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**A Case for Global Democracy? Arms Exports and Conflicting Goals in Democracy Promotion**

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**Abstract**

*Employing the framework of conflicting goals in democracy promotion as departure point, the paper addresses the issue of arms exports to non-democratic countries as an important research topic which points to a reconsideration of certain fundamental conceptual and normative commitments underpinning democracy promotion. Empirically, we remind of the lingering hypocrisy of Western arms exporters, knowing that exports to non-democratic countries often hinder or block democratisation. This is not easily circumvented, because of the many conflicting objectives both internal and external to democracy promotion itself. Yet democracy and human rights promotion remain, ethically and pragmatically, important policy goals. Noting that the self-evident character of the state-based liberal democratic model is being increasingly questioned in the literature, we then critically explore a radical if surprisingly natural alternative vision: Namely that if the commitment to democracy and human rights is to be genuine, only global democracy remains a viable way of resolving the many dilemmas, as it aspires to deal both with regulating arms exports and building of accountable decision-making structures. Although we ultimately reject the globalist solution and lean towards a less radical constructivist approach, we endorse the underlying rationale, namely that democracy promotion needs to sincerely embrace normative democratic theory.*

**Keywords**

*Democracy Promotion, Arms Exports, Conflicting Goals, Liberal Democracy, Global Democracy, Democratic Theory*

Democracy and human rights now belong among the central elements of the language of international politics. In Western democracies, promotion of democracy abroad has become an established part of official policy documents as well as political rhetoric, for reasons that are both ethically driven (democracy as the most desirable form of government) and pragmatic (democracy as a prerequisite for mutual benefits such as peace and prosperity). The corresponding scholarly debate on justifications, goals, and instruments of, as well as obstacles to democracy promotion (hereinafter also DP) is complex, with a number of sub-debates as well as overlaps with other social scientific disciplines.[[1]](#footnote-1) One promising area of research which arguably has not received the systematic scholarly attention it deserves concerns the fact that DP may come at cross purposes with other important goals, not to mention that DP necessarily chases several rabbits at once so that tensions arise *within* the democratising enterprise itself.

Building on this preliminary observation, we address in this paper the particular issue of arms exports to non-democratic and/or democratising countries, which represents an instructive example of a conflicting goal in DP, and argue that the fallout it has for theoretical understanding of democracy and democratisation is substantial. Although by and in itself, arms trade (or arms trade policies) represents an important subject of scholarly attention, its link to democratisation and democracy promotion remains rather undertheorised. We have sophisticated analyses of arms trade/arms exports by economists, scholars of international relations and international law, experts on security studies, human rights watchdogs, or (very recently) political philosophers (Christensen 2015). Similarly, much intellectual effort has been invested into explorations of the standing challenges and dilemmas of DP, such as the priority of state-building to democracy-building, protection of human rights in a world of independent states, the conditions of a successful democratic transition, or (quite recently) alternative models of democracy-to-be-promoted. Neither arms trade control nor externally supported democratisation, however, exhibit an encouraging historical record or overly promising prospects. The framework of conflicting goals in democracy promotion allows for arranging these issues into a comprehensive picture, highlighting fundamental conceptual and normative commitments which underpin the DP enterprise.

Against this general background, the paper critically explores a radical, if at once natural and surprisingly neglected, theoretical response to the problem of arms exports in DP: Namely that if the commitment to democracy and human rights is to be genuine, then a globally centralised democratic decision-making mechanism in the area of arms trade represents the only effective solution. Put more ambitiously, global democracy aspires to solve both riddles at once, and by implication, promises to avoid the corresponding conflicts and dilemmas which otherwise plague democracy promotion at the intersection with arms trade. Although we ultimately argue that the globalist position is not the most suitable theoretical approach, it does provide a useful mirror which brings out certain conceptual and normative assumptions behind DP as such, whether they are to be vindicated, reappraised, or ultimately rejected. Big issues call for big answers, which, in turn, require us to look at the big picture. The paper thus interweaves insights and arguments from several freestanding scholarly debates in the fields of international relations, international theory, political science and political philosophy.

We start our rather complex argument by highlighting relevant aspects of the research on conflicting goals in DP, including several dilemmas which beset decisions on arms exports to non-democratic and democratising countries. We focus on two categories of potential recipients – fragile states and stable authoritarian regimes –, noting already here that the necessity of the modern sovereign territorial state for a successful democratisation can be questioned on conceptual-theoretical grounds. We then turn to current trends in arms trade and arms exports, pointing out that by prioritising instrumental preferences and short-term material payoffs, governments of Western democracies not only negate their official ethical commitments to DP and the corresponding policy goals, but also myopically undermine their own long-term interests such as international peace.

The problem is that not only the widely documented hypocrisy cannot be evaded by simply reshuffling the order of policy priorities (if at all possible), for it is the nature of conflicting goals in DP that multiple dilemmas arise, including those concerning arms exports. This applies no less to the recently adopted Arms Trade Treaty. Our larger point is that, if theorising on DP is to offer guidelines for avoiding the tougher dilemmas (and corresponding bad policy choices), it needs to sincerely embrace a normatively and conceptually informed approach to democracy and democratisation – not least because the many steps and options within DP constitute essentially *normative* choices, as opposed to mere technical solutions. Put simply, theory of democratisation must become democratic theory, and the arms trade problematic feeds into this proposition.

This leads us to explore a controversial argument, namely that the Gordian knot of arms exports in DP will be untied – or perhaps cut – by rethinking the model of democracy-to-be-promoted along global democratic lines: Specifically, the claim is that that global democratic institutions are either highly facilitative or outright necessary for local democratisation. At the same time, the issue of arms trade seems to provide a strong yet neglected argument in favour of globalisation of decision-making, as explored in recent democratic theory. Upon examining several theoretical and practical concerns with the globalist position, we conclude that not least for reasons of political agency, states need remain, at least for the time being, the central focus of DP efforts, with an important constructivist twist: That their self-understanding, as well as that of other actors, will be principally open to reinterpretation through the lens of normative political theory in general and democratic theory in particular. In this sense, our message remains subversive, for it is explicitly informed by foundational normative questions the answers to which the orthodoxy takes more or less for granted.

**Conflicting Goals in Democracy Promotion: Theoretical Dilemmas**

Putting provisionally aside ongoing theoretical disputes about its proper meaning, conditions and institutional implications, it can be stated with some authority that *democracy* (understood as a type of regime) is widely taken in the Western academia and public sphere to be an undisputed political and ethical goal, one which grounds an important class of foreign policy priorities.[[2]](#footnote-2) Democracy shares this general desirability with *human rights*, and it is no exception to read in the literature that the two concepts are interdependent, which has led to (controversial) attempts to substantiate theoretically their mutual conditionality (Habermas 2002; Goodhart 2008). At any rate, without delving too deep into philosophical debates,[[3]](#footnote-3) democracy can be and regularly is defended on the grounds of moral desirability, not least as the political regime most conducive to protection and promotion of human rights. All this provides intellectual background to the strong support that both democracy and human rights enjoy in the areas of international law, politics and diplomacy.

