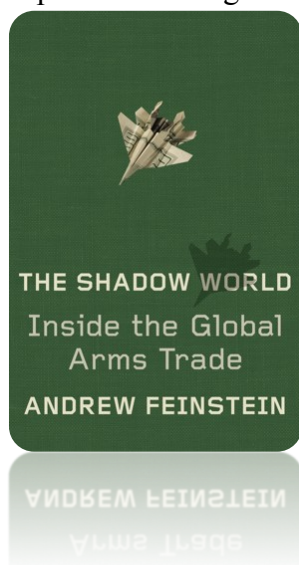


In Response to – ‘The Shadow World: Inside the Global Arms Trade’

By David J. Olney, Assoc. Lecturer, School of History & Politics, University of Adelaide

Having just finished reading Andrew Feinstein’s exposé of the global arms trade, I find myself impressed by his commitment and the quality of his research, but also with more questions than answers about the context within which the arms trade thrives. The importance of security and stability are mentioned in the introduction of *The Shadow World*, but how security is defined and perceived is not given serious analysis later on in the book. Additionally, and in conjunction with the lack of exposition regarding what security means, Feinstein fails to elaborate on why people and economies function in the way that they do, resulting in the arms trade appearing to exist in a very ugly vacuum.

Feinstein goes well beyond the stereotypical view of the arms trade as primarily involving roguish dealers and dastardly warlords, as presented in Hollywood movies



such as *Lord of War* (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VHn1zo_04), to show the reader how large a role corporate corruption and political collusion play in the arms industry. This could be both frightening and enlightening if one was not aware of the nature of the business, but no primary context is provided as to why people behave in the way he describes throughout the book.



Several contextual steps before an arms deal, and the cushion of corruption and collusion on which it may well rest, there has to be some idea of and/or desire for security. Whether security is defined as the ability to meet and maintain basic Human needs, or as the intention to secure control over people and resources at almost any cost, some definition of security is necessary in order to prefigure the labyrinth within which the arms trade flourishes.

Feinstein repeatedly restates the points that the world would be a better place if the arms trade were more transparent and if less arms were traded, as if the arms business is not a direct outgrowth of the Human desire for

security and to secure control over things. Feinstein would like the world to be a less war-ridden place, which is an admirable desire, but it is impossible to work toward creating a better world without first acknowledging how people choose to define and achieve their sense of security.

As we have seen from decades of intrastate violence across Africa, people do not need



an advanced weapons system to unleash horror upon each other: all that has been required has been a combination of basic agricultural implements and motivation from a cultivated sense of hate and greed. The need for security has been employed to both justify and respond to such violence, which inevitably creates an environment in which the arms trade flourishes.

Hate and greed both provide the motivation to acquire and put arms to use, as well as providing the reason for acquiring arms to deter aggression. Consequently, the arms trade does not necessarily define itself, but is, instead, a direct reflection of how people choose to define themselves and what they want to achieve.

Under circumstances where arms are employed to protect basic Human security and deter aggression, the arms trade is nothing more than a means to a desirable end, and it is worth considering if the arms trade is always just a means to an end. Consequently, the critical question becomes:

“is the security being proposed desirable enough to warrant the risks that come from the trade and application of arms?”

President Eisenhower warned the United States in particular, and the entire world in



general, about the dangers he foresaw in allowing the Military-Industrial-Complex to thrive. Eisenhower observed that the arms trade is a means by which to accumulate wealth and power, and that people would use it to accumulate wealth and power no matter whether there was or was not any good reason for making and trading arms. President Eisenhower acknowledged that security and social responsibility are not primary issues for those who are pursuing wealth and power, and it is through such a lens that Feinstein’s book can be brought into a practical focus.

Feinstein spends a significant proportion of his book describing the behaviour of the Military-Industrial-Complex, extending its definition to include Congress (MICC). In

doing so he lays out a web of political collusion and corporate corruption that knows no bounds and expands to exploit every new opportunity. The corruption and collusion that Feinstein documents is not specific to the arms trade, but, instead, represents what people in search of wealth and power will do with an opportunity.

For example, Feinstein makes the point that Sweden has very strict laws concerning the arms trade, but that it has a very relaxed approach to applying these laws. A desire for wealth and power is clearly the significant issue that needs to be addressed, since laws will only be applied if justice is deemed to be more valuable than worldly gain.

To claim, as Feinstein does, that the arms trade subverts and weakens democracy is to ignore the reality that many ruling elites have no intention of surrendering an opportunity to gain wealth and power. The arms trade is too good an earner for the minority who run our supposedly democratic Western system.

So what are we to do about the arms trade? First of all, we should separate the genuine need to protect ourselves from aggression motivated by hate and/or greed, which we can describe as a legitimate need for security, from the illegitimate goal of accumulating wealth and power at any and all costs.

Every country needs to decide whether it is going to take the eradication of corruption

and collusion seriously, and then seek out partners based on its chosen path. In the West, it seems, the majority of citizens are wilfully ignorant of how our ruling elite accumulate wealth and power, or what we can do about it. Consequently, the arms trade will continue to flourish and Feinstein will never be short of material for his next book.

In order to assist countries to achieve a degree of security, without leaving them at the mercy of the arms industry and its political accomplices, we should consider what kind of mediating institution we could put between the customer and the arms trade. As is made clear in *The Shadow World*, the arms companies and their political supporters descend on any country that wants to buy arms like a pack of vultures—employing every dirty trick in the book to make money.

Imagine, if you will, that the international community decide to create an institution called the International Arms Assessment and Security Assistance Agency (IAASAA). The activities IAASAA engages in include testing and assessing all arms put up for sale on the global market, comparing equipment so that possible purchasers have broad and unbiased data to consider, providing assessment of security requirements for states who are thinking of going shopping, and acting as a neutral umpire to help states purchase arms without being sucked into the vortex of corruption and collusion that the arms industry relies on in order to sustain its version of cowboy capitalism.

The IAASAA would function under a charter that precludes its officers from jumping back and forth between arms companies, defence forces, and government agencies. It would have to meet full financial transparency guidelines in its interactions with arms companies. Its officers would have to accept both full financial and ethical transparency when interacting with any state. Oversight would be provided via randomised red-teaming, with any discrepancies being forwarded to the ICC for investigation.

Can we imagine such an institution in the world we live in?

Of course we can't.

Security, as states tend to conceive it in relation to the purchase and use of arms, depends on secrecy and independence, which both set the stage for the arms trade continuing to flourish in exactly the same



way that Feinstein describes in his book. The arms trade flourishes as a direct result

of how security is thought about, combined with the Human desire for wealth and power. Nothing about the arms trade will change until people change, and I'd rather bet on the next mediocre and bloated weapons system coming down the gravy pipeline than on people changing.

Views expressed in this article are not necessarily those of SAGE International

Images Accessed: 21/01/2012

Feinstein book cover:

http://www.washingtonpost.com/rf/image_296w/2010-2019/WashingtonPost/2011/11/02/Outlook/Images/books1106tirman.jpg

Lord of War Poster:

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President Eisenhower image:

<http://reinhardkargl.com/iBlog/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/dwight-d-eisenhower-circa1956.jpg>

Ammunition image:

<http://www.carolinelucas.com/assets/images/carolinelucas/CL.com/ammunitions.jpg>