

Comment by Michael C H Jones
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The International Arms Trade has had a long and inglorious history since time immemorial. When countries are not officially at war and governments wish to deny destabilisation policies/strategies towards allegedly unfriendly rival nations the backdoor arms sales and transportations through third parties and countries is the chosen mechanism of all irrespective of previous or existing international treaties.

America as a "free enterprise" nation cloaks its activities through private companies and their national subsidiaries globally. Russia is just more blatant, and having fewer allies, often delivers direct by the jumbo load. In this article it appears, and no surprise to anyone, Saudi Arabia and Turkey are the principle western national Clearing Houses for weaponry into Syria and Yemen and elsewhere in West Asia.

Of course it is just another variation of the so-called Cold War weaponisation of Vietnam and Afghanistan during those years of US/Soviet confrontation, with China and Europe at the margins. We all know the results, both the US and USSR were defeated but the arms stayed with the warriors on the ground and were turned against former "allies". The last war Vietnam fought was against China in 1978 and the next could be anytime soon. The US and NATO have been failing for nearly two decades against the Taliban in Afghanistan whilst Iraq and Syria have made many western arms companies very profitable.

Have any lessons been learnt - No. Will the carnage and civilian deaths continue for decades - absolutely? Could Clinton or Trump do a deal with Xi and Putin - highly unlikely if not impossible. Is there leadership in Europe - please stop laughing. And what about Australia - the 76 seats/trombones electoral vaudeville show mandate for Mr Decisive - Malcolm Turnbull?

Chinese patrol boats and maintenance facilities in East Timor, Russian small arms container loads and weapons advisers in Fiji, an on the brink social collapse/failed state in PNG, gurgling restlessness in Bougainville and Solomons just to mention the most obvious. All have been, remain and arguably in the future, will be attractive markets for the arms traders. But remember Australia will have its new French built submarines in the early 2030s!!

The salad days, to redirect another's phrase, of international human rights diplomacy post WW II are over, that generation has died and their sons and daughters are ready for the retirement villages. This era's leadership began with US President George Bush, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair and Australian Prime Minister John Howard as the Chilcot Report so clearly reveals. The dog days are upon us, certainly with Muslim Fundamentalism in the streets of the great cities of the world, and another Dark Age threatens as extremism breeds extremism in culturally divided nations where old and new values and attitudes seem unable to reconcile. The social policy victories of the New Left of the 1960s have not only offended the more traditional sections of western societies but detonated a massive blowback from religious sects across many faiths.

Where will it all end? Questions first. Are there any wars that in the 21st century can be called Just Wars? Or do we simply allow the authoritarians, government or individuals, to take over? What is Democracy, and is it worth fighting for? Are our agreements/institutions, domestic and international, beneficial and working? Where is the mutual Peace interest for all countries/citizens? And if anarchy is not acceptable why permit the arms trade? Certainly continuing regional wars via proxies is a recipe for contagion and disaster.

This is an issue an Australian UN Secretary General may have propagated - former twice Australian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd would have been in his element. However Australia is a little country with little people desperate to cling to the coattails of previously Britain and currently America and soon perhaps China. Remember Dr H V Evatt was scathingly criticised by Australians when he was President of the UN General Assembly in 1948. Rudd may well have championed the smaller countries around the world.