However, two issues blemish this consensual story.[[4]](#footnote-4) First, beyond the concept itself, contemporary democratic theory offers a range of competing models (conceptions) of democracy, and as we shall argue, it is far from self-evident which one is desirable for non-democratic and/or democratising countries. The attention in this paper to the global democratic alternative reflects the growing dissatisfaction with the one-size-fits-all view of DP, as well as with the meagre success of extant policies in most parts of the world (Youngs 2009; Beaulieu and Hyde 2008; Piazza 2007). Second and more generally, although it is now recognised that each case of a regime’s/country’s democratisation represents a unique experience, which requires not a small amount of imagination and flexibility (Carothers 2002: 14–16), the hard and uneasy fact is that most of the time, not all good things go together in DP, and that this is a structural feature of the entire enterprise. This has been occasionally noted in the literature on foreign aid and democracy promotion (e.g. Zürcher *et al.* 2009: 3; Bermeo 2010); however, a systematic and generalised outline of what might be called a “conflicting goals in DP” research programme was provided only fairly recently by Sonja Grimm and Julia Leininger (2012). Their complex theoretical-analytic framework combines three main areas of inquiry: (1) Intrinsic and extrinsic trade-offs,[[5]](#footnote-5) (2) normative, strategic and operative phases of DP,[[6]](#footnote-6) and (3) interacting factors that help explain the presence or likelihood of conflicting goals.[[7]](#footnote-7) Two elements are of particular importance to us as they figure prominently in the explication below: On the one hand, the *normative phase*, because each instance of DP effort starts with considerations on the intended goals and their mutual relationship. This is also the space where decisions on the *type of democracy to be promoted* are taken. On the other hand, particular *interacting factors* gain in significance at various points: Closely linked to the normative question of democracy is the scope of participating actors, i.e. who is to take part in decisions on what type of democracy will be promoted. Inclusion or exclusion of either domestic or indirectly involved external actors in the decision-making process is no less consequential for the outcomes of decisions on arms exports and arms purchases.

Many practical hard choices in DP may be rephrased as theoretical dilemmas, or as conflicting goals whose priority depends on further normative considerations. As it turns out, the commendable imperative of heightened sensitivity to local conditions and histories cannot do the job all the way down (or up), for the problem of arms exports transcends particular cases of DP and points to a deeper reconceptualisation of the theory and practice of DP.

**Recipients of Arms Supplies and Conflicting Goals in DP**

A case *for* arms exports can be and regularly is made on the grounds that either state- or democracy-building (or both) requires external arms support for the given government, so that it can build “democratic police and armies” and keep anti-democratic or even order-threatening forces at bay (as it was with the much-discussed cases of Afghanistan and Iraq).[[8]](#footnote-8) Some transfers may thus turn out to be legitimate, insofar as they contribute to suppression of intra-state armed violence and ultimately to establishment of democracy. The fact is, however, that many transfers (if not their majority) remain ethically problematic and likely counterproductive – or so we shall argue. Bearing in mind the schematic nature of the distinction, we address in the rest of this section two possible configurations in recipient countries – *fragile states* and *authoritarian regimes* – which give rise to distinctive concerns.

(1) As regards weak, unstable, or failed – let us call them *fragile* – states, evidence suggests that from the viewpoint of their citizens, elimination of arbitrary acts of physical violence is probably the most important value, at least in the short run (Scheye and Andersen 2007: 235; the classic here is Huntington 1968) – unlike, say, innovative ways of “giving voice” to various segments of the society. Scholarly consensus seems to have emerged that at least initially, building effective and stable institutions capable of enforcing legal rules – especially individual rights – is a prerequisite for successful democratisation, and should therefore precede the process of democracy-building.[[9]](#footnote-9) The unfortunate fact is that at one point or another, building efficient structures of governance and building democracy come at cross-purposes, i.e. become conflicting goals, owing to their contrary logics: While the former requires centralisation of coercive and administrative capacities (which would *prima facie* justify arms supplies to recipient actors, usually governments), successful and lasting democratisation crucially depends on dispersion of political and military power, at least in representative democracies as we know them (Anderson *et al.* 2001: 157; Tilly 2007: 58, 165; Schneider 2009: 110ff) – which is a conflict in the *strategic* phase of DP. The Western experience with state- and democracy-building has otherwise limited purchase, firstly because the development of modern democratic states was long and manifestly non-linear, and secondly because the complex internal logic of state sovereignty in liberal democracies, embedded as it is in the interplay of robust administrative capacity, monopoly of violence, direct rule over citizens, democratic legitimacy, rule of law, and constitutional guarantees (including the protection of basic rights), is difficult to replicate.

Besides the basic dilemma (located in the *extrinsic normative* phase of DP) between state-building and democracy-building, numerous particular problems haunt the establishing peace and order in and subsequent democratisation of fragile polities while being relevant to decisions on arms exports; here we certainly cannot do justice to them (see e.g. contributions in Jarstad and Sisk 2008). They nevertheless share an important feature (apart from casting doubt over typical justifications of arms exports) in that they point to the desirability of re-evaluation of the conceptual framework of DP. One such set of issues concerns the distinction between state and (armed) non-state actors. Not only do the latter often play an important (positive) role in securing day-to-day governance over large parts of the given territory (Andersen *et al.* 2007: 11); their very relationship with the state may range from active cooperation to passive *modus vivendi* to anarchic guerrilla warfare (Staniland 2012: 247ff.). On the national level this defines the basic conflict dynamics that continuously evolves. Not seldom is the very distinction blurred, for those in formal competition for power may exploit the armed groups’ capacity for violence for their own benefit (Krause and Milliken 2009: 211, 2014; Maoz and San-Akca 2012). Most generally, whether these groups are labelled as *insurgents* or *freedom fighters* ultimately depends on the framing priorities of both the domestic government and the potential arms suppliers (we return to this issue later in the text).

A related set of issues concerns the purpose for which arms supplies are actually used. Once in possession, governments may crush *any* opposition forces, including pro-democratic ones (Barany 2009: 186ff.; Bermeo 2009: 256). Putatively pro-democratic governments as well as opposition and various non-state actors may turn out to be highly unreliable allies, especially if there are more than just two vectors of competition for power, including powerful external interests. An example here may be the situation in Yemen after the fall of President Saleh and the ongoing conflict between central government in Sana'a and rebels supporting Al-Qaeda, which escalated into a full-scale civil war in 2015. As a part of War on Terror, Western democracies provided military support to central government in Yemen with a primary intention to stop the operations of Al-Qaeda in the region. However, massive violations of human rights showed how problematic these actions might be if the recipients have no commitment to at least minimal democratic standards. Other recent examples highlighting this dynamics include Iraq, Afghanistan, Egypt, Libya or Syria (Angell 1996; Gilby 2009; Kurki 2013). These cases confirm that while people, institutions, regimes as well as interests change, weapons provided by external suppliers “will last for decades” (Bermeo 2010: 90).

In short, if police and regular army cannot be fully relied on with respect to securing peace and order, the standard pro-exports justificatory narratives “from stability” and “from freedom” fail.[[10]](#footnote-10) But there is a deeper conceptual point, namely that there is nothing strictly necessary about synonymising order and security with a “robust state”, understood as a monopoly holder of coercive power in the given territory. A growing number of authors argue that for reasons of either the dark side of forced state-building (“installing peace by violence”) (Staniland 2012: 256), or the assumed better effectiveness of deterritorialised and non-hierarchical modes of post-conflict governance (Stroschein 2008: 655–674), or the danger that fragile states arguably pose for other (mainly neighbouring) countries (Krasner 2004: 1089), or simply the putatively declining capacity of states to exercise the Weberian monopoly of legitimate use of force (Krause and Milliken 2009: 216), a different conceptual apparatus is needed. As we shall see in the latter sections, this feeds into the wave of rethinking the basic assumptions of DP and democracy as such, where the global democratic alternative represents a radical departure from the standard array of options

(2) The primary trouble with stable *authoritarian* regimes concerns the threat of abuse of arms supplies by the governments, for in these countries state monopoly of physical violence has been already consolidated – while dispersion of power which seems necessary for a representative democracy to flourish is by definition actively opposed by the ruling elites. Despite all the possible differences among types of authoritarian regimes, maintaining coercive superiority over the opposition or the society as a whole is a vital precondition of their existence (Gerschewski 2013) – even though overt and continuous use of violence is costly, so that such behaviour is usually concealed by the government.[[11]](#footnote-11) Without institutional safeguards such as constitutional checks and balances, political culture, strong judiciary, or functioning civil society – which are, again by definition, not in place –, governments of non-democratic or democratising countries are essentially “free to choose” how many weapons of whatever kind for whatever purpose they acquire.[[12]](#footnote-12) These very arms supplies then allow authoritarian governments to maintain the status quo without being dependent on resources extracted from citizens, presumably via taxes (Bermeo 2010: 89). Further negative externalities follow, such as potentially expansive policies against neighbouring countries, or covert re-selling of weapons to anti-democratic or “anti-Western” groups abroad – the Islamic State being just the most recent example (Harte and Smith 2010).

