

ANN: Small Arms - Big Business. Trading Small Arms: Political, Cultural and Ethical Dimensions in Historical and Global Perspective (Conference Report)

Discussion published by Dorothea Moewitz on Sunday, October 29, 2017

Workshop report

Venue: Center for Interdisciplinary Research (ZiF), Bielefeld

Convener: Dagmar Ellerbrock (Technical University Dresden), Angelika Epple (University of Bielefeld), Felix Brahm (German Historical Institute London)

June 8-10, 2017

Although small arms trade has a low share in the range of national exports, it plays a crucial role in international conflicts. The distribution of small arms has caused the highest number of injury and death in conflict and displacement since 1945. This makes it particularly important to gain a deeper understanding of this subject. On the invitation of Dagmar Ellerbrock (TU Dresden), Angelika Epple (University of Bielefeld), and Felix Brahm (German Historical Institute London), experts from different academic fields and from all over the world met at the ZiF in Bielefeld to discuss their research on the small arms trade, and its various implications and regulations in a global and historical perspective. The three-day conference aimed at connecting different fields of research but also at initiating an informed debate on this pressing political issue which is long overdue.

The topic of small arms trade is difficult to research, since it is often a hidden business performed in backrooms. The first panel of the conference addressed marketing strategies of the small arms business. From a micro-historical perspective, Brian DeLay (University of California, Berkeley) focused on a man who was a pioneer in the trading of small arms in the United States: Marcellus Hartley. As one of the most important arms dealers of the 19th century in the Western Hemisphere Hartley just like others intervened into foreign conflict and profited massively from war. What makes Hartley so instructive for the understanding of today's arms dealers is the fact, that he pursued his business as a respectable person. Hartley therefore, gives us a good deal to think about the morality of the arms trade

From a business history perspective, Stefanie van de Kerkhof (University of Mannheim) analyzed the marketing and discursive strategies of the West German company *Rheinmetall* during the Cold War. Confronted with profound political as well as societal changes of the 1960s and 1970s, Rheinmetall successfully adapted new marketing strategies to keep up its profits. Van de Kerkhof illustrated how Rheinmetall changed from a company whose core marketing policy consisted of direct meetings with contractors to a company with a coherent Corporate Identity with a marketing and advertisement strategy that implemented an image of trust and quality.

The former Scientific Director of the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy Michael Brzoska (University of Hamburg) in his keynote lecture addressed changes in international arms trade

control measures. He showed how focus shifted from major weapons to small arms and back since the 1990s. By analyzing the debates on arms control, he identified several explanatory variables that led to the modification in the international agenda. To him, international accomplishments like the Arms Trade Treaty or the Mine Ban Treaty were rendered possible by an increasing expert knowledge that led to a major change in public awareness of the ethical and moral side of the arms trade.

The second panel addressed the channeling and controlling of the small arms trade. Felix Brahm (German Historical Institute London) zoomed into arms transfer between Europe and East Africa between 1850 and 1914. The high demand for low-priced replica and second-hand military rifles from Europe, North America and South Asia was a crucial factor for the arms flow. In local contexts, these arms were applied for different purposes, but particularly for commercial hunting and warfare, and often also became prestigious object and symbol of masculinity that helped to establish trade contacts and relations of trust in the first place. Brahm then showed that the intercultural contact led to a semantic shift attributed to the rifles triggering different strategies on both sides to control the arms trade.

Nicholas March (Peace Research Institute Oslo) illustrated repercussions of arms proliferation and its restriction in Africa in different historical periods. He showed how the restricted transfer of military technology gave European powers an advantage in the Scramble for Africa, and how the vast influx of arms into Africa during the Cold War contributed to high levels of conflict and instability. Today, he argued, the widespread possession of weapons within Africa as a legacy of the Cold War period poses a high risk of violence across the continent and confronts governments with the problem to control access and use of firearms.

The third panel turned towards the eastern hemisphere and focused on marketing strategies of the arms business. Nabouo Tajima (Seijō University, Tokyo) traced the history of the China Arms Embargo of 1919. After the Sino-Japanese War, Germany contested Japanese efforts to become the principal arms exporter to China. The beginning of World War I opened Japan the chance to turn the tide. But their efforts came to a sudden end with China entering civil war. To prevent Japan's monopolization in the field of arms trade the great powers enforced an embargo against China in 1919. As Germany was already prohibited to export arms by the Treaty of Versailles, the embargo prevented each side to take sides in the civil war.

Lili Zhu (Bielefeld University) focused on the trading practice of private and unregulated arms trade between Germany and China that underwent a major change in the 1930s. Zhu examined the negotiation of the HAPRO-contract, the first intergovernmental treaty between the National Government of Nanjin (1927) and the Nazi Party (1933), enquiring about the power relations between the two partners. She demonstrated that right from the beginning of the negotiations until the implementation of the treaty, China was unable to prove as an equally sovereign counterpart.

In the papers of the fourth panel, politics of arms trade regulation came to the fore. Daniel Stahl (Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena) examined the emergence and the reception of two of the most influential proposals limit the international arms trade after the First World War: the restrictions of the traffic in small arms within certain world areas, proposed by Great Britain, versus the nationalization of the armament industry, as proposed by the United States. Although both proposals

were not implemented Stahl argued, that they are an expression of the very different visions the U.S. and Great Britain had about the organization of society and its threats during that period time.

Carlos A. Pérez Ricart (Freie Universität Berlin) revealed a tight network between politicians and corporate executives in the small arms business after World War II along [or across] the fine line between legal and illegal arms trade. Following the case of Gerhard Mertins, head of MEREX AG and a former SS-officer, Pérez Ricart demonstrated how German governmental institutions supported the transfer of small arms into Latin-American dictatorships.

