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# **The Influence of Political Ideology on the United Kingdom's Continued Support for the UN Arms Trade Treaty**

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**Universiteit  
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# **MA Thesis International Relations: Global Conflict in the Modern Era**

**The Influence of Political Ideology on the United Kingdom's  
Continued Support for the UN Arms Trade Treaty**

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## List of Abbreviations

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
ATT	Arms Trade Treaty
QCR	Quadripartite Committee Strategic Export Controls Annual Reports
QCAEC	Quadripartite Committee on Arms Export Control
CAEC	Committee on Arms Export Controls
SDSR	Strategic Defence and Security Review
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States

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## 1: Introduction

Tuesday April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013 is not remembered as an historic day by many people. However, on this specific day the UN General Assembly signed the first legally binding treaty that would regulate the international trade in conventional arms. Prior to the arrival of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), there were no international regulations that governed the global trade in conventional arms. Meaning that previously countries were free to import and export weapons, ranging from simple ammunition to anti-aircraft missile systems, without interference of any global regulations. In an effort to better the global levels of human security, international peace and general stability, the UN was tasked with creating a treaty that would monitor arms exports and limit the possibility of proliferation, diversion, and illicit trade (Garcia, 2013; Marsh, 2019).

The initiative of the ATT was formally launched at the UN General Assembly in 2006 by the British Ambassador for Multilateral Arms Control and Disarmament, John Duncan. Although, this was the first time the ATT initiative was presented to the UN General Assembly, the initial idea of the Arms Trade Treaty was already proposed in early 2003. In this year over a hundred organisation, including Amnesty International and Oxfam, formed a coalition called the Control Arms Coalition that proposed international action against illicit arms trade and created the “Million Faces” petition (Holtom, 2012). Regardless of gaining some initial support from important arms exporting countries such as France and the United Kingdom, the proposal of a regulatory measure was not received with a lot of enthusiasm. Therefore, it did not come as a surprise that the first rounds of negotiations were not as productive as hoped for (Bromley, Cooper & Holtom, 2012). Eventually on July 27, 2012, the negotiations reached their mandate after four intense weeks of negotiations, where it was established that especially the United States needed more time to revise the draft treaty (Marsh, 2019). In 2013, another four weeks of negotiations were conducted, after which consensus, even with the United States, was reached on the treaty’s text (Bolton & James, 2014; Jalil, 2016). A year after these historic negotiations, the UN Arms Trade Treaty became into force on December 24, 2014, and is currently ratified by majority of the 113 state parties (UN, 2023).

The initial enactment of the ATT was celebrated for its efforts to regulate illicit arms trade and thereby limiting human suffering caused by illegal weaponry (Garcia, 2013).

However, soon after the adaptation of the ATT the first critical studies started to question the effectiveness of the treaty (Jørgensen, 2014; Fukui, 2015). In addition to questioning the effectiveness of the treaty, the scholarly field started to develop theories that explained the contradictory situation that some of the largest arms-exporting countries were among the first to sign this treaty (Erickson, 2015; Stavrianakis, 2016). The support of these exporting countries for the ATT was seen as a paradoxical situation as the export of arms is generally beneficial to the national wellbeing of states. The trade in arms can be economically profitable, support an increased level of national security (Levine, Somnath & Smith, 1994; Yarhi-Milo, Lanoska & Cooper, 2016) and can be used as a foreign policy tool to forge strong ties between trade partners (Kinne, 2016). Hence, the introduction of an international, legally binding treaty that would regulate and possibly limit arms trade and its associated benefits was not expected to be received with as much eagerness to sign by some large arms-exporting states.

One country specifically perplexed experts by vocally supporting the ATT despite having a large share, and therefore a higher dependency on arms trade, in the international arms market namely the United Kingdom. The UK is the seventh largest arms export globally, with a share of 3.2 percent of the total market value and has the second largest defence industry (Wezeman et al., 2022). In addition, to the importance of their defence industry for their economic wellbeing, Shvydun (2020) highlights that their position on the arms market has shaped their international level of political influence as they have obtained a large network of trade connection. Seen the centrality of the defence industry to both the economic and political status of the UK, the UK's early support for the ATT initiative in 2004 was rather surprising. Despite, the interesting puzzle that the UK's approach poses it has only been sparsely researched within the scholarly field. More generally scholars have identified different motivations for states to ratify international treaties which could be used to explain the UK's approach. For example, Bolton and James (2014) and Stavrianakis (2016) argue that there is an economic motivation present or Dunne (2008) and Nielsen and Simmons (2015) who state that treaty ratification is motivated by political incentives. But only two studies have specifically studied the case of the UK's approach to the ATT, Erickson (2018) and Perlo-Freeman (2020).

Erickson (2018) presents the argument that the support of the UK was not motivated by any type of external rewards but was rather a reaction to their domestic political situation.

In 1996 the Scott Report was published in which the arms export to Iraq in the 1980s was heavily criticized. This report suggested that the arms regulations of the UK were lacking in transparency and competency which allowed for illicit trade with deadly consequences (McEldowney, 1997; Erickson, 2018). A year after the publication of this report the general elections were held during which Tony Blair's New Labour Party skilfully used this criticism to present a new political discourse (Heath, Jowel & Curtis, 2001). The general aim of New Labour was to introduce a more ethical approach to foreign policy, which would place the UK at the heart of the international order. As part of their objective, they would introduce a thorough restructuring of the UK's defence policies (McInnes, 1998; Wheeler & Dunne, 1998; Gilmore, 2014). This strategy paid off as they won the 1997 election (Morgan, 2001). In the subsequent years, the New Labour Government introduced many new defence policies of which the Export Control Act of 2002 was the most influential to their arms industry (Lunn, 2014). This implementation of this act did however create the concern that it would diminish the competitive position of the UK as other states would not have similar restrictions. Hence, Erickson (2018) argues that the UK's support of the ATT was based on the ideology that it would 'level the playing field' between them and other exporting countries by creating an international measure that would be similar to their national regulations.

Similarly, Perlo-Freeman (2020) indicates that the UK support for the ATT was a reaction to their domestic political situation. In his study he defends the thesis that the early support for the ATT was a reaction to the backlash the government received after deciding to join the United States-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. By encouraging the ATT, the New Labour Government hoped to salvage their 'ethical' image. Although, both scholars make compelling arguments on how domestic politics influenced the UK's decision to initially support the ATT, they do merely present the UK's support as a singular activity and thereby leave unanswered why the UK remained supportive of the initiative till its ratification. Especially in the case of the UK this is a crucial question as the country experienced a shift in government in 2010. The elections in this year were won by the Conservative Party, who formed a coalition with the Liberal-Democratic Party. This coalition government, led by David Cameron, took office in a fairly challenging time as the UK experienced one of the worst financial crises and thereby needed to heavily decrease their governmental spendings (Seldon & Finn, 2015). Hence, during the height of the ATT negotiations the UK not only experience a shift in political ideology but also was challenged by a completely different domestic context compared to the period in which the New Labour Government presented their

support. The explanation that the UK's support for the ATT was either a way to legitimize New Labour's claims of being an ethical actor or a reaction to the invasion of Iraq both do not seem to explain why the subsequent government kept on supporting it.