Besides the ethical rationale against exporting weapons to authoritarian countries, we can see how such exports may ultimately turn against the pragmatic foreign policy goals of democracies-qua-arms-exporters, not least because their leverage vis-à-vis recipient actors is often limited. The lesson would seem to be clear and easy to follow – *do not, as a rule, export to problematic countries unless an overwhelmingly persuasive case can be made*, so that “the right sort of resources” is provided to “the right sort of actors” (Bermeo 2010: 77). Now although we explain below why the interaction of arms exports and democracy promotion points to a rethinking of certain assumptions behind DP itself, a working threshold, kind of a “rule of thumb” for preliminarily distinguishing problematic from legitimate transfers, seems useful, for it makes the grounds for criticism publicly intelligible. In this regard, we suggest that a combination of the *Freedom House Index* and Andreas Schedler’s category of “electoral authoritarianism” can do the job quite efficiently (Schedler 2002, 2006, 2013; Freedom House 2016): The FHI measures democratic performance of the respective country while Schedler tells us which countries are less than trustful, although they formally hold multiparty elections. On the FH scale, “problematic countries” would then occupy the <4; 7> interval. We now show that the record of Western governments in this regard is quite bleak.

**What We Know About the Practice and Consequences of Arms Trade**

Although only history can tell whether a particular transfer really fell in line with the rationale of the broader concept of DP, we find only few strong examples that represent a source of positive inspiration, or a “good practice”. Worth mentioning is post-WWII reconstruction of Germany and Japan, military support of Taiwan before, during and after democratisation, post-war reconstruction of South Korea, support of NATO allies (Spain, Portugal, Greece or Turkey) from the late 1970s to early 1990s, or successful transformation of former post-communist states in Eastern and Central Europe and their eventual integration into Western security structures (Johnson 1994).

Unfortunately, the list of countries where the exporters’ financial, geopolitical and strategic interests prevailed over democratising goals, and problematic licences for arms transfers were granted, is much longer. Consequently, the tally of negative impacts attributed to global arms trade is manifold, mainly in relation to human rights violations worldwide, including violent deaths (Laurance *et al.* 1993: 4–6; Sidel 1995; Stohl and Grillot 2009; International Committee of the Red Cross 1907; Holtom 2011: 11; Small Arms Survey 2012; Wisotzki 2013: 89ff.).[[13]](#footnote-13) Correspondingly, a significant part of international arms trade consists of transfers that may disturb security environment in national, regional and global contexts (Da Silva 2009: 31), especially if we construe security along the lines of the *human security* approach and its core element, physical safety. Between 1945 and 1995, conventional weapons are estimated to have directly caused more than 30 million casualties the majority of them civilians and non-combatants (Sidel 1995: 1677). A significant share of these exports have been carried out by manufacturers and/or exporters based in and operating from Western democracies, i.e. those countries which proclaim democratic values and human rights as a universal and common good (SIPRI 2016).[[14]](#footnote-14)

The volume of arms trade shows no signs of decreasing: According to available data, recent economic crisis has helped global armaments industry *increase* revenues. In March 2015, SIPRI reported that, in comparison to the previous five years, the volume of international arms transfers rose by 16 % between 2010 and 2014.[[15]](#footnote-15) This increase was strongly associated with notoriously fragile regions of Africa, Asia and Oceania as well as the Middle East where the degree of political stability and protection of human rights tended to stagnate or even deteriorate (Wezeman and Wezeman 2015). Since internationally recognised human rights include an important subset of political rights related to democratic participation, it could be argued that bad exporting practices undermine democratic rule at its very core, as modern representative democracy crucially depends on its constitutional, rights-protecting component, often subsumed under the notion of the rule of law. Upon reviewing available data, Nancy Bermeo (2010: 81) concludes that military aid (of which arms supplies constitute a substantial part) “may have an independent and negative effect on the likelihood of democratic regime change,” which implies that “increasing democracy aid without decreasing military aid may not boost democratization.”[[16]](#footnote-16)

The international community recognizes the negative impact of illicit and/or irresponsible arms trade in the existing global market., acknowledging (e,g, the UN Group of Governmental Experts on the Arms Trade Treaty) that even legally conformant transactions frequently produce negative consequences for global peace and security, human rights, and development (Group of Governmental Experts on a Comprehensive, Legally Binding Instrument Establishing Common International Standards for the Import 2008). Correspondingly, the general idea of promoting and protecting universal human rights as well as advancing democracy in extra-territorial spaces regularly appears among foreign policy priorities (Manzo 2003; Gaskarth 2006). Importantly, protection of the rights of individuals abroad is framed not only as the “right thing” to do, but also as a matter of self-interest (Cook 2002: 45–51; Hancock 2007).

Provisions in the relevant documents speak an unambiguous voice, be it those of individual countries or the European Union as a peculiar political actor which aspires at becoming a “normative power” in international politics. There are, however, obvious loopholes. For example, Article 346 of the Lisbon Treaty grants security-based prerogatives to all member states (Hansen 2016). Furthermore, although the Council Common Position 2008/944/CFSP which defines common rules and procedures governing the control of exports of military technologies and equipment by the EU member states is legally binding, the criteria are (deliberately) ambiguous and thus generally open to interpretation by national authorities, depending on international, security, financial and humanitarian interests and priorities in each case (European Union 2008; Bromely 2012: 1–6). Thus, if a given country is not subject of an international embargo, there are basically no international/global legal procedures to prevent controversial transfers, as they can be always justified by strategic, security-related or foreign policy interests (cf. Erickson 2015).

As has been repeatedly corroborated, this loophole has been generously exploited by governments and private enterprises. A study analysing export decisions by France, Germany, the UK and the US between 1992 and 2004 evidences that these countries have not discriminated among recipients as regards their record of human rights abuses or their autocratic nature, and thus have violated the ethical principles to which they have explicitly subscribed – a phenomenon the authors call “organised hypocrisy”, alluding to Krasner’s work on sovereignty in international affairs (Perkins and Neumayer 2010). Another study shows that between 1989 and 2006, the United States transferred conventional arms to authoritarian regimes to an even greater extent than China (De Soysa and Midford 2012). Similar conclusions about various Western exporters have been presented by numerous other authors (Blanton 2000). In the context of DP goals and rhetoric, the upshot is that support for democracy traditionally takes a back seat to either “self-interested foreign policy pursuits” (Schraeder 2003) or to security concerns (Olsen 2000).

Let us take stock of what has been said so far about the interplay between democracy promotion and arms trade (AT). First, AT threatens people’s (human right to) physical security, and this applies both to fragile and stable authoritarian states. Second, centralisation of power made possible by AT goes against the ideal of dispersed power which is central to democracy. Third, AT enables authoritarian regimes to strengthen its repressive capacities vs. citizens. Fourth, AT incurs costs on buyers which have to be repaid by future governments (or generations), instead of being spent on modernisation, development etc. Fifth, there is the problem of future counterproductive use of the goods, such as if forces hostile to democracy take over. Sixth, it is often difficult to tell who the “good guys” and who the “bad guys” are, as far as democratic progress is concerned. Seventh, irresponsible AT threatens with counterproductive consequences for regional peace, stability, and security. Eight, AT has most likely contributed to highly negative backlash against Western-type and Western-led democracy promotion. Ninth, Western democracies are immersed in hypocrisy as regards their official policy priorities on AT and DP. We now examine the reasons which give rise to the global democratic response, showing that no matter how justified criticism of current arms-exporting practices is, progress is unlikely unless a serious rethinking of the entire democratisation enterprise takes place.

