

MuckrakersBulletin

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The Iceberg



As we see it:

It is no secret that the USA is awash in guns (112.6 guns per 100 people; 60% of Americans own one or more guns). To an outsider, it seems mystifying.

Put aside the mythology of pro-gun influence coming from Nebraska and Saskatchewan farmers and hunters. Gun mania exists among urban dwellers including those living in homogeneous and gated communities. Similarly, talk of amendment rights in the USA is simply rhetoric.

Obviously, the NRA is an important influence. But why? Why are there so many not-wealthy backers as well as smart billionaires pouring their money into the pro-gun cause?

This Bulletin looks beyond the usual explanations. It suggests that guns are at most the local story, regardless of their tragic consequences.

We borrow from Rosa Brooks: She says that the line between war and the military on one side and civilian life/not war, on the other, has become blurred. Militarism (we call it hawkishness) has penetrated all aspects of American life and undermined the foundations of criminal and international law.

This is not a cheerful Bulletin, although our goal is, as usual, neither support nor condemnation. Preparing this Bulletin gave us important insights.

In Canada, so far, it is different. So far. No one should underestimate the political pressure (Andrew Scheer campaign) for looser gun control in Canada for example.



The Arms Economy:

- Make no mistake: the US administration has a something akin to a coherent industrial policy, a plan for creating jobs, technological change notwithstanding. It is hidden in plain sight.
- This plan can be seen in the astonishing number of arms sales in the last year. It is found in the newly announced revisions to regulations and restrictions (say about human rights) about which countries can buy US-made arms.
- It can be seen in the very recent US Administration statements that employees of the government should use their offices and efforts to champion and sell US-produced arms throughout the world.
- It can be seen in the squeals from industry and government alike that there is increasing competition for such sales, competition not just from Russia and especially China, but also from Mexico and Latin America. The refrain is that US must step in and put itself on a competitive footing, or it will lose ground.
- Arms sales are said to promote cooperation from potential allies. They are “military intervention without losing soldiers”. But according to academic studies, arms sales actually do *not* encourage cooperative behavior on the part of purchasing countries.
- Arms deals are made with many or all parties already engaged in a conflict (90% of them are to countries in the Middle East).

- Arms sales are simply sales. They are what companies do and what economies depend upon. They create an ever-expanding industrial capacity and jobs. They benefit, quite specifically, the regions of the USA where jobs in other sectors are shrinking.
- Arms sales are possible strategies to “bring jobs home”. Another strategy is tariffs. Tariffs create blow-back from business and they raise prices for consumers. Arms sales are hardly ever noticed.



The Iceberg:

- We think of the military in terms of war and soldiers fighting.
- We look at the ballooning US defence budget (bigger than the next 6 countries’ budgets COMBINED, but not the highest per capita in terms of spending). We think: How awful it is that so much money is being drained from social, public and community life to be used for defence.
- But we think again, it really is a dangerous world, where even a different sort of US government (Obama’s for example) thought it was compelled to increase defence spending and arms sales. It is actually not very surprising that the opposition in the US does not take up the issue.
- A large part of the defence budget is spent on un-assisted technologies (drones etc.). It includes social programs that the military undertakes in the name of “nation-building”.
- The US defence budget is only part of the money being allocated. It does not include, for example, the costs of fighting the many “non-wars” that the US is currently engaged in (Afghanistan/Iraq), homeland security or even veterans affairs. Much of cyber-warfare has its own budget as well.
- It does not include supplies, services and community support (roads etc) that the contracting companies count on being there. It does not include cost for the vast intelligence apparatus that needs to be put into place especially when it is often non-state actors who are engaged in conflict.
- What counts as “war” to justify spending has been broadened dramatically to include things that don’t look anything like the military.
- In short, we are not just talking about about soldiers fighting soldiers: Even for the armed forces, only 14% of this budget is spent on those engaged in combat.



Kissing cousins:

- In commerce, most transactions are business to business.
- To be sure, regulations restrict what can and cannot be done. Export licences, national laws, permits and regulations impose a modicum of state control over private sector activities. International law, state-imposed sanctions, foreign policy decisions and state-based industrial policies for tariffs, sanctions and subsidies all affect business.
- But something is different about arms sales. Here, governments are parties to the transactions. They provide the defence budgets; they spend the money, they contract out.
- Governments provide much of the cash and they direct where it goes. They even administer some of the contracts. They buy the arms. A portion of the US government's foreign aid (military aid) goes to the countries that buy US arms so that they can pay for what they buy.
- Virtually all politicians promote a strong defence as part of their campaign strategies, thus generating media spin to make all this spending seem reasonable.
- This isn't "corporate welfare". This is a partnership.