To fuel the discussion, the evening program was reserved for two completely different non-academic approaches to the subject that reflected different strategies to shift public attention to the arms trade issue. Michael Eickhoff (Stadttheater Dortmund) presented a campaign by Dortmund artists for the Peng Kollektiv!, an alliance of actors and activists that apply performance arts to expose the arms industry to the public. Using subversive strategies like a major fake callback on weapons from Heckler & Koch in the United States or a fake campaign against the German Christian Democratic Party's stance about arms exports, which triggered international attention, Peng tried to direct German public and parliamentary attention towards the issue of small arms trade.

A second focus lay upon journalists' efforts to rise public attention on the small arms trade. Alex Yablon (The Trace, New York City) introduced into his recent investigative work on the American Gun Market and its repercussions in the Trump era. He showed that the illicit gun transfer into Latin American countries had had a major impact on the migration-movement to the United States. His results suggest that migration to the US might also be a product of a US-American government unwilling to approach the issue of illicit arms trade.

The fifth panel addressed political, economic, and juridical settings of different arms trading cultures. In his talk, Aaron Karp (Old Dominion University Norfolk), Senior Advisor of the Geneva based small arms Survey, provided a rather pessimistic outlook on the ability of political science to produce reliable data on the small arms trade. On the one side, Karp's research shows that since the end of the Cold War the production of small arms for the state continues to decline, since armed forces are shrinking and procurement quantities decline. On the other side, the surveying of small arms trade is getting more difficult since the production small arms is globalizing, favored by two processes: the *sovereignization* and the *democratization* of technology. While an increasing number of countries assert legal privileges to the production of small arms, individuals and non-state actors assert their own ability to generate deadly technology. This trend poses the international community to a new demand for action.

Ritu Mathur (University of Texas, San Antonio) argued that the human rights discourse as new standard of civilization is not without problems in respect of the small arms issue. She showed how critics of disarmament increasingly use the human rights discourse for their purpose, by claiming the right to resistance and self-preservation. According to Mathur these critics pose a severe challenge to the effort of arms control.

Katsuhiko Yokoi (Meiji University, Chiyoda) shed light on the economic history of the arms trade in Japan in the 19th and early 20th centuries. He examined how Japan - within only 30 years - turned from an arms importer to an arms exporter, following a governmental policy. He emphasized the great

importance of a British technology and knowledge transfer from Great Britain to Japan.

Dorothea Schmidt (Berlin School of Economics and Law) scrutinized into Germany's official claim of "a restrictive, responsible policy on the export of military equipment"; according to Schmidt, its policy and practice speak another language. In the case of Heckler & Koch, guns abound in conflict regions like Guerrero, Mexico, without having a license for exports. Examples like the Guerrero case illustrate how existing rules of the German government can still be circumvented and are part of the bigger problem.

The conference has demonstrated that small arms trade is a multifaceted issue that needs to be tackled from different methodological angles. Perspectives towards an interdisciplinary approach have been outlined, and the necessity of reliable data sets has been stressed, which might be gained in interdisciplinary cooperation, especially between historians and colleagues from the social sciences. Furthermore, questions of moralizing markets have been identified as a promising field of future research to better understand the asymmetric entanglement of local, national, and global settings that characterizes the small arms business.

Programme

8th June 2017

Market Structures I: Commercial Strategies and Hidden Rules of Demand and Supply

Brian DeLay (Berkeley) The Most Dangerous Man you've Never Heard of: Marcellus Hartley and the Missing History of the U.S. Arms Trade

Stefanie van de Kerkhoff (Mannheim): For your Security - Now and in the Future. Marketing Strategies of German Arms Production in the Cold War. A Business History Perspective

Keynote Lecture

Michael Brzoska (Hamburg): From Major Weapons to Small Arms and Back - Efforts to Control the Trade in Arms since the Early 1990s

9th June 2017

Market Structures I: Channeling and Controlling the Trade

Felix Brahm (London): Arms Trade in East Africa: A Transregional Perspective, 1850 to 1914

Nicholas March (Oslo): Warfare and the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Africa, from the Scramble to the War on Terror

Market Structures II: Channeling and Controlling the Trade (cont.)

Nabouo Tajima (Tokyo): Japan, Germany and the China Arms Embargo, 1919-1929

Lili Zhu (Bielefeld): Creating a Business between Two Countries. Arms Trade as Intermediaries in German Chinese Arms Trade in the 1930s

Politics of arms trade regulation

Daniel Stahl (Jena): Confronting Unleashed Capitalism or Revolution? Negotiations on Limitations of the Arms Trade during the Interwar Period

Carlos A. Pérez Ricart (Berlin): MEREX AG as an Example of the contradictory German Arms Export Policy to the World

Evening Programme

Michael Eickhoff (Dortmund): Artistic and Journalistic Input - Peng Kollektiv!

Alex Yablon (The Trace): The Other Iron Pipeline: The American Gun Market and Trafficking to Latin America in the Trump Era

10th June 2017

Political, Economic and Juridical Settings of Different Arms Trading Cultures

Aaron Karp (Norfolk, USA): Two Faces of Global Small Arms Proliferation: Sovereign versus Democratic Technology.

Ritu Mathur (San Antonio): Postcolonial Interventions in Weapons Control

Political, Economic and Juridical Settings of Different Arms Trading Cultures II

Katsuhiko Yokoi (Chiyoda): Economic History of the Arms Trade in Japan

Dorothea Schmidt (Berlin): The German Paradox of Small Arms Governance: Despite Restrictive Laws Weapons Abound in Conflict Regions - the Case of Heckler & Koch.