**Ethical and Pragmatic Grounds for Criticism**

The propensity of democratic governments to sell arms to authoritarian regimes and fragile regions draws regular criticism from non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International or The International Action Network on Small Arms. Especially military support for newly established regimes in the Arab world proved highly problematic (Stohl *et al.* 2007: 22–37). This is however not an exclusive problem of one region: Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America provide numerous examples of trade-offs between normative commitments and pragmatic interests (cf. trends in arms trade in SIPRI 2017).

A straightforward ethical case for criticism of extant policies of Western democracies thus arises: By supplying weapons to regimes which oppose democratic values and violate basic human rights of their citizens, Western liberal democracies systematically breach their own principled commitments to promotion of democracy and human rights, and in effect uphold the practice of a systemic “organised hypocrisy”. An alternative framing consistent with some recent work in IR theory and political philosophy revolves around the value/norm of *justice* (Hurrell 2007; Christensen 2015).

This kind of ethically grounded criticism will be countered by a mixed bag of realistic and pragmatic arguments (besides the security- and freedom-based defence discussed above), pointing variously to the need of balancing multiple commitments in foreign policy; the primacy of protection of national interests abroad; the indirect protection of a nation’s security by supporting allies; or the self-defeating consequences of ceding ground and leverage to non-democratic exporters such as Russia or China (‘lesser evil’-type of arguments; for a sample of the debate in the US and UK, see e.g. Bromund and Groves 2008; Bedard 2011; Ekklesia 2012). Vis-à-vis domestic publics, a case for exports is almost always made on the grounds of employment security and jobs provided by the local armaments industries, as well as of revenues for the respective national governments (cf. the official statements made by the countries’ leaders recorded in France24 2014; Martin 2011). In short, arms export promotion – not restraint – has long been the rule in practice, as it reflects a more pragmatic approach to reality (Erickson 2015: 37). At the core of such arguments is the worry that the idealistic *logic of appropriateness* irresponsibly threatens to take priority over the *logic of consequences* which ought to be of paramount importance for national governments.

The obvious reaction is to re-emphasise the uneasy gap between rhetoric and reality – that is, between the Western self-complacency rooted in shiny charters and agreements, and the gloomy situation on the ground. This is an entirely legitimate point, given the pre-eminence of democracy- and human rights-promotion in official policy documents, upon which an alleged moral superiority of Western democratic countries is rested. In a similar vein, the “supporting allies” argument may be soberly rephrased as attempts to carve up political and power space in recipient countries (Staniland 2012: 254; this is not a direct quotation). As Christensen (Christensen 2015) has comprehensively shown, none of the above arguments is plausible as principled defences of arms exports *if* the basic commitment to democracy, human rights and justice is to be upheld. Our purpose in this paper, however, is not to recount and assess the respective arguments, responses, rejoinders to responses and so on. The salient point is that DP as an ethical goal of foreign policy encounters manifold conflicting goals in the *extrinsic normative* phase, many of which (such as economic profit at home and/or national strategic interests abroad) are related to arms exports. We emphasise that this is inevitable under the present political and institutional circumstances, unless either normalisation or substantial change of the agents’ goals and/or self-understandings takes place: The former points to setting authoritative constraints on arms trade “from above”, the latter to a gradual shift in agents’ identities.

However, we also wish to stress that the realistic/pragmatic argument from the *logic of consequences* is in fact problematic in itself, for a growing frustration with and aversion to the arms-exporting hypocrisy is already observable in the target countries of DP. Unsurprisingly, the result is an increasingly negative perception of the “Western” type of democracy and the “Western” conception of human rights among citizens of these countries (Carothers 2006, 2010; Bridoux and Kurki 2014). This constitutes an indirect negative impact of arms exports on DP as well as a further example of arms exporters’ myopia

**The Persistence of Conflicting Goals: Why Bad Exporting Decisions Do Not Go Away Easily**

As noted above, a powerful source of questionable arms deals resides in the extrinsic normative phase of foreign policy decision-making, including that part which concerns democracy promotion. In this regard, much hope surrounds the recently adopted (April 2013 by the UN General Assembly) and quickly ratified (December 2014) Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), a seed of a potential global regime whose goal is to subject heretofore unregulated global arms trade to clear rules. Other hoped-for benefits of such mechanisms include reduced transaction costs, internalisation of externalities, or pooling costs and risks (Smith and Udis 2003). Given what we know about the consequences of arms trade, improved results of democracy- and human rights-promoting efforts would also be a part of the expected package.

There are both theoretical and practical reasons why our expectations linked to the ATT should remain modest. Theoretically speaking, unless a body endowed with reasonably efficient control and enforcement powers is in place, free-riding seems a rational course of action for national governments – precisely as is the case today with many Western exporters. We saw that reasons for such behaviour do not necessarily stem from intrinsic moral wickedness of Western countries; lesser-evil type considerations might be all that is needed, even though they turn out to be myopic in the long run. Since the ATT introduced no supranational mechanism, thus representing mostly an attempt at formulating shared universal standards, implementation of any such measures still ultimately depend on internal policies and review procedures by arms-exporting countries themselves. As shown above, these turn out to be beset by external conflicting goals at best and by (organised) hypocrisy at worst.

Empirically speaking, experience with treaties of the ATT kind – such as the 1990s Wasenaar Arrangement – does not provide much ground for immediate optimism. Recall especially the EU’s Council Common position commented upon above, after which the ATT has been possibly modelled (Stavrianakis 2016: 844): Even though EU member countries arguably share important foreign policy interests as well as self-understandings regarding DP, and although the EU as a whole is incomparably more institutionalised and centralised than any current international regime, countries still find ways of navigating around existing regulations. We see no reason to expect that on the international/global level, countries with much more diverging geopolitical interests and ideological commitments will voluntarily observe unenforceable legal norms – especially in such sensitive policy areas as security and arms trade.

Let us nevertheless assume for the sake of the argument that a general consensus arises about the damaging consequences of globally unregulated trade in arms for the prospects of democracy worldwide. Even such an optimistic scenario would need to proceed on the rather fanciful assumption that there is no serious disagreement about the other phases/dimensions of democracy promotion as well as about the *interacting factors* that need to be taken into account. (1) As regards interacting factors, a “direct” problem concerns the very definition of a standard for distinguishing legitimate from problematic arms transfers. This applies to issues such as evaluation of the socio-political and economic condition of the recipient country (authoritarian or not? Able to afford or not?), of its capacity to actually carry out the suggested democratisation policies (efficient or not?),[[17]](#footnote-17) of the imminence or remoteness of violent clashes, and many more (Krause and Milliken 2009). One may attempt to set a fixed threshold for distinguishing “problematic regimes”, as indicated previously.[[18]](#footnote-18) However, this would provide us merely with a working rule for highlighting preliminary alerts: There is always the possibility of tension with the imperative of sensitivity to particular cases, to which we add the already discussed problem whether administrative robustness and efficiency, including a clear demarcation between government and insurgents, are in fact necessary conditions of a successful democratisation. Put bluntly, there is no scholarly consensus on when arms transfers help DP and when not.