The exclusion of this variation is especially problematic as there has been research conducted that shows that right-winged governments are more likely to promote arms export while left-winged governments are more concerned with the ethical considerations of arms trade and therefore are more likely to decrease arms export (Comola, 2012).

This thesis therefore aims to develop a better understanding of how the changes in the UK's domestic political situation have influenced their stance towards the ATT negotiations by answering the following research question: *'How did the shift in political ideology in the United Kingdom from the New Labour Governments (1997-2010) to the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government (2010-2015) influence the United Kingdom's stance towards the UN Arms Trade Treaty negotiations?'*. To answer this question, a qualitative content analysis of the annual export reports published by the Quadripartite Committee/ Committee on Arms Export Controls has been conducted. The result of this research suggests that the shift in political ideology only minorly influenced the different approaches towards the ATT. In addition, the results suggest that the UK's approach to the ATT has been mostly influenced by several, prominent foreign and domestic political events which led both governments to frame the ATT as a tool to increase the national security of the country without restricting their own arms exports.

This thesis will be structured as following. The first chapter will present the relevant academic research that has been conducted on this topic. Subsequent to this literature review, the methodology of this thesis will be outlined. The fourth chapter of this thesis will present the results of the content analysis of the relevant documents and in the last chapter the concluding remarks will be made.



## **2: Literature Review**

The academic literature on international arms trade has produced many insightful theories on the mechanisms of this market. In general, there are three main incentives that motivate states to participate on the conventional arms market, namely: potential benefits to the national economy, an increase in national security and strengthening of international relations. The first section of the following literature review will introduce these incentives and explain their interconnectedness. What can be concluded from this discussion is that there are substantial benefits associated to participating on the international arms market. Seen that there are considerable benefits to trading arms, it was found rather controversial that in 2014 the ATT was received with so much enthusiasm by many states. The second section therefore explores the potential benefits that are associated with the ratification of international treaties. In the last section the literature on the United Kingdom and its incentives for arms trade and the ratification of the ATT is presented.

### **Incentives for International Arms Trade**

Over the past few decades, the incentives for international arms trade have been extensively researched. A concise summary reads that there are three main determinants that influence the decision to conduct arms transfer of conventional weaponry, these being: potential benefits to the national economy, an increase in national security and strengthening foreign relations by trading arms (Kinsella, 2010, p.218). The economic narrative of international arms trade has been a prominently studied incentive. The traditional explanation of the economic incentive for countries to participate on the arms market, is that there is appears to be a positive relation between increased defence expenditure and national economic growth (Benoit, 1978; Heo & Bohte, 2012; Mintz & Hicks, 1984). This “defence-growth nexus” framework denotes that increased governmental defence spending directly, and indirectly, stimulates the national economy by creating employment opportunities (Dunne, 2005; Yakovlev, 2007; Heo & Bonte, 2012) and having positive technological spill-over effects to other markets (James, Molas-Gallart & Stankiewicz, 2019). Opposing these theories on the economic benefits of participating on the arms market, there are several studies that show a contrary effect on the national economy, whereby increased defence spending limits social spending (Carter, Ondercin & Palmer, 2021) creates crowding-out effects (Mylonidis, 2016), increases privatisation of the market (Yakovlev, 2007) and creates the possibility of leaking investments to third parties (Xu et al, 2022).

The discussion above briefly outlines the lack of consensus on the existence of a positive relation between participating on the international arms market and growth in the national economy. Despite it being accurate that the arms industry is a highly profitable market due to its oligarchic characteristic and high entry costs (Smith, Humm & Fontanel, 1985; Levine, Somnath & Smith, 1994), there is no purely economic explanation that demonstrates why governments are willing to invest in, and support, arms trade. A more thorough understanding of arms trade dynamics should, at least, consider the inherent affiliation of arms trade decisions to the level of national security. Levine, Somnath and Smith (1994) were among the first to describe how these two elements are connected. Their study develops the argument that states who export arms wish to maximize their economic profits whilst simultaneously limiting the possibility of increasing external security threats, while importing countries aim at limiting the economic impact of the trade whilst increasing their national security. As countries import arms, their defence sector, and therefore their national security, is expected to become more robust and pose a larger security threat to others. According to this theory all arms transfer decisions are informed by the economic cost and benefits and its influence on the level of national security. Although, this economic-security trade-off forms the foundation for the contemporary understanding of arms trade decisions, Levine et al. (1994) do not introduce an answer to how this trade-off is eventually resolved by exporting and importing states (Thurner et al., 2019).

The fundamental challenge of this trade-off is that exporting governments need to assess the probability of the importing governments using the exported products directly, or indirectly, against them or their allies. In order to determine the level of risk that is associated with a potential trade, exporting countries are likely to use the variable of political similarity as indicator. Akerman and Seim (2014) were among the first to develop a study that researched this theory and concluded that regime similarity is an excellent indicator of arms trade, as similar regimes are less likely to wage conflict on each other. However, such an explanation would not fully clarify all kinds of trades as there are also examples in which trade happened between dissimilar regimes. Therefore, Yarhi-Milo, Lanoska and Cooper (2016, 137) argue that more suitable predictors for arms trade are similarity in security interests and the assessment of the clients' military capabilities prior to trade. They further explain that economic interests can also play a key role in the arms trade market, but that this can only be a decisive factor if the security risks are very small. Pamp et al, (2021) further this discussion by stating that prior to (new) trade alliances all three elements, economic, security

and political considerations, are important with risk considerations being the most influential. But that after the trade alliance is made, trade volumes are more dependent on the economic considerations associated with the trade. Other variables that are influential in the risk assessment of arms trade are the existence of trade-agreements, previous trade relations (Bove et al., 2018) and the affinities of suppliers, and clients, to other exporting countries (Harkavy, 1994; Krause, 1995).

In addition to viewing political similarity as a variable that predicts arms trade there is also evidence that trading arms can create, or strengthen, political ties among trading partners and therefore can be used as a foreign policy tool. Arms trade is not merely about provisioning other countries with weaponry, but also entails the creation of trade agreements, military cooperation, and diplomatic relationships. As discussed above, there is a certain security imperative associated with trading arms, and therefore exporting countries will want to either gain insight into the military decisions made by the important country, which allows for greater transparency, or obtain strict agreements on further trades (Sachar, 2004; Swistek, 2012). By increasing arms trade relations exporting countries are therefore able to substantiate their hegemonic power within the international community, as well as decreasing the chances on being involved in (armed) conflicts (Kinne, 2016)

The literature on the mechanisms of arms trade is broad and has produced a wide array of theories on why and how countries decide on arms deals. A general tendency that can be found in the different studies is that there are three overarching variables that seem to be associated with arms transfer decisions these being: economic benefits, the impact on national security and creation of political ties. In addition, to using arms trade as a benefit to one of these variables, the process of transferring arms has also been associated with strengthening a country's international political position.

