UN Security Council's recent responses to this threat, but stressed that any new measures adopted would become meaningless if they lacked effective implementation. Ambassador Nishida ended the seminar with a call for a multilateral response and universal participation in arms control efforts.

The meeting was a successful third installation to the previous two conferences held in May and December of last year. The roundtable allowed for an important exchange of views on the consequences and modalities of the conventional arms trade and how to curtail their dangerous proliferation. The potential of the adoption of a new Arms Trade Treaty this summer will be a significant development that will require sustained cooperation among UN Member States, civil society, and the private sector. Participants valued the opportunity to attend a forum that permitted an innovative dialogue among representatives of UN Member States, scholars, and experts on nonproliferation, and voiced their strong support for continued discourse on nonproliferation issues and their global impact.