Foundations:

- Law, policing and treaties matter. In the international arena, UN Conventions exert an important pressure delimiting what can and cannot be done and what counts as "war" versus "non-war".
- The trouble is that the line between war and non-war is increasingly blurry.

What if it is no longer sovereign states that are being engaged?

What if war is never declared but fought under a different name?

What if “combatants” include people who are not part of any declared military operation (citizens in other words) but who just might be terrorists?

What about “terror”? Terror is all about striking fear into people who do not think of themselves as being engaged in military combat.

How then do international laws and treaties apply?

- The basic premises of law, both criminal and international, is that until a crime or declaration of war has been committed, there is little room for legally sanctioned armed or police response.
- But what if the public expects that governments (and individuals) take a preemptive and preventative stance? What then is the role of law as a counter-force to unrestricted belligerent response?



In sum: Hawkishness

- In the conflict between hawks and doves, the hawks are soaring.
- To be clear: being hawkish isn't about specific armed conflicts whether justifiable or not.
- Hawks and doves disagree about whether the response to Syrian chemical attacks is right or wrong, whether military intervention in brutally autocratic countries (including those engaged in ethnic cleansing and genocide) is a good thing or bad, given who the interveners are likely to be. There are hawks on the left and the right.
- Hawks think that:
 - huge defence budgets need no justification,
 - enemies surround, both at home and in the world,
 - there are only two sides to every issue; polarization is good.
 - belligerent responses are always reasonable.
 - civic institutions have failed to protect us.
 - prevention and pre-emption legitimately call for belligerent response.
 - the military is the most trustworthy institution
 - foreign policy, intelligence and defence are one and the same.
 - governments and industry are true partners in all of the above.

- Being hawkish means that thinking that everything from people owning guns to massive defence budgets (and arms sales) is reasonable.
- We haven't yet mentioned the effect of the depiction of guns and war in media that everyone enjoys; "Hawkish" is entertainment.



Meanwhile, back in Canada:

- Canada is a bit player in the arms trade. It has a few companies and branch plants engaged in military-related production, but nothing compared to the USA or most other countries.
- A much smaller proportion of people in Canada have guns. There are fairly strict gun controls (but not a gun registry except in Quebec)
- There are and have been political quarrels in Canada about which arms to buy and to whom to sell them. There have been debates about how much involvement Canada should have in military alliances and how much should be spent on which kind of fighter jet.
- However, even in Canada there is no significant opposition to the idea of defence spending.
- It would be hard to claim that Canada is hawkish. Note however that the main plank of Conservative party leader Andrew Scheer's campaign is looser regulation, especially of guns.
- The push from his flank of the Conservatives (and his flank is in the ascendancy) is to turn Canada hawkish.

Sources: Rosa Brooks, *How everything became war and the military became everything*, (2016) Guy Lawson, Pocket Books (2015) *War Dogs*, defencenews.com, tradingeconomics.com, lmdefence.com/foreign-military-sales/fms-vs-dcs/, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2018) Foreign Policy Analysis (2011) US Department of State and US Department of Defense (various documents) Defense Security Cooperation Agency SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) (various documents, all excellent!) "*What Progressives Miss about Arms Sales*" The Atlantic (2017), Statista, The Economist (various), The Official Home of Defense Security (2018) , US Department of Energy (various documents) , NYTimes (2017) Harpers (2017) Military Embedded Systems (2017) Amnesty International, Firearms Industry Trade Association (various publications) The Guardian, "*Don't Bank on the Bomb*", Mother Jones, 24/7 Wall St.com, US Department of Homeland Security (various documents), The GunBlog.ca, Toronto Star(2018), Tom.Dispatch (2018), Journal of Economic Issues Vol. 22, NO 2 (1988), "*Risky Business: The Rise of Arms Sales in US Foreign Policy*" (2018) Cato Institute , "*Dollars at Work*" Brookings Institute (2015), Bloomberg News (April, 2018) Reuters News (April, 2018), National Observer (2018)