### **Incentives for Ratifying International Human Rights Treaties**

The above discussion of the benefits of arms trade to the national wellbeing of states, shows that there are multiple incentives for states to want sovereignty into their arms transfer decisions. Although, these studies provide a necessary insight into the dynamics of trading arms between governments, it does provide merely a simplified model of the actual international arms market (Stohl, 2017). In reality the arms market has been plagued by illicit trade, diversion, and illegitimate brokering (Lustgarten, 2015). These practices form a great

challenge to the international level of human security and therefore have been a focus point within international politics for decades. Hence, when the ATT was eventually signed by 154 states, many were relieved that there finally would be an international, regulatory measure to ensure more ethical arms transfers (Holtom et al., 2010; Erickson, 2015).

Although, the arrival of the ATT was initially celebrated by the academic field for enabling a shift in norms regarding arms trade (Garcia, 2013), soon after more critical accounts started to appear on both the effectiveness of the ATT and the sincerity of the ratifying countries. As there are considerable benefits connected to the process of trading arms, it seemed contradictory that states were willing to partly concede their sovereignty in order to pursue a rather vague goal of bettering the global standard of human security (Maletta, 2021). The question that arose from this contradiction, is why states were willing to sign and ratify this treaty despite the potential limitation of benefits. Although, there is little research conducted specifically on the topic of the ratification of the ATT, there is a strand of literature that describes state behaviour regarding human security treaties. These studies have produced the insight that there are two expected types of rewards associated with ratifying international treaties: tangible and intangible rewards (Nielsen & Simmons, 2015; Miles & Posner, 2008).

The first category of this ‘reward theory’ suggests that there are, mostly economic, benefits associated with ratifying and complying with international treaties. It is expected by states that once they sign a treaty this could increase the level of foreign investment, trade relations and potentially even monetary aids from the international community (Hathaway, 2007). Although, there is little empirical support for such a claim, it has been theorized that this logic could be a motivation for states to comply (Nielsen & Simmons, 2015). Another potential, tangible reward for complying with international treaties is that it could increase the level of international cooperation and thereby limit transaction costs (Miles & Posner, 2008). In terms of the ratification of the ATT, two studies have been conducted on existence of economic benefits. According to Stravianakis (2016) especially large exporting states were likely to sign and ratify the ATT as they could use this treaty to shield them from criticism on the legitimacy of their trade. Being perceived as an illicit arms exporter can potentially not only harm the national arms industry, but also influence the general trading position of a state. Therefore, agreeing with, and ratifying, an international treaty that determines standards on just arms trade presents those who signed it to be in accordance with these new norms.

Stravianakis (2016) labels this behaviour as the legitimization of liberal militarism. Another economic benefit of the ATT could be that it decreases the complexity of inter-jurisdictional rules, as prior to this international agreement only national jurisdiction determined rules on arms trade, and therefore creates a more open economy in which trading is more cost-efficient (Bolton et al., 2012).

A second set of explanations of treaty ratification is associated with the importance of being perceived as a just and valuable member of the international community. Ratifying a human right treaty could reward a country with the intangible reward of being perceived as a 'good international citizen'. Albeit there is a large academic debate on what exactly entails good citizenship, the general consensus is that the broad characteristics, from a Western liberal-democratic perspective, include actively promoting human rights, multilateralism and just, international law (Souter, 2016). There are many different theories that explain the benefits of being perceived as a 'good international citizen. According to Landman (2005) and Dunne (2008), countries who comply with human rights treaties are perceived as more legitimate, which at its turn generates wider political powers for them. Another explanation is that states desire the least amount of public criticism as this could influence their independence (Hawkins, 2004). Erickson (2015) states that the ATT was an excellent resource to gather such an image of 'good international citizenship' as the eventual treaty was so ambiguous that it did not limit state sovereignty, but still allowed signatories to be seen as willing to change the international community for the better.

Another intangible rewards that is often associated with the ratification of treaties, is that it can influence the hegemonic power dynamics within international politics. According to Schneider and Urpelainen (2013) states are always motivated by their own interests in international agreements. There are various explanations on which interests these are, for example that the ratification can legitimize the ambitions set in domestic politics (Moravcsik 2000; Mansfield & Pevehouse, 2006) or that the proposal of a new treaty can strengthen the international position of a country by gaining support for it within the international field (Schneider & Urpelainen, 2013).

## **The United Kingdom and the Arms Trade Treaty**

The British defence industry has been intrinsically connected to several economic and political developments of the United Kingdom since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Dorman & Uttley, 2020). Historically, the UK has always prided itself with their extensive, and at times leading, defence capacities. This status has made them an important international actor, which is sustained by their leading positions within NATO and the UN (Dorman & Uttley, 2020). An important engine behind their defence sector is their conventional arms industry. Over the past ten years the UK, on average, exported around sixteen billion pounds in defence products yearly (UKDSE, 2022). Due to the size of the UK's arms industry and the yearly revenue that it gathers for the country the export of arms is fairly important to the economic wellbeing of the country. After the introduction of the Export Control Act 2002, Hartley, and Martin (2003) researched how the potential decrease of trade volumes due to this act would influence the UK's economy. They found that a decrease in arms trade volumes would lead to an estimated loss of 1.3 billion pounds in profits and would subsequently lead to the loss of between 13.000-41.000 jobs. Although, it was later questioned how accurate these findings were (Hennig, 2023) they do indicate a certain economic dependency of the UK to its arms exports.

In addition to the importance of arms trade to the economic wellbeing of the UK, they also use their arms trade as a tool to enhance their (international) political position. The literature on the political use of the UK's arms trade is rather small but growing. Most recently Shvydun (2020) argued that the UK is one of the five most influential countries within the arms market because of their extensive trade ties to others. Their large trade network enables them to gather insight into other defence industries as well as forge strong partnerships based on their trade agreements. In addition, Perlo-Freeman (2014) discusses how large arms exporters have used arms trade agreements to substantiate political relationships with other countries, especially since the spheres of ideology after the Cold War have substantially changed. The United Kingdom in particular has an extraordinary position in the arms market as they are both intricately connected to the United States and the European Union. By cooperating with both parties, they hope to further strengthen their position within the international political order (Perlo-Freeman, 2014).

Due to the centrality of arms trade to the UK's national wellbeing it was, to say the least, surprising that the UK was among the first countries to actively support the ATT initiative in 2004. Only two studies have looked into the dynamics that led to the UK's support for the ATT despite the potential consequences it could have. Both argue that the support can be explained as a reaction to the domestic political situation at the time. Erickson (2018) argues that the support of the UK was mainly derived from an economic perspective. The publication of the 1996 Scott Report highlighted the lack of transparency and accountability in the UK's arms export policies which endorsed global illicit trade. The New Labour Party skilfully used this backlash to their advantage by promoting a new political discourse that would be aimed at becoming a more 'ethical' global leader within the international order. One of the promises they made to their voters is that this new ethical dimension would be supported by a thorough revisioning of their defence policies. After winning the 1997 elections, the New Labour Government indeed started to implement new defence objectives, as well as incorporating EU guidelines on arms trade. In 2002 their pursuit of creating just and transparent guidelines on arms trade was finalized in the Export Control Act 2002. It however worried the government, and the defence sector, how this new guideline would influence their competitive position as it could mean that other exports would take advantage of these new rules. Hence, Erickson (2018) argues that the support for the ATT was mainly derived from the understanding that introducing an international measure would limit the economic imperatives that the contemporary guidelines of the UK posed to its arms sector. Perlo-Freeman (2020) contests this argument and states that the support for the ATT should rather be seen as a reaction to the backlash that the New Labour Government received after joining the US in their invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Both scholars seem to address the UK's support for the ATT as dependent on a development in the domestic political situation. However, both do not discuss why the UK remained supportive of the ATT, even after experiencing a shift in governments in 2010. This question is especially interesting as Comola (2012) argues that statistically right-winged governments are more likely to increase their arms trade volumes and decrease arms regulations, whereas left-winged governments tend to favour more ethical arms regulations and international cooperation and therefore decrease their trade volumes. Hence, it could be hypothesized that the New Labour Government had a different approach to the ATT negotiations compared to the subsequent Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government based on their distinct political ideologies.