(2) Moreover, there is a deeper if “indirect” problem, linking a particular interacting factor – namely the extent of inclusion of domestic actors in decisions about DP goals and policies – to the *intrinsic normative* phase of DP (which concerns decisions about the type of democracy to be promoted, either generally or in particular cases). It is by no means certain that domestic actors, if asked, would in fact accept the standard model of liberal individualist electoralist market-based democracy placed within a robust territorial state. As Jonas Wolff observes, it might very well be the case that heretofore marginalised or repressed segments of the given society would want to deviate from donor interests and preferences, typically by demanding far-reaching redistribution of economic resources and entrenched power privileges – rather than a simple replacement the ruling elites (Wolff 2012: 418ff., 430). On a related note, Tilly (2007: 7) persuasively argues that socio-economic inequality (among other types of what he calls “categorical inequalities”), including control over natural resources or financial capital, constitutes a significant obstacle to democratisation. Finally, it remains an open question which *external actors* should be included in such decisions, since it is often the very arms-exporting countries which have the strongest or the only voice, despite significant impact of arms trade on local and regional political situation

**Contested and Decontested Democracy**

We have seen that importance of the normative phase of DP both in the extrinsic and intrinsic dimensions cannot be overstated – in other words, that democratisation is an eminently political and normative task, not least because of the many trade-offs among which democracy promoters have to choose, according to certain priorities. Indeed, the belief that DP needs to be conceptually rethought from the ground up, not least in the face of the poor or irregular success that existing democratisation policies have achieved, has been gaining ground in normatively oriented literature on DP. Otherwise, the argument goes, we would remain stuck with a teleological view of DP, one that is oblivious to alternative democratic visions as well as to paths to their realisation (Kurki 2013; Poppe and Wolff 2013; Bridoux and Kurki 2014; Wolff *et al.* 2016). Milja Kurki notes that the “naturalness” of the liberal democratic model actually makes the intrinsic normative phase (as we call it here) invisible, resulting in a depoliticisation of essentially political types of decisions (Kurki 2013). Kurki overviews several competing models of democracy which are commonly invoked in normative debates, namely socialist, social democratic, participatory, radical, and cosmopolitan/global democracy. She argues that it is plausible to expect that these alternatives may prove more attractive to local communities than the liberal democratic one, besides perhaps being more desirable in themselves, as many Western scholars would agree (Berman 2011; Patomäaki 2011). Hobson and Kurki (2011) extensively employ the notion of “conceptual politics” which captures the quest for semantic decontestation of a fiercely contested concept, that is, democracy.[[19]](#footnote-19) The upshot is that theory of democratisation and democracy promotion ought to become democratic theory, if only to be capable of providing reasons for specific conceptual and normative choices.[[20]](#footnote-20) As long as a substantial gap persists between democratic and democratisation theory, the latter cutting off its normative aspirations at a point where the former only starts getting off the ground – that is, at liberal representative democracy –, one-sided answers to questions such as “What counts as democracy?”, “What constitutes democratic progress?” or “What kind of democracy do we strive for?” remain either arbitrary or unintelligible (Dufek and Holzer 2013).

**The Globalist Challenge**

Following up on this line of argument, we now explore the thesis that the problem of arms exports and their impact on the prospects of democratisation provides strong support to conceptions of *cosmopolitan* or *global democracy*: What we call the “globalist challenge” builds on one of the alternative conceptualisations of democracy, with the aim of thoroughly transforming both the conceptual apparatus and the very practice of democracy promotion. What is surprising, though, is the modest attention awarded within global democratic literature to the issue of arms trade, which represents a typical example of a policy problem with global ramifications. In somewhat technical terms, it is surprising that theorists of global democracy have not yet joined the ranks of “norm entrepreneurs” in global arms trade, providing the movement with a distinct *revolutionary* angle (Wunderlich 2013: 34).[[21]](#footnote-21) Once this element is integrated, we see that global democracy indeed seeks to kill two birds with one stone – that is, to provide both a solution to the problem of arms trade and a model of democratic decision-making on the transnational level that would facilitate smoother democratisation of non-democratic regimes.

Numerous variants of global democratic decision-making have been envisioned and we cannot engage in a detailed institutional exegesis here; nevertheless, they share and build on a core set of moral principles, including, in David Held’s words (2010: 97–98), “avoidance of serious harm”, “inclusiveness and subsidiarity”, and “collective decision-making through voting procedures.” Global democrats are strongly convinced that these goals cannot be effectively procured within the current international environment. The main target of their criticism is the (desirability of the) “liberal, electoralist, elitist, capitalist and minimalist model of democracy”, contained within the borders of a territorial state (Dryzek 2004: 144–145). Correspondingly, the many trade-offs and conflicting goals in DP are claimed to have common root in the “sovereign strong stable active liberal state”-perspective on democratisation, as held and propagated by the majority of scholars and decision-makers alike (Kurki 2013). The standard “Weberian” model of stateness thus becomes a contested *normative* political goal, rather than a natural state of affairs to be attained by universally applicable set of technical steps and measures (Andersen *et al.* 2007; Kurki 2013; Milliken and Krause 2002; Booth 2007). Note that such a perspective links several themes from earlier parts of the article – such as deterritorialised modes of governance, the difficulty of distinguishing between “good guys” and “bad guys”, lack of institutional safeguards and civic ethos which normally keep incumbents in check, abuse of arms supplies by authoritarian states, or the possibility of increased developmental assistance. Global democrats however add an important twist or two to the story, engaging the very dilemmas which give rise to conflicts in the normative phase of democracy promotion, as connected to several interacting factors.

In his defence of a cosmopolitan world order, Thomas Pogge argues that the sources of global poverty and other pressing global problems lie in certain legal privileges that are granted, under current international law, to *any* government of an internationally recognised state (Pogge 2002: 119ff.). Especially interesting for our case is the international *borrowing* privilege which entails that governments are legally entitled to borrow money from other countries or international institutions, without any (presumably international or global) control mechanism being in place that would be authorised to check as well as capable of checking where these financial means are subsequently channelled. Unsurprisingly, Pogge argues, they are often used to cover arms-trade expenses – instead of, say, meeting basic material needs of citizens –, which in turn constitutes a major incentive for other power hubs within the country to seize power even by violent means (while often generously exploiting illegal arms trade). The usual victims – and this is an all-too-common scenario in the contemporary world – are ordinary citizens and their human rights, including the very basic right to physical security, but also those related to civil and political (democratic) freedoms. Adding insult to injury, continues Pogge, after years of oppression citizens of poor countries are ultimately required to repay the debt incurred originally by purchases of the very weapons which were used to oppress them (Pogge 2002: 167, 2005: 109). In Pogge’s and a few other global democrats’ view (e.g. Archibugi 2008: 96ff.), only centralised decision-making in global institutions is capable of dealing with the complex agenda of arms trade, ensuring peace, security, and protection of human rights. The general idea of functional *vertical dispersion* of state sovereignty thus acquires a distinctly globalist-centralist flavour in this particular area, although other policy sectors may invite an inverse approach (Pogge 1992).

A related issue is raised in critique of the “democratic peace hypothesis” which states that democracies are highly unlikely to wage wars against each other, implying that once most states are functioning liberal democracies, probability of violent conflicts will drop significantly (Doyle 1983; Russett 1995). First, the fact is that mature democracies have developed massive arms/defence industries, which likely contributes to their surprisingly belligerent foreign policies *against non-democracies* or *non-mature democracies*, besides leading to substantial surplus in weapons production which triggers their willingness to export (Archibugi 2012: 251; Caverley 2014). All the pragmatic and strategic reasons apply, overriding both ethical commitments and long-term policy priorities. Second, it is a matter of classification whether the recipient country or even the country under armed attack is in fact a democracy; however, as every student of democratisation knows, much disagreement persists in the scholarly community over categorisation of regimes (often labelled “hybrid regimes”) which fall into the grey zone between democracies and clear-cut non-democracies. This arguably applies in practice to authoritarian countries as well: Archibugi claims that the labelling of a non-Western state as authoritarian or sufficiently democratic is often an arbitrary, ideologically tainted *consequence*, not cause of policies by Western powers (at once major arms exporters and democracy promoters) (Archibugi 2012: 266). Third, it has been convincingly argued that *democratising* states are more war-prone than either mature democracies or non-democratic countries (Mansfield and Snyder 2005). If this “democratisation violence” hypothesis holds true, then not only another straightforward justification of arms exports on the grounds of maintaining peace within or among democratising countries turns out to be controversial (at best): The entire set of assumptions underpinning the mainstream discourse on maintaining peace and promoting democratisation is rendered dubious.

