



## Defence and Security Sector Oversight in the Fight Against Corruption

BY: JEAN PIERRE CHABOT | SSR | FEB 26, 2015

December 24, 2014 saw the coming into force of the United Nations Arms Trade Treaty. At the passing of 2014, the Treaty had been signed by 130 States and ratified by 61 of those. Such treaties are important vehicles for greater cooperation on pressing global issues, as well as benchmarks for the establishment of minimum standards. Ratification of a UN treaty ultimately involves the legislative process and it is therefore fitting, in this context, to speak of the role parliamentarians play as overseers of the defence and security sectors.

Oversight is the continuation of democracy by other means. This statement is a play on the famous quote by Carl von Clausewitz: "War is the continuation of politics by other means." The alternative statement is an optimistic assertion that democracy is served not only by free and fair elections but also by the integrity of the democratic institutions that forward the causes of democracy between elections. In particular, oversight of the defence and security sectors is critical to safeguarding democracy and ensuring stewardship of the greatest public good, peace.

This statement is also the title of a recently published position paper by the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC). The position paper tackles the challenging questions of how to achieve a proper balance between accountability and secrecy in oversight of the defence and security sectors. This balance is not an easy one to maintain. It requires a parliament that has access to resources and expert advice specific to the defence and security sectors. Having a defence or national security committee within parliament is only a first step. Assuring the integrity and accountability of such a committee, e.g. assuring members of such a committee are not in any conflicts of interest, goes a long way in protecting the public trust that what is discussed in camera, i.e. in secret, pertains to the public interest.

Parliaments are, or should be, tasked with overseeing the budget on defence and security spending. Parliaments are also responsible for decisions to engage as peacekeepers or peacemakers in conflict zones. Moreover, parliament plays a role in holding these sectors accountable to the common good through regulation of the production, sale and export of arms.

This brings us back to the United Nations Arms Trade Treaty. The Treaty has two main objectives. The first is to set a high standard for the legitimate trade in arms between States. The second objective is to prevent and eradicate the illicit trade of arms and to stop the diversion of such arms to terrorist organizations. These two objectives can be circumvented by corruption and corruption is too often the source of illicit trade in and diversion of conventional weapons.

Parliamentarians should be conscious of the challenges inherent in providing proper oversight of the defence and security sectors. Secrecy is necessary but not sufficient for public safety; accountability is paramount. Moreover, parliamentarians are well positioned to determine the rules by which a proper balance between accountability and secrecy can be established and maintained. Oversight is, after all, the continuation of democracy by other means.

Jean Pierre Chabot is a Program Advisor at the [Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption \(GOPAC\)](#). He recently edited a GOPAC position paper titled [Oversight is the Continuation of Democracy by Other Means](#). This position paper was co-authored (the personal views of whom are expressed in this position paper) by Chris Mayer (Ph.D.), U.S. Army and Academy Professor of Philosophy at the United States Military Academy, and James Cohen, international development, security, and governance consultant.

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