

## Move Over 'Atoms for Peace' — the Arms Race Has Begun

Laura Bannerman

**Thomas Jefferson** once said;

Question with boldness even the existence of a God; because, if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason than that of blindfolded fear.

Now, more than ever, we question the existence of God, or reason or equality. It is hard for me to understand that people say we are all equals, or that we treat one another equally — we don't. The world has never been equal, people have never been reasonable, and more often than not, life is not fair. And people wonder why we question the existence of anything, even God. Time doesn't heal all wounds — in this case, it tears gaping schisms in the souls of the tortured, and reminds us of the blatantly horrific history that lies behind us, and so close ahead.

It can be said that war is good for business — both sides need arms. But what happens when the peace comes? What happens to all of the weapons that were ordered or stockpiled? Well, the arms trade happens. If there are no wars to service, the wars are created by corrupt megalomaniacs eager to be supplied for a few bloodied dollars, for distorted supremacy. To make up for a lack in domestic sales, new markets are created, and as world trade globalises, so does the arms trade. Today, even 17 years after the Cold War ended between the Soviet Union and the

United States, Russia's stockpile of arms, nuclear and non-nuclear, is higher than ever, and growing. The United States is still the biggest arms dealer in the world, supplying 36% of the world with weapons, closely followed by the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and China. The now 'stable' Russia and the proud United States of America are competing in the biggest arms race ever, with millions of weapons. They, both combined, have more than enough weapons to destroy the world twice over. The nations Australia relies on are corrupt — cyanide laced vodka is at our lips. Nuclear overkill is knocking at our doors.

The arms trade is not so much as glorified by the fact that it is a huge organisation that is well known about, and dealings occur, so often, where people, corrupt governments and human rights violators are aware of the ongoing. The famed Viktor Bout (from the former USSR), who was loosely portrayed in the film *Lord of War*, has a business empire worth billions of dollars, including his own airline, all based on his arms trafficking to particularly war-torn nations, where his ideology is based on the level of corruption of his buyers, and, effectively, what he can get away with. He supplied the Taliban, who are closely associated with al-Qaeda, with weapons, and was deemed a contributing factor of the September 11 attacks. He was only arrested in March 2008.

But it is not only terrorists that we should be afraid of. The pure fact that the foremost nations of our wonderful world hold in their arms that of which might one day destroy us, waving in front of us the imminence of terror and suffering, and smiling at us with their promises of safety is disturbing. It is time we realised that it is not the 'Middle-Eastern Muslim terrorists' we need be afraid of — it is the trade of arms in our own milieu, the ones in which we place our trust. We are being led to war, like cows to the slaughter, all in the name of making money, increasing the status of military profile and stating that Western civilisation is the best damn thing to be a part of. Should we be proud that the nations around us are dealing weapons of mass destruction, all for our protection? People need to see beyond the closed doors of governments, for it is us who will pay the costly price — a nuclear winter is encroaching; something far

more chilling than the Cold War. This 'civil' world we live in is no more than shambles and organised chaos. We would shoot our own brother if we needed to. In ways, we have already cocked the gun.

National security, in the modern world, is a keystone in the building of nations — foreign domination is not an option, and the protection of those within borders is crucial in observance of amity. But the hostility comes from within, and has grown to become like a cancerous demon in the depths of humanity. A fear is created in us so that we buy weapons to protect ourselves from these monsters. What most don't see is that this monster consumes our souls — it is within us. We are the trade, we make the trade, as long as they keep the fear alive — it is a vicious cycle — we are the wheels. And there is nothing we can do.

In response to the dealing of arms, a former President of the United States, Dwight Eisenhower, set up a program called 'Atoms for Peace' — the control of nuclear weapons to create peace — and stated in 1953:

Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. The world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its labourers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children ... This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.

Incongruously, over 80 million Americans, and an undisclosed amount of Russians, are in possession of arms, and though personal security is rightful, the fact that billions of dollars are spent every year by nations just so people can have guns in their hand on any given day proves that this is a bloody massacre waiting to happen. In the words of John Lennon, 'Happiness is a warm gun'. And ain't that the truth.



**Laura Bannerman** wrote this in 2008 when she was in Year 12 at Catholic College Bendigo in Victoria