Finally, an often noted feature of the liberal democratic model is its close affinity to capitalism, free trade and market-oriented economic policies. We are not in a position to resolve the dispute whether free trade- and market-oriented structural reforms ultimately help democratisation, as many modernisation theorists would claim (Inglehart and Welzel 2010), or rather produce manifold “deleterious consequences” (Hobson 2012: 448). The salient point in the given context is that arms trade is still essentially unregulated on the international level, all the while representing a major portion of international trade as such: In 2015, global military expenditures were estimated at $1.733 trillion, or 2.35 % of global gross domestic product (GDP) (SIPRI 2017). Moreover, the manufacturing process itself, i.e. the origin of the various components, modules and sub-modules, is spread among numerous countries (Garcia-Alonso and Levine 2007); this is one of the reasons why the arms industry trade has been labelled as “the most global of all” (Mann 2005). Although this may be considered a platitude; it has significant consequences from a normative point of view in at least two aspects.

(1) The relatively uncontroversial empirical claim that global arms exports/industry *can* and *do* burden the process of DP and HR protection with serious negative externalities can be rephrased in a more philosophical language, harking back to John Rawls’s restatement of liberal justice (Rawls 1971) – specifically that there is “a set of economic and political institutions that has profound and enduring effects on the distribution of burdens and benefits among peoples and individuals around the world”, which amounts to saying that there is a *global basic structure* in arms manufacturing and trade (Buchanan 2004: 213). But if there is such a structure, then it follows (at least according to globalists) that political institutions ought to be in place which would regulate the distribution of these benefits and burdens. Put simply, if we negatively and profoundly affect someone’s life chances and conditions, then the interaction ought to be regulated politically, otherwise we are complicit in wilful perpetration of (global) *injustice*.[[22]](#footnote-22)Given that the extant institutional mechanisms of arms control are patchy, inefficient, and subject to whims of power politics, and that non-democratic if efficient form of exercise of power is not an acceptable option, then some kind of global democratic decision making seems like a logical conclusion, at least as a normative ideal to be gradually approached.

(2) Such a view certainly coheres with the oft-proclaimed belief that “*we* should exercise much greater control over arms sales” (Mann 2005: 526; emphasis added). Little attention, however, has been paid to the lurking trouble: who is this “we”? We saw above that it remains an open issue which actors are to be included in negotiations over what type of democracy and under what conditions is to be promoted; in a clear sense, the same logic – embedded in the interacting factors component of the conflicting goals framework and affecting the normative phase of DP – applies to arms trade. If those affected by arms sales and purchases include not only ordinary people in recipient countries, but also in neighbouring countries or the region as a whole, then it seems prima facie legitimate to ask whether they should be included in the decision-making mechanism as well – or at least their representatives, even though the representative link is doubtful in non-democratic regimes. But of course, since arms industry is possibly “the most global of all”, such decisions affect lots of people all around the world, even if in differing ways.

Again, a deep issue in democratic theory arises, namely how to delineate the relevant parties to the deal. Who is “the people” that is to democratically decide, and who is to decide on who “the people” is? Who is to exercise much greater control over arms sales? It cannot be solely the exporting and purchasing countries (as under current practice), for such a state of affairs not only is highly arbitrary from the democratic point of view but also produces clearly negative consequences. More promising is the appeal to the “international community”; however, as we saw above, its regulatory, control, and sanctioning mechanisms are weak at best and basically toothless at worst, and its “voice” expresses mainly the interests of major arms-exporting countries – while the potential or actual victims of weapons abuse remain mostly excluded from decision-making processes. It would seem that the only non-arbitrary way of deciding democratically is to expand the scope of participants to the whole of humanity at least in principle, for otherwise we cannot be sure whether unjustified exclusions occur or not. This is simply a logical extension of the “all-affected principle” which states that decision-making on a certain policy ought to include all those who are subject to the impact of the decision, an extension that simultaneously provides a solution to the paradox of democratic self-founding (Goodin 2007).

If the all-affected principle is found wanting, there are other ways of arriving at an analogous conclusion (Agne 2006; Saunders 2012). A strong argument rooted in the justification of DP itself has been proposed by Hans Agné who explores the *logical* possibility of democracy promotion (Agné 2014): How can there be *any* external promotion of democracy if democracy is defined as self-determination of a given group of people, understood as constituent power? Put shortly, the problem is that *any* interference from outside, no matter how well-intentioned, *and* *including the very practice of DP*,constitutes by definition a violation of democratic self-determination. Agné concludes that in order to avoid such self-contradiction, democracy needs to be conceptualised as having a global scope, or more precisely, as concerning the “internal relationships of world politics as a whole”, so that any interference by external actors – including, as it were, DP and arms exports – can be assessed as regards its effect on political freedom and distribution of political power “among all people” (Agné 2014: 63).

Finally, besides invoking foundational issues of democratic theory, some theorists have argued in a consequentialist manner: According to them, moves towards institutionalising democracy on the global level would either greatly facilitate successful democratisation of individual countries (the weak version), or they constitute a *necessary condition* thereof (Marchetti 2008; Archibugi 2012). Given the unsatisfactory record of DP as well as the fact of organised hypocrisy in arms exports policies, either version points to the desirability of a radical transformation of how politics is done on the international/global level. Analogously, institutional fragmentation within the domain of security, that is, the existence of *national* militaries, is claimed to result in “vast duplication, overlap and waste of resources” as well as the incapability of delivering where intervention is most needed, especially in relation to human security (Held 2010: 196ff). Moreover, establishment of global security forces under the command of a democratically accountable body would profoundly transform (legal) inter*national* trade in arms, as there would be only one legitimate customer (or perhaps one authorising body for such transactions). This, in turn, would synchronise decisions on which arms transfers are legitimate and which should be blocked.

Regulation of arms trade thus becomes an important component of a broad alternative vision of democratised international politics which consists in a simultaneous centralisation and decentralisation of decision-making powers away from the state level, even though the state is to retain certain instrumental role in policy implementation. What all this entails institutionally – besides the apparent pull towards globalisation-centralisation of decision-making in the area of arms trade – is hard to tell with much precision. Held (2010: 103–112) specifies desirable institutional transformations in the realms of cosmopolitan law, politics, economy and culture, which would include such steps/measures as entrenchment of cosmopolitan democratic public law; interconnected global legal system concerned with issues of criminal, human rights, and environmental law; a network of democratic fora from the local to the global level; or global taxation mechanisms and transfer of resources to poor members of the system. Traditional and increasingly numerous calls for expanding the powers of the International Criminal Court, reforming and strengthening of the United Nations, regulation of international trade and finance, or generally for judicialisation and constitutionalisation of world politics can be thus dialectically subsumed under the global democratic project.

**Cracks in the Globalist Solution**

As indicated at the outset, we have ended up knee-deep in issues central to normative political theory. This is why the apparent “feasibility objection” – that such a state of affairs is impossible to attain, given the interests of powerful states and other actors – misses the mark, at least as an immediate knock-down argument. The point of such debates is to animate political imagination, with the hope that the results will ultimately trickle down to real-world political decision-making. Political ideals and institutionalised political practice are not necessarily mutually exclusionary; after all, democracy/democratisation and protection of human rights represent precisely such far-reaching transformative ideals, and few would presently question their desirability (at least openly).