### **3: Methodology**

#### **Research approach**

The purpose of this study is to analyse the influence of political ideology on the approaches to the ATT by the New Labour Government and the succeeding Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government. As previously mentioned, the negotiations on the ATT started in early 2004. The UK government took on a role as forerunner for this initiative and maintained to play a vital role during the whole trajectory of the treaty. Interestingly, at the midst of the negotiations, the UK alternated between governments and went from a New Labour Government to a Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government. In order to answer to how these two governments approached the ATT negotiations, and what the potential differences and similarities in their approaches are, a qualitative content analysis has been conducted.

This method has been chosen in order to reduce the complex text into distinct categories that allow for a structured comparison, as well as giving insight into the complex network of meaning that lays at the basis of written material (Flick, 2014; Neuendorf, 2017; Krippendorff, 2018). The three key features of a qualitative content analysis are: reducing the data into separate categories that enable a comparison between the different documents, being highly systematic and therefore offering the widest possible lens and it being fairly flexible as the categories can be created on the basis on the content that is found (Schreier, 2013). As the chosen period of this study entails over 18 years, in which many documents have been published, it was of significant importance to find a method that offered a systematic and structures approach to analysing the documents, without limiting the possibility of creating flexible categories.

Within the analysis of the documents special attention has been paid to the intertextuality, i.e., how the different documents relate to each other and in which context they are produced, the function that they obtain within the chosen context and how the information is presented. These elements offer additional insight to the context of chosen documents and allow for a better and wider understanding of the separate categories (Coffey, 2014).

The analysis of the primary documents has been conducted in an inductive manner. The relevant literature on international arms trade offered insight into the three general incentives that guide arms trade decisions. These three incentives, i.e., economic benefits,



national security, and international politics, were used as the main structure for the analysis. After finding the relevant quotes, which discussed the UK's stance towards the ATT or international trade regulation in general, the quotes were categorized into the three general themes. Within these distinct themes, the relevant quotes were divided in sub-categories based on the time period and government they belonged to. For the purpose of comprehension, the quotes used in the analysis were presented in a chronological order.

### **Data collection**

As the aim of this study is to find how political ideology influenced the UK's approach to the ATT, the Quadripartite Committee Strategic Export Controls Annual Reports (further referred to as QCR) have been selected. The Quadripartite Committee, renamed in 2005 as the Committee on Arms Export Controls, is a committee comprised of four groups of representatives from the Ministry of Defence, Foreign Affairs, International Development and Trade and Industry, that annually publish a review on the status of the UK's arms export and on the governmental decisions regarding regulations. The twenty-three primary documents have been selected based on three justifications.

Firstly, the Quadripartite Committee consists of several representatives from four different departments, Defence, International Trade, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and International Development. The remarks and conclusions of these reports are therefore the most all-encompassing as they are based on information from the different ministries. It therefore can be assumed that these reports allow for a wide overview on arms transfer decisions. Secondly, the committee's reports are a review of both the Strategic Export Controls Annual Reports (the report that provides numerical data on trade volumes), proposed or adopted arms export policies and parliamentary debates and speeches. The information that is presented in the QCRs is the broadest of all governmental documents published, as it includes information on the established and proposed policies, the trade volumes and decisions and incorporates all the relevant debates and reactions from the parliament. In addition, to providing the widest arrange of information, the Committee also critically addresses some of the proposed policies and the governmental statements. These reports therefore provide extensive information on the Arms Trade Treaty negotiations from multiple angles. One important remark is that after 2010 the reports did no longer include the governmental response to the prior report. In order to withstand this change, during these

years the separate governmental response documents have been added to the selected data. Lastly, the reports have been published annually from 1997 onwards. As the reports are published every year, a more precise analysis is possible that offers insight into the yearly differences and/or similarities between the governments as well as within the governmental periods. It should be addressed, that the Committee reports of 2014 and 2015 were combined with the Strategic Export Controls Annual Report, which previously only gave numerical data on trade volumes. Hence, for both 2014 and 2015 these documents have been selected.

### **Limitations**

There are three main methodological limitation to this research. The first limitation regards the function that the selected data holds within the larger governmental structure in the United Kingdom. Although the selected sources give the widest possible overview on arms trade decisions in the UK, it should be addressed that the reports published by the Quadripartite Committee/ the Committee on Arms Export Controls are merely advisory reports commissioned by the government. The proposed policies and approaches presented in these reports are therefore not guaranteed to be actually implemented or incorporated by the government. Despite, this limitation the reports do address it when the government has not followed their proposed approach. The second limitation regards the imbalance between the available information on the ATT between the two periods. The first governmental period, 1997-2010, has a larger period in which more was published on the ATT. The second period, 2010-2015, has a significantly smaller period and interestingly enough a lot less was published on the ATT trajectory. Although, this could have been combatted by adding various sources, such as parliamentary debates, in this research the decline in information during the second period has been used as an indicator for the government's position on the ATT. The last limitation regards the chosen approach of this thesis. As previously mentioned, an inductive approach was chosen after which the quotes found in the documents were placed under three distinct categories. The quotes therefore needed to relate to one of the three themes that were established prior to analysing the document. At times it happened that interesting quotes were found that did not fit any of these themes and therefore were not incorporated in the eventual analysis.

#### **4: Analysis**

The literature on arms trade mechanisms provides the insight that there are three main incentives that guide trade decisions on the international arms market, namely: potential benefits to the national economy, an increase in national security and using it as a foreign policy tool. The introduction of a legally binding international measure that enabled a restriction of free trade was therefore expected to be received with hesitancy. However, the ATT was received quite positively, especially by the United Kingdom who supported the initiative from 2004 onwards. Within the academic field there are some explanations that illustrate why states are willing to sign international treaties, and why they were willing to sign the ATT, but none of these explanations account for the influence of variation in domestic politics. The following analysis examines how the New Labour Government and the subsequent Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government explain their support for the ATT in economic, political and security terms. As these three themes generally form the basis for arms trade decisions it is to be expected that both governments present their approach to the ATT in a similar discourse.

#### **Introducing the ATT as an Economic Tool**

One of the initial concerns of the introduction of the ATT was how it would impact the economic benefits that are associated with the practice of trading, and especially exporting, arms. According to Erickson (2018) the New Labour Government framed its support for the ATT as a solution to the economic impact that their new regulations would enforce on the country. In the following section it will be analysed how the New Labour Government presented this claim and what economic rhetoric the subsequent Coalition Government presented in regard to the ATT.

