



MAPW

health professionals promoting peace



The Global Arms Trade & the Wars it Fuels

This series of fact sheets explores many aspects of the global arms trade, including its participants, its promotion, its victims, and some of the lessons of history. The information is very relevant to Canberra and its identity. Despite very welcome recent additions to the advertisements at Canberra Airport that promote some positive features of our beautiful city, significant weapons advertisements remain

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In 2015, global military spending was \$1.676 trillion ([\[i\]](#)). That is the amount spent by all nations on fighting and preparing for wars. Military expenditure constitutes a severe drain on social expenditures, especially (but not only) in less developed countries.

Some governments spend more on their military than on health care for their citizens. For example, in 2014 the government of Pakistan spent nearly 4 times as much on its military as on health care ([\[ii\]](#)). Pakistan's neighbour and military rival India is also a big military spender, and for the period 2010 - 2014 was the world's largest importer of major weapons ([\[iii\]](#)).

Although the financial value of the global trade in weapons is difficult to assess, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) states that "It is possible to estimate that the total value of the global arms trade in 2013 was at least \$76 billion. However, the true figure is likely to be higher."[\[iv\]](#)

International transfers of major conventional weapons grew by 16 per cent between 2005–2009 and 2010–14. The US remained the top exporter, followed by Russia, then China ([\[v\]](#)). Companies based in the US account for 54.4% of the global total, with Lockheed Martin in top place ([\[vi\]](#)).

The majority of those killed and maimed in modern wars are not terrorists or combatants, but innocent civilians. While the percentage of the victims of modern wars who are civilians is disputed, part of the reason for the uncertainty is the enormous "indirect" damage during armed conflict to health care services and other essential

infrastructure, attacks on food supplies, the loss of employment and income, and the many dangers to which refugees are exposed.

The majority of those killed in modern wars are civilians. They are ignored in official war statistics

The 2015 study "Body Count", by affiliates of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), estimated that the "war on terror" in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan has killed, directly or indirectly, a total of around 1.3 million people – 1 million in Iraq, 220,000 in Afghanistan and 80,000 in Pakistan. The report notes that civilian casualties are ignored in official statistics. The war in Syria adds another layer of human catastrophe to this toll.

Weapons sales to the Middle East are of particular concern, given the appalling abuses of human rights that they facilitate. Saudi Arabia, whose weaponry is used in attacks on civilians in the disastrous war in Yemen ([\[vii\]](#)), as well as anti-government forces in Syria ([\[viii\]](#)), is the second largest importer of major weapons, following India in first place (and Australia is the 6th)[\[ix\]](#).

"Show me who makes a profit from war, and I'll show you how to stop the war"
Henry Ford, US Industrialist (1863-1947)

While responsibility clearly falls on governments and others that use weapons against civilian populations, and on those who that supply the weapons, the weapons industry itself cannot turn a blind eye to the civilian impacts of its products. It

promotes the arming of regions of tension, thus increasing the risks of weapons being used, just as other industries seek to maximise the use of their products. This will be addressed in a future paper in this series.

There is no evidence that spending up big on weapons helps to “keep the peace”. On the contrary, the regions that have the highest weapons expenditures are the regions where tensions are highest or armed conflicts are raging, with millions of innocent people suffering as a result.

The UNHCR reports that in 2015 there were an unprecedented number of people – 65 million globally – displaced from their homes by war and persecution, and that 51 per cent of the world’s refugees are children([x]).

Increasingly, preparations for warfare are being normalised as just another part of Australia’s economy. The 2016 Defence White Paper and federal budget treated major weapons acquisitions programs as job-creation schemes, completely ignoring the much wider regional ramifications of contributing to, rather than attempting to rein in, the arming of our region. This is despite the white paper’s recognition that the risk of Australia being invaded is remote ([xi]).

Weapons systems are advertised for their high-tech sophistication. The wars they fuel reduce communities to rubble.



The No Airport Arms Ads campaign was formed because weapons advertisements are inappropriate at a major gateway to our national capital.

They help to normalise warfare by presenting sanitised images of weaponry, and they sell short our city by presenting it as a place focussed on preparing for war.

New advertising panels in mid-2016 celebrating Canberra’s 100% renewable energy target and our excellent educational institutions look great and are extremely welcome. However significant weapons ads remain, and we look forward to their replacement also by more welcoming signage.

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<https://www.facebook.com/NoAirportArmsAds/>,
or email naaa@mapw.org.au

References

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- [x] <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/6/5763b65a4/global-forced-displacement-hits-record-high.html>
- [xi] 2016 Defence White Paper, Executive Summary, p 15