Nevertheless, there are *theoretical* reasons why remain reserved towards the grand global democratic narrative. It is impossible to provide a sustained criticism in a single article, not least because its specific versions vary, so let us point to two general worries which more or less apply to both of them. First, the idea of a global set of binding rules that are to be successfully enforced requires the establishment of a global *coercive* political authority – a world state no less –, numerous arguments to the contrary notwithstanding (Dufek 2013; Scheuerman 2014). Recall that, to the extent that cosmopolitan authors reflect on the topic, the particular area of arms trade control entails *centralisation* of global political decision-making. Insofar as the point of democracy is to ensure autonomous determination of the conditions of collective life, it remains unclear how local self-rule is to be protected without contradicting the very rationale for global enforcement of arms trade-related regulations. Besides that, arms trade and democratisation are far from the only issues where globally centralised decision-making would seem efficient or necessary. A core global democratic claim – namely that the framework of state-based liberal democracies, including the concept of citizenship, can be replicated on the global level *without* transplanting the notion and instruments of statehood itself – is thus unpersuasive.

Closely related is the second general worry which concerns the *legitimacy* of global political decision-making. The state-based liberal (constitutional) model of democracy rests on a number of conceptual and institutional pillars, one of them being the link between the legitimacy of political decision-making and the existence of a sovereign people in whose name such decisions are carried out (Belling 2014). Moreover, as Tilly stresses, the relationship between the government and individual citizens in a liberal democracy is one of *direct* rule, i.e. undiluted by intermediary bodies, groups or institutions (Tilly 2007: 19ff.). Neither element is however reasonably conceivable under any global democratic framework, which puts the *principal* impossibility of a global constitutional democratic rule into stark relief.

The expected reply would stress that in accordance with our own narrative, the competing models of democracy are meant precisely as *alternatives* to the dominant liberal democratic model, so why bother about its demise, or more precisely, its inapplicability on the global level? Why remain dependant on the statist imaginary at all (Little and MacDonald 2013; Goodin 2010: 200ff.; Sekerák 2016)? The problem with this position is that these alternatives actually *require* the liberal democratic core to remain in place, so that its central ideas, demands, and achievements – such as political equality or protection of basic (human) rights – can be “radicalised”; this much has been admitted even by some of its most vocal critics (Phillips 2003). Liberal democracy is, first and foremost, *constitutional* democracy, which tends to get lost in critiques of market capitalism. Connected to constitutionalism are elements such as separation of powers, rule of law, political representation, or collective political identity, not to mention country-specific path dependencies.

This leads us to the final observation regarding the desirability of a global *democracy*. Would not a benevolent global dictator do the job much more efficiently? Suppose the hypothetical global decision-making framework could be arranged in such a way that it succeeded in substantially reducing the volume of problematic arms transfers and its many collateral harms; let us also assume, along with cosmopolitan authors, that this would subsequently facilitate the establishment of democracy worldwide. The catch would now be the not-really-democratic nature of such a system: The legitimacy of global political decision-making would be derived from its putative desirable outputs, for which democratic inputs are unnecessary or even positively harmful since they block its speed and efficiency. This amounts to saying that the path to democracy worldwide would need to pass through a non-democratic, (quasi-)authoritarian global stage.[[23]](#footnote-23) In an interesting sense, we would be faced with a very similar set of conflicting goals as in the case of fragile, low-capacity states, in which the problem of sequencing (stability or democracy?) has haunted scholars of democratisation for decades.

**Conclusion: Constructivism with a Normative Bent**

On the face of it, our argument leaves us in an uneasy place: On the one hand, we have questioned the obviousness of the standard, statist/liberal-democratic approach to democratisation, and criticised the current practice of arms exports. On the other hand, we have eventually rejected the suggested global democratic solution. Recall, however, that we have not *rejected* the former: We “merely” argued that it was just one normative/political option among many, and that more needed to be said. It is entirely consistent to conclude that the standard route of state-centred democratisation is in most cases the preferable way to go about practical politics, not least because insofar as there has been the occasional international success in DP, it always consisted in “creat[ing] durable, modern nation-states that are organised around democracy and markets” (Barnett and Finnemore 2004: 164; see also Milliken and Krause 2002: 762ff.; O’Donnell 2010: 10; Whitehead 2010). Although we might seem to have made no progress at all, the return path in fact proceeded on a dialectically higher level: We can now see that questions of arms trade, democracy promotion as well as their intersections need to be disaggregated into (intrinsic and extrinsic) phases and corresponding interacting factors, and that the answers may vary along many dimensions. This is no small feat, as it opens up a “middle ground” between the excessively broad idealistic brush of global democratisers and the status quo bias of mainstream political science, while creating space for productive interrogation of alternative models of democracy (including, as it were, global democracy itself). One telling example concerns the range of actors who participate in decisions on the goals and paths of democratisation in particular cases.

This is also where the argument “from feasibility”, concerning the vagueness and unattainability of the globalist ideal, becomes relevant. For no matter how high or low the moral and political ideals are set, it still needs to be shown how they are to be achieved – in other words, we are faced with the question of diffusion and sustainability of the given system of values and norms. Even optimists about “moral possibility” in world politics point out that if norms are to be observed and internalised, they cannot be simply decreed from above, or from the philosopher’s armchair (Price 2008). This is the problem of *political agency* which necessarily accompanies ideal-type political theorising, including those variants of global democracy which call for a decentering of established conceptual categories (Scholte 2014). It always needs to be said, *who* is to “democratise”, “protect”, “regulate”, “control” or “punish wrongdoers”. Having set the normative bar somewhere between the status quo andthe globalist vision, we concur that insofar as states will remain for the foreseeable future the central actors in international politics, the only reasonable path of moving forward in both DP and arms trade regulation is to change the way these actors construe their goals and preferences.

Of course, this is itself a humongous task, and the present authors do not profess to have a magic formula up their sleeve. Yet something obviously needs to be said, and in this regard, the constructivist approach to norms and identities provides useful guidance, especially in its emphasis of the role of international regimes. The hope is that identities and self-understandings of actors in international politics are essentially malleable and open to an ongoing reconstitution, thus providing a more stable basis for substantial changes in established patterns of behaviour. Recent research on norm dynamics in multilateral arms control shows that successful cooperative regimes in the realm of arms exports and arms control combine both utilitarian, interest-based incentives and intrinsic moral imperatives (above all justice), to the effect that logic of consequences and logic of appropriateness supplement and also shape each other (Wunderlich 2013; Hansen 2016). Others are even more optimistic as regards current trends in “disarmament diplomacy” and norm building (Garcia 2012, 2014). Thusly understood, the Arms Trade Treaty represents not so much a definitive solution to the problem of arms exports in democracy promotion as a first and necessary step enabling a sustained *official* *ethical* criticism: The “Helsinki Effect”, or the (mostly unexpected) consequences for Cold War politics of the adoption of the human rights-focused Helsinki Final Act, might serve as a powerful guiding example (Thomas 2001).

Constructivists generally agree that X is what the involved actors make of it, where “X” may be anarchy (as in the source article of this phrase; see Wendt 1992), sovereignty, war, but also material incentives in general. As (among others) the abovementioned research attests, *ideological* factors play a crucial role in directing political agency, not least of states (Müller *et al.* 2013: 157). To drive the point home, provision of coherent guidelines for political action is precisely the domain of normative political theory. In this sense, we have in this paper taken a step *beyond* the ordinary constructivist narrative, for our discussion of alternative models of democracy available to democracy promoters points to the necessity of putting democratic theory at the heart of scholarly DP theorising. To see what difference it makes, consider the “metanorm” of justice identified empirically as the central moral determinant of the actors’ course of action: Whereas existing states construe justice at best as “fair distribution of benefits and burdens under the current state of affairs”, it would deprive the concept of its primordial meaning if it was to lose its ideal, critical, prescriptive edge, one radical face of which we have outlined under the “globalist challenge” label. In other words, “justice” according to state governments and “justice” according to the best political philosophy out there, and to a lesser extent according to NGOs and other types of activist groups, are two quite different things.