#### ***New Labour's Ethical and Profitable Arms Trade***

The scandal of the Scott Report of 1996 created an opportunity for Tony Blair's New Labour Party to introduce their innovative ideas regarding the restructuring of the British foreign policy and the defence sector. One of the main conclusions of the Scott Report was that the British foreign policy and defence policy lacked a level of transparency and responsibility. New Labour's approach to this criticism was to promise a thorough restricting of both policies with a focus on incorporating an additional element of transparency and responsibility (Wheeler & Dunne, 1998). At the same time, New Labour was challenged by the economic

situation of the UK as it came out of an era of increased neo-liberalism (McCourt, 2011). The persistent focus of previous governments on self-interest and capitalization created elevated levels of economic inequality and polarisation in the country which led to dissatisfaction under those who did not have the means to invest (Haugh & Kitson, 2007). By introducing new regulations on arms export and the defence sector, as promised in their party manifesto in 1997, it would potentially risk imposing consequences to the national economic well-being. This precarious balance between on the one side introducing more ethical and transparent norms in order to combat illicit trade and on the other side not inflicting harm to the economic wellbeing of the country is reflected in the first QCR annual report in 1997. Here it is stated that “The Government is committed to the maintenance of a strong defence industry [...] in which arms transfers must be managed responsibly” but that it “will be important to avoid a situation in which our policy of seeking to prevent certain regimes from acquiring certain equipment is undermined by foreign competitors supplying them” (QCAEC, 1998, p.2)<sup>1</sup>.

The reports that followed the initial QCR discuss the potential economic effects of adopting new regulations on arms trade in a similar fashion. In the 1999 QCR the government promotes their aims of creating guidelines and regulations that “set a standard for other to meet” whilst keeping in mind that this “could eventually be damaging to the United Kingdom’s competitive positions” (QCAEC, 2000, p.346). In the 2000 report a similar observation is made in a comment from the Foreign Secretary “These two objectives of trying to create a safer world through an effective international and bilateral system of arms control and the other side having a profitable and viable defence industry can be in conflict.” (QCAEC, 2001; p.5). However, a few pages later it is stated that eventually a world with better international regulations on arms trade, will subsequently also be better for the British economy (QCAEC, 2001, p.7).

The QCR reports of the first New Labour Government present an economic dilemma between wanting to obtain ethical regulations that limit the possibility of illicit arms trade whilst not inflicting harm on the economic wellbeing of the UK. In 2002 the second New Labour Government finalized the Export Control Act of 2002. In the 2003 QCR it is addressed how the potential negative effects of these new rules can be combatted by pushing for international regulations on arms exports. According to the government, merely having

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<sup>1</sup> The annual reports of the Quadripartite Committee on Arms Export Control/Committee on Arms Export Controls are, in general, published at the end of the following year.

national rules on just arms trade are not cost-effective as this could lead to high transaction costs and the risk of sunken costs (QCAEC, 2004 p. 47) the introduction of an international measure would ensure that the UK can more easily determine whether a potential trade would be considered as just. In the 2003 QCR it is even stated that a potential decrease in arms export by an international regulatory mechanism would not outweigh the expected decrease in transaction costs (QCAEC, 2004, p. ev51).

The argument that is made in the reports after the introduction of the reformed arms controls is that supporting an international regulatory measure would limit the expected economic consequences by means of ‘levelling the playing field’ between countries. Prior to the ATT initiative the only international regulatory measure that the UK could support was the EU Code of Conduct on arms export (signed in 1998). However, this measure was only applicable to EU member states, and therefore did not impose restrictions on non-European arms exporters such as the US, China, and Russia. Hence, the arrival of the ATT initiative was seen as the ultimate solution to the UK’s dilemma of balancing their new norms and its economic influence. In the 2004 QCR it is stated that the development of a “multilateral legally-binding control mechanism, e.g., an international Arms Trade Treaty, would allow for a levelling of the playing field that would reduce the cost of reallocating export and offer access to ‘difficult’ markets” (QCAEC, 2005, p.e91).

The QCRs after the introduction of the ATT initiative in 2004 repetitively use the same argumentation as presented above. In the 2007 QCR it is stated once more that the government believes that the introduction of the ATT will offer considerable benefits to the British economy if the eventual treaty is “as strong and robust as possible” and that attention should be paid to the “ definitional issues, to minimise the burden on legitimate industry and to make the systems and procedures more robust (QCAEC, 2008, Ev60).

### ***The Coalition Government’s Focus on National, Economic Interests***

The Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government that took office in 2010 inherited a country with an unfavourable economic situation that was completely different to how the previous New Labour Government started in 1997. In 2008 the global financial crisis had hit its peak and heavily affected the economic wellbeing of the UK. As a result of this crisis many governmental institutions were destabilized, and the previous government had created large financial deficits to combat the detrimental effects of the crisis (Seldon & Finn, 2015).

The British defence sector was especially troublesome for the new government, as there was a budget deficit of around thirty-eight billion pounds (O'Donnell, 2011). Hence, an important task for the new government was to implement new measures that would revive the British economy. As part of their electoral promise, i.e. that they would do everything in their power to restructure the British economy, one of the first things that they did was conducting a thorough review of the defence policies which resulted in the publication of a new Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) and the introduction of a National Security Strategy (NSS) in early 2010. These documents presented a novel approach to the defence and foreign policies based on the ideology that all implemented policies should benefit the 'national interests' of the UK (Ritchie, 2012; Crines, 2013; Daddow, 2015).

The first QCR published under the new government immediately broke with the previous New Labour QCRs by stating that they would pay "particular attention to the government's policy of intensifying the promotion of arms exports' (CAEC, 2011, p.3). In the Strategic Defence and Security Review 2010 the government's aim of increasing arms export is promoted because "[...] bringing the defence budget back to balance is a vital part of how we tackle the deficit and protect this country's national economy and security." (SDSR, 2010, p.2). In these passages the focus on the national interests of the UK, and in particular the economic interests, are clearly presented as being fundamental to the defence policies of the new government. In October 2010, the new Secretary of State for Defence, Liam Fox, even goes as far as stating that the long-term prosperity and economic recovery of the UK's economy is dependent on the competitiveness of British defence sector (CAEC, 2011, Ev 35). The Coalition Government takes a radical turn away from the New Labour's approach to arms exports. Although, New Labour's approach did mention the importance of maintaining a strong defence basis, the priority in their approach seemed to be placed on creating more ethical guidelines despite the potential economic consequence this would have.

