

Black market weapons at the root of global security threat



PATRICK ROSS

In the time that it takes you to read this article, someone, somewhere in the world will likely be killed with an illegal weapon. Whether in the hands of a child soldier in Africa, a gunman in the Middle East or a common thug somewhere in North America, illicit weapons are used to take the lives of hundreds of thousands of people every year.

The weapons black market has many different faces. Professional black-market arms merchants (also known as gunrunners), organized crime cartels and the clandestine espionage operations used by some of the world's most powerful countries to supply weapons covertly to groups or states they are sympathetic to (often using gunrunners or organized criminals as proxy agents), combine to form an international web of illegal weapons sales.

The top threat posed by black market weapons is their sustenance of various conflicts in developing nations—particularly those in Latin America and Africa. The weapons black market is also the chief weapons supplier to various terrorist organizations. Cutting off the flow of weapons into these hands seems like the most logical solution to solving these particular problems.

As unsavory as the idea may seem, the problem could best be solved through the creation of an international law enforcement organization.

Currently, the international community relies on customs agencies, domestic police forces—often linked through co-operative organizations such as INTERPOL—and the aforementioned weapons embargos to control the flow of weapons to trouble-areas around the world.

But such soft-power approaches, based on diplomacy, coalition-building and international good will, are meaningless without sufficient hard power—that is, actual operational capabilities—to back them up. This is where current international policy toward black market weapons trading falls short.

While there have been numerous attempts to crack down on illegal weapons sales—including the UN's Small Arms Review Conference, as well as efforts by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines—the illegal weapons trade continues to pose a serious threat to global human security. Year by year, it's becoming clearer that the current approach isn't working, and that it's therefore time to try something more ambitious and direct.

Intriguingly, when tallying the costs related to the black market weapons trade, one can't help but realize that failure to deal adequately with the illegal sale of weapons has a negative impact on the UN's peacekeeping initiatives. Terrorists, freedom fighters and militant factions the world over have to attain their weapons somehow, and the black market serves as a convenient source for these arms.

It's in this sense that the establishment of any such force actually characterizes a more proactive approach to UN peacekeeping, one built upon the foundation of simply enforcing international law.

Of course, the establishment of any new United Nations initiative, especially one this ambitious, raises the question of how it will be paid for. Perhaps the UN could take the advice of Satya Das, who suggested levying an international tax on defence spending in order to fit the bill. Mustering the necessary political will would, in the long run, prove more difficult. However, the lives saved would be well worth the effort.

Thank you for not voting



PAUL KNOECHEL

Every year about this time, the circus comes to campus. Colourful decorations litter the ground and cover the walls. People you've never heard of before explode into the limelight with troupes of supporters and performers. And from all corners of campus there are shouts for you to join the madness, get involved, fight apathy and so forth and so forth. Yes, Students' Union elections are a magical time indeed.

Even more impressive than the massive hullabaloo of it all is the fact that so many people are able to ignore it completely.

And for all of you out there that cared so little that you didn't take the whole 20 or 30 minutes needed to become relatively informed and cast a ballot, this article is for you. I wish to extend my thanks to each and every one of you brave souls—keep up the good work.

I can hear the collective gasp right now of the one-fifth of the student body that actually did vote. This is followed by questions such as, "How can you support such apathy?" or, "Don't you believe in democracy?" But I have good reasons for this: my ego and my opinionated nature.

If you were to get to know me, you'd realize that I have an enormous ego. In fact, in order to fall asleep every night,

THE BURLAP SACK

Global warming being the thorny issue that it is, perhaps we shouldn't be all that surprised that high-profile activists like Al Gore and David Suzuki are going to take some heat about their respective campaigns—especially when it comes to those who have the most to lose from a change in lifestyle.

But as the evidence—and, more importantly, public support—for action on climate change increases, it seems that the coherence of the arguments against it decreases proportionally. Now that global warming is a fact, we no longer hear, "Come on, it's just earth's natural cycle"—it's, "David Suzuki drives a big, gas-guzzling bus across the country to get his message out," or "Al Gore's house consumes a huge amount of electricity" or "the producer of *An Inconvenient Truth* flies in a private jet."

While the actual degree of hypocrisy found here could easily be disputed, the point is, these character attacks don't take away from the issue at hand. Just because Al Gore has a big house doesn't mean that climate change isn't happening—so don't just scoff about it and leave it at that.

As these types of fallacies are somehow making front pages across the country, a sack-beating is definitely in order—both for those who suggest them and those who report them as well.

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