

## Leaving the Arms Trade Treaty would be another shot in America's foot

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President Donald Trump's announcement in late April that the U.S. will withdraw its signature from the Arms Trade Treaty is the latest move by an administration innately hostile to nearly every form of [international cooperation](#). In a move that was intentionally deceptive and rife with political theater — with the annual meeting of the National Rifle Association as a symbolic backdrop — the president's decision damages both America's security and its credibility.

It took more than five years of negotiations to develop the ATT and we spent those years working together as the U.N. consultant to the treaty process and as the U.S. lead negotiator, working hard to develop a treaty text that met U.S. interests and satisfied those dedicated to stopping the irresponsible and illicit arms trade.

And we succeeded. The final text, which reflected great compromise by close allies, is wholly consistent with American priorities and values. The president's decision is an abdication of U.S. leadership and moral authority.

Most Americans do not know what the ATT is or does. The president even seemed surprised that his announcement was met with cheers by the NRA faithful, but the NRA has dominated the dialogue on the ATT in the United States and the president willfully and gleefully gave credibility to the NRA's politically expedient mythology on the arms trade.

The president repeated the false claims that the ATT could lead to United Nations bureaucrats taking guns away from American citizens. But the treaty explicitly says that administration of the ATT is purely the responsibility of national governments, consistent with their own constitutional and legal systems. The ATT does not create any supranational bureaucracy that requires the United States to give up its sovereignty to foreign countries in making any arms transfer decisions. And most importantly, the ATT only regulates the international trade in weapons and has no effect — in the United States or elsewhere — on legitimate domestic trade or individual rights to bear arms.

So what *does* the Arms Trade Treaty do? It seeks to require other nations to implement the same rigorous processes and standards that legislation has required the U.S. federal government to implement for more than 50 years. Adherence to the ATT would not require the U.S. government to change a single thing in its arms-export control laws, processes or regulations, as we negotiated a treaty that is modeled on and consistent with decades-old U.S. legislation.

The ATT makes the international arms trade safer and more responsible. It requires governments, before granting an export license for weapons, to consider whether weapons could be used for genocide or human rights violations, as well as the likelihood that the weapons would be diverted into the wrong hands and fuel civil conflict or criminal activity. It provides mechanisms for governments to cooperate and a means for greater transparency over a murky trade that contributes to devastating human suffering — including casualties to American service members and civilians — in conflicts in places like Syria, Yemen and Libya.

This treaty reflects U.S. values and priorities. Throughout the negotiations, we, as the U.N. consultant and the U.S. government team, met regularly with interested defense industry and nongovernmental organizations, briefing simultaneously defense exporters, human rights advocates and Second Amendment advocates of how the ATT furthered U.S. interests.

Industry, in particular, expressed the hope that requiring other nations to meet American-style standards would help level the playing field in the global arms market and close loopholes in other countries that allow unscrupulous dealers to undermine legal U.S. transactions. That hope is now extinguished, as the administration has chosen to stand with reckless regimes, such as North Korea, Iran and Syria, and with Russia and China — and against our biggest allies — in allowing an arms trade that flows with impunity.

The Obama administration viewed the ATT not as an arms control treaty, but as a trade regulation treaty, one that had the potential to ameliorate the worst problems created by a wide-open global arms bazaar. It has now fallen victim to the Trump administration's inherent distrust of *all* international treaties. The president's action to remove a nonexistent "threat" to law-abiding American citizens will not benefit America's defense industry or American interests.

Let's be clear: The ATT is not perfect. Even if it was fully implemented, it would not solve all of the challenges created by the global arms trade. But more than 100 other governments have committed to the treaty, and momentum for implementation is strong. The treaty will survive. The U.S. reputation for concern about human suffering and the country's credibility across all international affairs will suffer the greater harm.

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