The Committee is rather critical about this new approach of focussing on national interests and questions how the government will deal with the "negative consequences of increased military exports" and how it will promote "human rights or economic development, or efforts to stamp out corruption" when their vision of increased arms export is "even more aggressively than has been the case to date" (CAEC, 2011, Ev 35). The pivotal question that the Committee would like to see answered is how the Coalition Government envisioned its support for arms trade regulations, and the ATT, whilst simultaneously wanting

to increase their arms export. The concern of the committee is accurately captured in the following quote:

Since the Coalition Government is, as described above, heavily promoting arms sales its commitment to an arms trade treaty that makes a real difference must also be questioned. The danger is that an arms trade treaty would further legitimise the arms trade without reducing sales, even to governments, such as those of Israel or Saudi Arabia, that many would consider dangerous regimes. (CAEC, 2010, Ev38)

Since the arrival of the new government, it became clear that they took a more reluctant stance within the ATT negotiations. In their response the government states that they are disappointed by this statement and that they did make considerable contributions to creating the ATT. However, they do mention that as the ATT negotiations reach a more critical stage it should be expected that the UK needs to make compromises in order to get as many countries involved as possible (CM 8841, 2012, p. 81). In the 2012 QCR the last remark is made regarding the economic influence of the ATT. Here is it once more emphasized by the Government that the eventual Arms Trade Treaty must be robust and have a wide scope in order to further the goals of protections civilian lives and general human security, but that it simultaneously must not inflict harm on the sovereignty of national defence industries (CAEC, 2013, Ev.115).

An explanation for the ambiguous stance of the Coalition Government towards the ATT can be found in the large defence deficits that were present. In early 2010 it became clear that over the next ten years they would have to cut over thirty-eight billion pounds from the UK's defence budgets (O'Donnell, 2011). Such a considerable cut would inherently mean that the UK needed to decrease the scale of their defence sector and thereby become more reliant on their allies. In November 2010, the UK and France signed the Lancaster House Treaty, which was aimed at creating a shared pool of armoury and increasing the defence cooperation between the countries. In addition to strengthening their ties to France, the Coalition Government also seem to mention their relationship to the US more frequently. The UK and the US signed the Defence Trade Cooperation Treaty back in 2007 but took till 2010 for it to be fully functional (Clarke, 2015). It can therefore be argued that as the UK needed to rely more on its allies for support in the defence sector, they became more ambiguous in their stance towards the ATT as one of their closest allies, the US, was very reluctant to sign the ATT.

What is seen, especially under the Coalition Government's approach, is that political connections often have determined how the UK positioned itself towards the ATT. In the following section the analysis of these political ties and its influence on the ATT approach will be provided.

### **Using the ATT as a Foreign Policy Tool**

The trade in arms is highly connected with foreign policy as it enables states to forge strong political ties. Comparably the introduction of the ATT was seen as a way to align the interests of states and thereby create strong international ties. The following part of the analysis aims at answering the question how both governments presented the ATT in terms of its political and foreign policy use.

#### ***From Internationalism to Increased Americanism***

The pivotal discourse of New Labour's foreign policy was based the ideology that the global order had reached a stage of 'internationalism' in which all countries were intrinsically linked to each other. They introduced the understanding that in this era of internationalism the only valid way to promote national interests was by shaping international organisations to these national goals (Vickers, 2015). In one of the first speeches that the Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, gave this ideology of the world order was presented. Cook states that the world as a whole had reached its "era of internationalism" and that all states were "interdependent" to each other (Cook, 1997). This interdependence between countries incentivized New Labour to aim for a leading role within the international community as they viewed this as the only way to accurately promote their national interests (Atkins, 2013). The 1997 QCR reflects this contemporary understanding of internationalism as the report itself is published in "fulfilment of our commitment to transparent and responsible arms trade" that "sets a standard for global partners" (QCAEC, 1998, p.2). One crucial element of New Labour's new ideology was that they wanted to promote their exceptional position of being closely connection to both the US and the EU (McCourt, 2011). In the 2001 QCR the potential of an international trade agreement is first discussed and here it is stated that the government wants to use their "extraordinary international position" and their "close ties to both the United States as well as to the member states of the European Union" to create an agreement that is based on morality and internationalism and will promote the interests of the UK (QCAEC, 2002, p.42). The next



year it is stated that an active position within such an agreement would allow for a “strong international position” for the UK (QCAEC, 2003, p. 49).

The first five years of New Labour’s foreign policy is in stark contrast with the period after 2003. In 2003 the UK decided to join the US in their ‘war on terror’ mission in Iraq. Since the 9/11 attacks the foreign policy of the UK became more focussed on following and supporting the US (Vickers, 2015; Bluth, 2004). The influence of the US was not only visible in the decision of joining them in the Iraq war but would also later influence the UK’s decisions in the Afghanistan war (Nelson, 2019). The change of heart of Labour’s foreign policy was similarly present in the QCRs after 2003. In QCR of 2003 it is stated that the government should be more pay more attention to blindly complying with EU guidelines on arms control as this could have “grave consequences” for the “much needed strong strategic and industrial relations to the US” (QCAEC, 2004, p.41). The QCR of the next year applauds the government for their support of the ATT, but here it is stated that they feel “uneasy” about the “doubts that the USA has about how far the proposal for a treaty will reach” (QCAEC, 2005; p.91). The QCR reports from 2004-2010 present a similar rhetoric of being supportive of a robust ATT but simultaneously showing the hesitancy of how this would influence the UK’s relations to their ally the US (QCAEC, 2007, p. 31; CAEC, 2009, p. 44).

### ***The Coalition Government’s Break from the Past***

The large defence deficits that the Coalition Government inherited from the former Labour Government created an increased awareness about the importance of their strategic relationships as they would not be able to maintain the scale of their former defence sector (Vickers, 2015). As demonstrated above, the previous Labour Government diminished their role as an international leader by following US policy in crucial decisions and thereby limited their cooperation with important EU partners. The Coalition Government wanted to break with this tradition, as they viewed this US doctrine harmful to their ‘old’ connections and international position (Daddow, 2015).

In order to regain their unbiased international position, they wanted to be perceived as less radical and interventionistic. A similar temperance is found in their stance towards the ATT. In the 2010 QCR it is stated that the government “adopted a different policy from its predecessor; appearing to be prepared to weaken the Arms Trade Treaty in order to try to

ensure that key arms exporting countries become signatories.” (CAEC, 2011, p.95). Later it is stated that there was “significant evidence of insufficient continuity of leadership’ and that this “reduced activity, could potentially impose negative results on the final Treaty” (CAEC, 2011, p.97). Foreign Secretary, William Hague, reacted to this statement that the government is not trying to weaken the eventual treaty but does want to opt for a treaty that will be ratified by the most amount of countries and therefore adjustments need to be made in their role (CAEC, 2011, p. 128).

In the 2011 governmental response the government places emphasis on their commitment to “maintaining and strengthening the effectiveness of its strategic export controls, and to improving the international system by taking a leading role in the United Nations negotiations for an Arms Trade Treaty which the international community is working to conclude” (CM 8707, 2011: p.1). However, later it is argued that these objectives should not come at a cost of risking their foreign and diplomatic relations. In the 2011 report it is mentioned that still push for a wide support basis of the ATT, and that the government will fund different projects ‘to promote the ATT, to assist the ratification and to support effective implementation’. In order to fulfil this aim, the government will ‘donate £100,000 to the United Nations Trust Facility Supporting Cooperation on Arms Regulation that has been established to support early ratification’ (CM 8707, 2011 p. 22). In the following years, the government persistently answers the Committee’s question on how they will support the widespread adaptation of the ATT by stating that they will grant funding to NGOs and projects that support countries in implementing the ATT (CM 8935, 2012, p. 32; CM 9089, 2013, p. 27). In the 2014 report the government argues that they now ‘practically’ support the ATT process by organising informal consultation by making use ‘of the wide and effective network of UK diplomatic relations’ and their ‘close relationships with other governments, civil society and industry’ (CAEC, 2015, p.8).

