



PARIAH WEAPONS

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FY2017-2019 RIHGAT PROJECT

Meiji University Research Institute for the History of Global Arms Transfer (RIHGAT)

1 August 2017

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As Neil Cooper and David Mutimer have observed, there is little academic literature on post–Cold War arms control that reflects critically upon the framings underlying arms control policies or on the functions served by the global architecture of arms control.¹ This project brings together an interdisciplinary group of historians, jurists, international relations (IR) thinkers and practitioners, with the intent to critically analyse the conceptual framing of certain types of weapons that made their pariah status possible. Moreover, the project aims to unveil the historical evolution of, and changes in, norms concerning pariah weapons. The analysis challenges the assumptions and ideas underpinning the norms themselves, as well as the social, cultural, political and historical contexts in which the norms were developed. It gives particular salience to the relations between norms, power and political and material interests, and challenges those who argue that the prohibition of particular categories of weapons is unambiguously emancipatory.

DEFINITION OF PARIAH WEAPONS

We define ‘pariah weapons’² as weapons that are singled out as ‘pariahs’ (socially despised outcasts) and whose use is treated as taboo in international policy debates in different eras. We do not limit the scope of ‘pariah weapons’ to weapons whose use is explicitly prohibited by legally binding international agreements (such as anti-personnel landmines), but include those weapons whose use has been considered for prohibition in international policy debates (such as ‘aggressive weapons’ before the Second World War). Although humans have problematised and prohibited the use of certain weapons throughout history (such as crossbows in medieval Europe), we limit the scope of our project to the period from the nineteenth century to the present.

WHY WE USE THE TERM

‘PARIAH WEAPONS’

By choosing the term ‘pariah weapons’, we emphasise the socially constructed way in which weapons are conceptually framed. We intend to challenge the ideas and assumptions that justify the framing of some weapons as pariahs and to highlight the way in

PROJECT AIMS

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which such framing is accompanied by the implicit construction of the 'legitimate' and 'mundane' spheres of weapons. The above definition will allow us to consider why each 'pariah weapon' was singled out as particularly problematic and odious among a wide range of weapons at a specific moment in a specific society, as well as to examine why some 'pariah weapons' are prohibited by international agreements while others were not. It also allows us to reassess the inter-war negotiations where a broader range of weapons, such as 'aggressive weapons', were tabled for possible targets of prohibition and abolition and to examine the development, in the aftermath of the Second World War, of the narrower framings of 'weapons of mass destruction (WMD)'³ and 'certain conventional weapons'. Rather than uncritically using terms such as 'aggressive weapons', 'inhumane weapons'⁴, 'WMD' and 'certain conventional weapons', we will examine the specific historical contingency from which such terms and framings of weapons arose.

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¹ Neil Cooper & David Mutimer (2011) *Arms Control for the 21st Century: Controlling the Means of Violence*, *Contemporary Security Policy*, 32:1, 3-19, p. 3.

² The term 'pariah weapons' has not been widely used in arms control literature, but it has been used by Neil Cooper and a few other critical scholars in IR and security studies. See Neil Cooper (2011) *Humanitarian Arms Control and Processes of Securitization: Moving Weapons along the Security Continuum*, *Contemporary Security Policy*, 32:1, 134-158.

³ Although the term 'weapons of mass destruction' is said to have been first used in 1937 in reference to the aerial bombing of Guernica, Spain, it became associated with nuclear, biological and chemical weapons after the Second World War. In its current usage, this term is premised on the assumption that nuclear, biological and chemical weapons are inherently horrific and significantly more destructive than 'conventional weapons'. See its first usage in the Archbishop's Appeal, *Times*, 28 December 1937, p. 9 ('Who can think at this present time without a sickening of the heart of the appalling slaughter, the suffering, the manifold misery brought by war to Spain and to China? Who can think without horror of what another widespread war would mean, waged as it would be with all the new weapons of mass destruction?'). See the development of the term WMD in Ido Oren & Ty Solomon (2013) *WMD: The Career of a Concept*, *New Political Science*, 35:1, 109-135.

⁴ 'Inhumane weapons' is more commonly used in arms control literature to signify the kind of weapons whose nature is seen to have specific 'inhumane' characteristics. When the term 'inhumane weapons' is used, it is often based on the assumption that there are certain weapons whose nature is intrinsically 'inhumane' and thus illegitimate. In that case, the term implicitly constructs a sphere of weapons that is conceived to be 'humane', 'discriminate' and legitimate and does not lead us to question the dichotomy's underlying ideas.