



« Weaponizing the Planet ». President Obama's Lesser-Known Legacy: « Arms Dealer in Chief »

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« [This is something we should politicize.](#) » — *President Obama, October 2015, in response to the mass shooting in Roseburg, Oregon.*

Calls for stricter gun control are rather predictable, as the regularity of mass shootings has become a new norm within the United States. Laws regulating the purchase of firearms are now a fiercely debated issue and utilized to rally support on both sides of the political spectrum. Society has become mired in politically expedient catchphrases, such as « Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims, » or « God isn't fixing this. » These catchphrases allow politicians to feel politically active within the debate, yet remain conveniently distant from the heart of it.

Ironically, amid all of the sanctimonious finger-pointing, a critical detail has gone relatively unnoticed: President Obama has discreetly brokered and authorized the sale of more arms to foreign governments than any other US president since World War II. How has such a critical detail gone relatively unnoticed by media seemingly fixated on the United States' « culture of violence »?



President Barack Obama makes a toast during his acceptance speech of the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, Norway, on December 10, 2009. (Photo: Doug Mills / The New York Times)

Many mainstream media reports have participated in promoting President Obama as the standard-bearer of moral righteousness as he passionately decries gun violence. The Obama administration has also worked to disseminate this narrative. At BarackObama.com, for example, President Obama is described as a purveyor of peace who is at odds with an unenlightened Congress:

Despite Congress' inaction, President Obama is not backing down. When Congress failed to act in 2013 after the Newtown shooting, he proposed more than 20 Executive Actions to prevent gun violence.

In January 2016, after nearly three more years of inaction from Congress, the President continued to build on those efforts by issuing additional executive actions that will expand background checks and better enforce existing gun laws.

These executive actions will save lives, but only Congress holds the power to fill all the gaps in our gun laws. While no single legislation can solve every violent crime, prevent every mass shooting, or keep every gun out of the hands of a criminal — more must be done, and can be done. Congress must pass common-sense gun safety laws to make our communities and children safer from gun violence.

The story changes, however, when one looks at arms sales globally. According to the [US Department of State's « World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 2014: Introduction and Overview »](#) report,

« during the period of 2001-2011, more than 77% of the world arms trade, by value appears to have been supplied by the United States, about 11% by the European Union, about 5% by Russia, less than 2% by China. The US share of the world arms market appears to have grown, while the EU share appears to have diminished. »

The scope of this scenario becomes further exacerbated by the economic potential that unrelenting wars offer. This is particularly true of the violence that is raging throughout the Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa. As conflicts reach hideous levels of depravity, the demand for state-of-the-art weaponry has increased substantially. New and emerging markets have established the Obama administration as the pre-eminent force in arms sales.

Arms are purchased by an array of « politically stable » governments such as Turkey and Taiwan. They are also purchased by corrupt, weakened and « unstable » governments such as those of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, where there is little to no accountability in terms of who is utilizing or selling the weapons. During President Obama's first five years in office, new agreements under the [Pentagon's Foreign Military Sales](#) program — the largest channel for US arms exports — totaled over \$169 billion. According to [William Hartung](#), director of the Arms and Security Project at the Center for International Policy, in an interview with Democracy Now!, the volume of deals authorized by President Obama has exceeded the amount approved by President George W. Bush throughout his tenure by nearly \$30 billion.

At the forefront of these arms purchases has been Saudi Arabia. For decades, the House of Saud has been recognized for an appalling human rights record, financing proxy wars throughout the Middle East and aggressively exporting a Wahhabist ideology — which is mobilizing terrorist organizations throughout the international community. According to [Congressional Research Service](#), in 2010, the Obama administration authorized the sale of \$90.4 billion worth of arms to the House of Saud.

In 2015, President Obama authorized the sale of armed drones. A study published by the [Teal Group](#), a defense industry research and analysis firm, indicated that the sale of armed drones is expected to grow substantially: « Teal Group's 2014 market study estimates that Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) spending will nearly double over the next decade from current worldwide UAV expenditures of \$6.4 billion annually to \$11.5 billion, totaling almost \$91 billion in the next ten years. »

This will intensify the violence that currently plagues the Middle East. A fleet of missile-carrying drones will provide some of the most repressive regimes on the face of the earth an opportunity to reach unimaginable levels of violence. Considering the political upheaval that has come to define the Middle East, one's naiveté must reach new heights to believe that armed drones will not be sold on the black market to internationally recognized terrorist organizations and non-state actors.

The [Stockholm International Peace Research Institute](#) released a study which indicated

« arms imports to Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states increased 71 percent from 2005-2009 to 2010-2014, accounting for 54 percent of imports to the Middle East in the latter period. Saudi Arabia rose to become the second largest importer of major weapons worldwide in 2010-2014, increasing the volume of its arms imports four times compared to 2005-2009. »

The fact that the vast majority of Americans are unaware of these details is emblematic of the unprecedented support President Obama has received from much of the mainstream media throughout his tenure. This was epitomized by a recent David Brooks piece in [The New York Times](#) in which he writes, « Obama radiates an ethos of integrity, humanity, good manners and elegance that I'm beginning to miss, and that I suspect we will all miss a bit, regardless of who replaces him. » Such unequivocal statements convey an image of Obama that builds upon the public image constructed by his campaign. Unfortunately, there is a stark difference between perception and reality. The image of Obama as a benevolent overseer of morality becomes slightly tarnished when details emerge regarding the manner in which his administration has monetized modern warfare. It is this false image of benevolence that many media agencies have conveyed to the American people; and, subsequently, it is the media that are just as complicit in the weaponization of our planet.

[Noam Chomsky](#) once stated, « Any dictator would admire the uniformity and obedience of the US media. » Such an astute observation has never been truer. As people in the United States attempt to comprehend the US « culture of violence, » perhaps it is time to start looking to the top.

Each time President Obama morally admonishes the National Rifle Association and its supporters or implores Americans to « politicize » gun violence, we should be challenging him to come clean about his administration's role in spreading weaponry worldwide.

How can a man who has weaponized the planet at a historic rate be championed as a purveyor of peace? If one is to acknowledge the righteous narrative promoted by the Obama administration, one must also acknowledge the reality of international arms sales under his watch. It is incumbent upon people throughout the United States to act on Obama's request and tirelessly « politicize » violence — at home and abroad.

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