The Coalition Government’s stance towards the ATT is more ambiguous compared to the previous Labour Government. Although, the Coalition Government wanted to present themselves as an international leader that did not blindly follow the US in their foreign policy, they did not play an active role in the ATT negotiations according to the QCRs. As hinted at before, a potential explanation could be that during these years the government opted for a decrease of their own defence capabilities and to compensate for this potential loss they started to implement agreements on sharing defence capabilities (Vickers, 2015). Both the US

and France were important partners in these endeavours. Actively promoting the ATT could be a risk to these agreements, as the US was still opposed to the arrival of such a treaty in the first years of the Coalition Government.

### **Using the ATT as a Solution to National Security Imperatives**

The most common concern of international arms trade was, and still is, the chance of illicit trade. The proliferation and diversion of weapons is believed to cultivate violence and even support terrorism and violent non-state actors. This last part of the analysis tries to find answers to how both governments perceived the ATT in relation to the experienced national security of the United Kingdom.

### ***New Labour's Fear of Terrorism***

A great concern for the New Labour Government was that the globalised world had generated threats from new non-state actors. In addition, they feared a loss of legitimacy of international institutions (Nelson, 2019). In 1998 Iraq decided to terminate further cooperation with the UN's weapon inspection programme. The possibility of there being an authoritarian regime with a none-regulated weapons of mass destruction (WMD) arsenal was considered to be such a great threat that the US in collaboration of the UK decided to bomb the Iraqi WMD facilities in December 1998. The perceived risk that uncontrolled access to arms formed for the national security of the UK would after this event be the backbone of New Labour's security policies (Kettell, 2011; Kennedy-Pipe & Vickers, 2007M). In the 1999 QCR the lack of transparency in arms trade is described as one of the "greatest threats to our society" and that "there is regrettably little sign that other Member States are taking [this lack of transparency] very serious" (QCAEC, 2000, p.41).

After the 9/11 attacks in the US, the understanding that terrorists and their potential to access deadly weapons formed a great threat to the national security of the UK grew tremendously. In the 2002 QCR it is stated that the proliferation of conventional weapons, and small arms in particular, is seen as "a real and serious threat to the human security that needs to be addressed internationally" (QCAEC, 2003, p. 49). During the same year the UK introduced the Export Control Act 2002, this act was aimed at bettering the regulations of import and export of British weaponry. However, the government did underline that this act would not provide a solution to the potential proliferation and diversion of their arms based on

the difficulties of imposing extra-territorial laws on arms (QCAEC, 2002, p. 35). What would be a possible solution to illicit arms trade according to the Labour Government is “an effective, international arms export control regime” that can “make an important contribution to the security of the United Kingdom and the world” (QCAEC, 2002, p.4).

After the invasion of Iraq in 2003 the Labour Government became even more explicit about the threats of illicit arms trade because “proliferation of arms is fuelling conflict, facilitating human rights abuses and violent crime, undermining development, threatening governance and increasing insecurity across the world” (QCAEC, 2004, p. Ev44). In the report of the following year, it was stated that illicit arms trade was not only troublesome to the global security but also challenged the prosperity of the UK and that therefore an international control regime would also be beneficial for the security of the UK (QCAEC, 2005, p. Ev136). The discourse of portraying terrorism and proliferation of weapons as big national security threats got even stronger after the 7/7 attacks in 2005 in London. In the QCR of 2005 it is clearly stated that the ATT would protect the UK from many threats:

Corruption greases the circumvention of arms controls. It facilitates the diversion or re-export of arms consignments to unintended recipients such as embargoed countries and terrorist organisations. It undermines the capability of officers to apply effective controls and facilitates the trade of banned or illegal weapons such as landmines. It introduces distortions into decision-making, such as whether the proposed export might be used for internal repression or provoke conflict. It undermines security and defence, good governance, the rule of law, the democratic process as well as sustainable development, all of which it is hoped the International Arms Trade Treaty will protect. (QCAEC, 2006, p. Ev128)

Notably, the New Labour Government relied heavily on the ideology that proliferation and diversion of arms were among the biggest threats to their national security. The ATT would be a solution to these threats as the treaty would “help curb the flows of illicit arm trade that contribute to abuses of human rights and international humanitarian laws which are inseparable to the national wellbeing of the British citizen” (QCAEC, 2008, p. Ev 84). Although, of none in the reports terrorism and the efforts of the UK in the Middle East are linked to these statements about illicit arms trade, it is remarkable that in the years following 9/11, the invasion of Iraq and the 7/7 bombings the government seems most persistent in their appeal for an Arms Trade Treaty.

### *The Coalition Government's Continuation of the Terrorism Discourse*

The succeeding Coalition Government continuously describes terrorism and the illicit trade in arms to these organisations as a big threat to the British national security. Although the visions of the Labour Government and the Coalition Government align on risk description, their approach to how to secure the national interests does vary. The Coalition Government took a more liberal approach to their understanding of foreign policy and the role of the UK. In their policies the understanding that states behave as separate entities within the global order and will behave in accordance with their own interests is clearly presented.

Additionally, emphasis was placed on the importance of allowing 'developing' states to create their own democratic institutions (Beech, 2011). Whilst promoting these goals, the Coalition Government wanted to take a step away from the former interventionist approach of New Labour and promote an approach of preventing instead of solving. This aim is clearly described in the Strategic Defence and Security Review 2010 "more effective ways to tackle risks to our national security taking an integrated approach, both across government and internationally, to identify risks early and treat the causes, rather than having to deal with the consequence" (SDSC, 2010, p.1). In the first QCR published under the new government it is described in detail how the introduction of the ATT would advance the goals of both promoting British national interests as well as preventing further conflicts. William Hague, the new Foreign Secretary, explains that the introduction of such a treaty would prevent "illicit exports that could undermine our own security or core values of human rights and democracy" (CAEC, 2011, p. 62). Later in the report the Foreign Secretary mentions that there is a mutual relationship between the security, prosperity, and values agendas of the United Kingdom, and that the government recognises that a potential international treaty could strengthen the defence relationships between the UK and other countries (CAEC, 2011, p.84; p.103).

In the reports from 2011 and 2014 and additional emphasis is placed on the proliferation of weapons that is fuelling terrorism and other illicit forms of organised crime. In 2011 the Conservative–Liberal Coalition Government states that an Arms Trade Treaty would help "maintain the UK's security interests by reducing conflict and by stopping weapons reaching terrorists and insurgents that use them against our troops and our civilians, and those of our allies" (CAEC, 2012, p. 19). Similar statements can be found in the reports from 2012–2014. But in 2015 the Conservative–Liberal Coalition Governments seems to take a different

stance on the potential security benefits of an arms regulatory measure, as they promote the idea that a strong and robust defence industry can strengthen the international security, and that the “legitimate international trade in arms enables governments to protect ordinary citizens against terrorists and criminals, and to defend against external threats. The government remains committed to supporting the UK’s defence industry and legitimate trade in items controlled for strategic reasons.” (CAEC, 2016, p. 34).