Of course, norm contestation is to be expected, either by “norm antipreneurs” (Bloomfield 2016) or by addressees of either DP or arms trade control who otherwise profit from them, or both; such contestation is in fact a logical corollary of opening up the semantic space of democracy and democracy promotion. From nothing we have said follows that state-centred democratisation and/or the liberal (constitutional) democratic model is the only permissible combination, or that evolutionary steps towards transnational or global modes of decision-making are prohibited. After all, if there is one actor on the international scene which self-consciously strives for an ethically grounded foreign policy, not least as regards arms exports, *and* has some tangible political and legal leverage over arms-exporting and democracy-promoting states, then it is the European Union, often depicted as a “laboratory of cosmopolitisation”. The criticism levelled against the EU, some of which has been cited throughout the article, is not necessarily wrong, just a bit impatient. Politics, especially in such sensitive areas as arms trade and democratisation, does indeed remind of a “slow drilling through hard boards” with the aim of reaching for the impossible, in Max Weber’s (1994: 369) memorable phrase. Admittedly, the task of political philosophy is doubly difficult, for the hard board it seeks to penetrate is political activity itself. Yet for this very reason, it is also doubly important.

Anyhow, the constructivist catchphrase needs to be reformulated: What *should* actors makeof incentives presented to them? This is why the theory of democratisation, as practiced by Western scholars, needs self-consciously to become democratic theory, and why the cosmopolitan democratic vision needs to stimulate our political imagination.

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1. We will use in this paper the notion of democracy promotion as covering also the related modalities of advancing democracy abroad, such as democracy support, democracy assistance, democracy building, and so on. We believe that no substantial part of our argument hinges on this terminological choice, although we are aware of the voices which point out the negative connotations of DP, stemming from its linkage to the recent practice of armed intervention in non-democratic countries [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For discussions of validity of such a generalised statement, see Markoff and White 2009; Burnell 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For examples of possible justifications of democracy, from guaranteeing peace to protecting rights to having epistemic superiority (see Dahl 1989: 83–96; Saward 2003: 25–31; Estlund 2008: 1–20). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Admittedly, there is another, logically prior issue – namely the questionable implicit assumption that democratisation is a shared interest of both democracy promoters and democracy receivers (elites or regular citizens) (Zürcher 2013: x, 5ff, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The former refers to situations where there is a conflict of goals or instruments which are tied to DP itself; a typical example is the common dilemma between organising free nation-wide elections and ensuring equitable access to power to representatives of all significant segments of the given society (for example by means of power-sharing arrangements). Extrinsic trade-offs refer to cases when DP as such clashes with other valuable social goals or priorities of the involved actors – such as peace-building, state-building, economic development, or – most relevantly for our purposes – calculations of economic benefit (Grimm and Leininger 2012: 397–398). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In the normative phase, conflicts arise both intrinsically between competing visions of what type (model) of democracy is most desirable (think of liberal individualist vs. Confucian collectivist vs. socialist egalitarian conceptions) and extrinsically between democracy and other goals and ideals that are in themselves valuable (peace, welfare and justice, stability, etc.). The strategic phase stands for (both intrinsic and extrinsic) “conflicts of appropriate timing, sequencing, and systemic interdependence” (Grimm and Leininger 2012: 401). These may be triggered by differing political, cultural and economic motivations of the involved actors. Examples include the need to supply governments with military equipment, so that anti-democratic forces are kept at bay, versus the ever-present danger of their abuse against any opposition forces. The operative phase describes the “micro-level” of disputes over implementation, e.g. prioritisation of certain policy steps. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Such as the socio-political and economic condition of recipient countries; the nature of interaction between international and domestic actors (i.e. promoters and recipients), especially the extent of inclusion of the latter in decisions about DP policies; or the degree or lack of capacity to actually carry out the suggested policies. Assigning priority among competing goals thus should be sensitive to such questions as whether the given country is an authoritarian or transitioning regime, whether violent clashes are imminent or remote, or whether the nature of the democracy-to-be-achieved is relatively open or pre-defined by external actors (Grimm and Leininger 2012: 402ff.). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. As a matter of fact, member states of the United Nations most likely have the (legal) *right* to *purchase* arms from abroad, stemming from Art. 51 of the UN Charter. This, however, does not entail a (legal) duty to sell, although a case could be perhaps made for a moral one. In any case, this paper does not deal with such examples. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Although it has been also pointed out that overlaps and differences between the two processes have not been systematically explored; see (Zulueta-Fülscher 2014: 36–37; Zürcher *et al.* 2009: 20). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. We comment upon other typical arguments in defence of arms exports throughout the article; for a systematic (critical) exposition see Christensen (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See e.g. O’Donnell’s (2010: 7) recounting of the powerlessness of ordinary citizens vis-à-vis the machinery of secret police in 1970s Argentina. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. We say “essentially” because it might be argued that many authoritarian governments actually do face both external and internal constraints, for example due to ethnic cleavages or conditions introduced by external donors. Although this is a relevant observation, it does not undermine the general point concerning the use of arms supplies by authoritarian states against pro-democratisation forces. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. We could no doubt identify corrosive effects on Western democracies themselves, arising among a. o. out of the presence of a powerful military-industrial complex. Such considerations, although intriguing in themselves, would take us far beyond the present set of concerns. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Some authors have claimed that criminal liability of arms trade exists under current international law – namely on the grounds of expectable, traceable or predictable violations of universal human rights (see Bellal 2013: 448–471). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The list of top 10 exporters for the period 2010–2014 reads (in millions of US dollars): 1. United States (43 876); 2. Russia (37 383); 3. China (7612); 4. Germany (7387); 5. France (7304); 6. United Kingdom (6228); 7. Spain (4102); 8. Italy (4030); 9. Ukraine (3826; 10. Israel (3345). These figures include all types of weapons and ammunition. Worth noting is the predominance of liberal democratic countries in the list (7 out of 10 if Israel is included, and 11 out of the top 15) (see SIPRI 2016; Small Arms Survey 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Although Bermeo’s data cover US military aid only, generalisation is most likely possible here. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Tilly’s (2007) account of state capacity is instructive here. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Christensen’s (Christensen 2015) philosophical scrutiny of arms exports proceeds on such an assumption. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. In this regard, Bermeo’s (2010: 84) claim that “democracy is singular” (whereas “security is plural”) proves unconvincing. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. This “critical” perspective on democratisation finds its counterpart in views according to which the ATT specifically and arms control in general only represent hegemonic assertion of either capitalist interests, or liberal militarism, or sovereign stateness in a Foucauldian governmentality disguise, or perhaps all at once (e.g. Krause 2011; Stavrianakis 2012, 2016). All voice the complaint that arms control efforts tend to be (naïvely) taken at face value, as presented by powerful liberal states, without looking into the “conceptual politics” behind ordinary politics in the realm of arms trade. Although we share these authors’ normative concerns over a purportedly technical set of issues, we do not subscribe to the wider theoretical position they occupy (that is, critical security studies). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. By contrast, scholars of security have recently begun exploring the contours of a “security cosmopolitanism” of which trade in small arms constitutes an important part (Burke 2013). Still, a straightforward argument from arms trade to global democracy is missing. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. There are other plausible interpretations of the notion of a basic structure, see Abizadeh (2007); the “impact” version is however in line with the standard understanding of the consequences of economic globalisation. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Compare an analogous argument about global justice in Nagel (2005: 145ff.). Recent defences of the democratic nature of output legitimacy assume – illegitimately, in our view – that a democratic decision-making structure is already in place; see Steffek (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)