The Coalition Government repetitively connects the ATT to the improvement of their national security. Compared to the previous Labour Government the Coalition Government want to improve their national, as well as the international, security by means of prevention. In their view, many of the problems that were experienced during both the New Labour years and their own governing period were a consequence of improper regulations of arms trade which supported illicit arms trade. Preventing illicit arms trade on an international scale was assumed to increase their national level of security. In pursuit of their aim of prevent conflict and risks to the national security, the ATT was presented as a plausible solution to at least illicit arms trade. Notably, the Coalition Government is mostly supportive of the ATT process but in the last QCR published during their governing period they seem to adopt a change of heart as they do not discuss the ATT as detailed and rather want to emphasize the need for a strong and robust national defence industry that would eventually limit the existence of illicit trade.

## 5: Conclusion

The international trade in conventional arms has an interesting, and fundamental, role within the economic and political wellbeing of states as well as being determining of the sense of national security within global order. Due to its relation to these elements, the trade in conventional arms has been an enduring and legitimate element within world politics (Erickson, 2015). In their pioneering study Levine et al. (1994) introduce the understanding that there is an economy-security trade-off that stands at the basis of any arms trade. To solve this trade-off states will try to assess the security risks that are associated with arms trade by examining different, determining variables such as political similarity (Akerman & Seim; 2014), existence of (prior) trade agreements (Bove et al., 2018) and affinities to other countries (Harkavy, 1994; Krause, 1995), that eventually offer insight into how secure the trade with a potential partner is. Pamp et al. (2021) lay the foundation for the understanding that there are three determining elements that eventually compose the trade decision, these being: how the proposed trade would influence the economy, the level of national security and the political ties to other countries.

Seen the influence that arms trade has on multiple, crucial elements of national wellbeing it is convincing that states have long protected their sovereignty within the arms trade domain. Hence, the widespread adaptation of the Arms Trade Treaty in 2014, the first legally binding treaty that would restrict the free-trade in conventional arms, perplexed many experts within this field. The United Kingdom especially stood out in their early support for the ATT. Despite being a considerably large arms-exporter and having the second largest defence sector globally, they were adamant in their support for this treaty. Erickson (2018) and Perlo-Freeman (2020) explain that their stance was influenced by the domestic political context at the time, however this does not seem to explain the continued support after the New Labour Government went out of office in 2010. Hence this thesis aimed to shed light on how the continued support of the UK for the ATT was influenced by the change in political ideology in 2010 by answering the following research question: *'How did the shift in political ideology in the United Kingdom from the New Labour Governments (1997-2010) to the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government (2010-2015) influence the United Kingdom's stance towards the UN Arms Trade Treaty negotiations?'*

The results of this thesis suggest that the general stance of the UK towards the ATT has mostly been influenced by domestic and foreign political events, but that the difference in political ideology between the two subsequent governments did only minorly influence how the country approached the ATT negotiations. The first New Labour Government, elected in 1997, effectively made use of the upheaval of the 1996 Scott Report and was determined to approach foreign policy and the defence sector completely differently compared to the previous government. A major part of their discourse was based on a contemporary understanding of the global order and how to approach this order in an ethical manner. They perceived the world as having reached the stage of 'internationalism' in which all countries were inherently dependent on each other and had the responsibility to contribute to a just world. This ideology led them to introducing a novel arms regulatory measure, however this could potentially harm their competitive position and thereby their economic wellbeing. The adaption of an international regulatory measure, outside of the European Union, could be a solution to this economic imperative as it would 'level the playing field' between all arms exporting countries.

The ATT was initially supported by the New Labour Government as it would help them fulfil their electoral promise of becoming more ethical within the global order whilst limiting the effect that such an effort would have on the national defence sector. However, this narrative did change during the course of their second term. After the 9/11 attacks the New Labour Government started to emphasize the threats that proliferation, diversion, and corruption in arms trade formed to the national well being of the country. Instead of supporting the ATT based on ideology that it formed an ethical solution to the economic imperative that was created by their new arms control guidelines, the second New Labour Government started to frame its support for the ATT as a security measure. Especially after the invasion of Iraq and the 7/7 bombing in 2005 the government argued that the ATT would be a solution to the threat of illicit arms trade.

Although the initial stance of the New Labour Government towards the introduction of the ATT was mainly influenced by their political ideology its latter approach, from 2002 onwards, was mostly dictated by the domestic and foreign political developments of which the US led 'war on terror' and the subsequent fear that illicit arms trade would support terrorism was the most determining. The argument that the ATT would facilitate better national security by eliminating threats of illicit arms trade was similarly used by the



subsequent Coalition Government in 2010. After winning the elections the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition had the challenging task of getting the UK out of one of the worst financial crises. A vital element of restrengthening the British economy was decreasing the governmental deficits that were created by the former government. Especially the defence budget needed to be cut down, by 38 billion pounds in ten years, in order to make it feasible. Because of this economic situation the new government did reorientate its focus on arms exports. At the same time, they also wanted to restrengthen their international position as they viewed their foreign political ties as crucial to their national wellbeing. Despite wanting to increase their arms export and international position without provoking a conflict in interests between for example the UK and the US, this government still supported the ATT.

The continued support for the ATT by both governments is especially interesting seen the differences in their approaches. The initial stance of New Labour regarding the ATT was heavily influenced by their ideology of ‘ethical internationalism’ which created a certain responsibility for them to create ethical arms trade regulations. In their vision the ATT was both a pursuit of this aim as well as a tool to decrease the economic imperatives that this aim of ethical guidelines created for their defence industry. The subsequent Coalition Government was less influenced by its ideology and therefore the ATT was not as crucial to their politics as compared to the previous government. However, what is seen in both approaches is that the support for the ATT over time, and especially after the 9/11 attacks, was more framed as an attempt at lessening the threats that illicit arms trade created to both the international domain as well as to the UK itself. The fundamentals of using the ATT as a tool to increase national security were already set by the New Labour Government. As this discourse was already in place it would have been foolish for the Coalition Government to stop supporting this initiative especially because one of their ambitions was to increase the focus on national interests.

This conclusion sheds new light on the motivations of the UK for supporting and ratifying the ATT. It also suggests that the conclusions of Erickson (2018) and Perlo-Freeman (2020) remain valid for explaining the initial stance of the New Labour Government, but this research adds to these conclusions that over time the UK’s support for the ATT became mostly influenced by the understanding that they could use this treaty to their national security goals. It can therefore be argued that the introduction of the ATT was used as a tool to partially solve the economy-security trade-off that is pivotal to international arms trade.

Further research on this topic could be conducted in manifold ways. This specific research had a focus on the proposed policies and approaches both governments took in regard to the ATT, a quantitative research approach that focusses on the changes in arms trade volumes and/or trade agreements prior and after the ratification of the ATT could offer further insight into the effects of the ATT. Another research approach could be to compare the UK's approach to another early proponent of the ATT such as Germany or France. This could provide additional knowledge on general state behaviour in treaty ratification. And lastly further research could compare how other treaties/foreign policies approaches have been influenced by this change in political ideology to further deduce the effect it potentially has.

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