

The Push for Gun Control

Jacob Magura



Soon after the 2012 election night and Barack Obama was called as the winner; the newly reelected President announced the United States would be supporting the United Nation's objective to push gun control internationally.

The new presidential term has yet to begin, but shortly after the presidential election for 2012 was resolved in favor of Barack Obama, he announced that the United States would support the United Nations' (UN) push for legislation regulating the international sale of firearms. The UN's disarmament committee quickly responded by approving a resolution stating that talks regarding an Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) would begin in March (reuters.com 1). The UN has argued in favor of such legislation in view of the currently lax regulations regarding international arms trade.

Currently, nations can sell ordnance or weapons to most other countries. According to the website for the International Relations and Security Network (ISN), a group that aids in international security-related dialogue and cooperation, what international regulations do exist to prevent arms trade to human rights violators "are often circumvented by suppliers and recipients alike" (ISN 1).

According to the United Nation's Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), the new legislation would restrict the sale of all weapons and ammunition including small arms by any nation guilty of human rights violations. The ATT would be in keeping with the UN's stated responsibilities, which include:

- Supporting negotiations for a global arms trade treaty

- Making information available on arms transfers between countries through the UN Register of Conventional Arms, and
- Addressing the illicit trade in small arms (un.org 1)

The question asked by the United States first should obviously be, "How does this affect the nation?" The proposed treaty states each country will have its intra-national gun trade laws unaffected; the primary focus would be international sales. However, the UN's assurances haven't comforted everyone. Professor Larry Bell, a teacher of architecture and space architecture at the University of Houston and a contributor to the American business magazine *Forbes*, argues that the result of the arms trade treaty would be the restriction of personal gun rights, citing that Iran's UN representative has been selected for "a top Arms Trade Treaty planning conference position" (*Forbes* 1), a particular problem since Iran has been typically recalcitrant when it comes to dealing with international pressure to avoid nuclear weapons capability (allvoices.com 1).

While the European Union (EU) continues to work towards sanctions against Iran for its refusal to halt its progress in nuclear reactor science, the UN is placing it in a position to influence what would be global arms legislation. If this were insufficient, it is also worth keeping in mind that laws established by the UN have been used before now, even when defeated, to undermine the control central governments exert over environmental regulations. Prof. Bell cites the "Agenda 21" movement by the UN, which, while defeated as a UN treaty, became a "soft law." Soft laws, which include UN action plans, resolutions, and declarations (Eurofound 1), do not have as much legal force as traditional law, but do exert influence over those who live in their jurisdiction. As an action plan, Agenda 21 became an organization dedicated to bringing local governmental bodies from UN nations into harmony with the UN's vision of environmental regulation on industry, public health, etc. In short, if the UN couldn't get constituent nations to swallow the whole treaty, they would push it in through the back door (*Forbes* 2).

With this level of manipulation having worked in the past, citizens of the United States and other nations who are not in favor of civil gun disarmament should be greatly concerned. For one thing, as Fox News columnist John Lott has observed in his article on the ATT, imposing legal restrictions does not guarantee the elimination of illegal activity:

"Indeed, as the surges in murder rates after gun bans in the US and around the world show, such regulations don't stop criminals from getting guns. A huge percentage of violent crime in the US is drug gang related, and just as those gangs can bring in the illegal drugs, they can bring in the weapons that they use to protect that valuable property" (gun control 1).

Even if the ATT were to succeed in limiting the sale of guns and other weapons from human rights abusers, the influence of the treaty need not stop there, and with Great Britain and the United States' executive branch both in favor of limiting civilian gun owners' rights, it would only be a matter of time before international law becomes a very private matter.

It's going to be a Brown Christmas



Conservatives
It's time for change



Bill Goes to Washington

Natalie Seid

The main function of Congress is the making of laws. Congress, the lawmaking body of the United States, is divided into two houses, the House of Representatives and the Senate. The U.S. constitution states that: “All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives”. Legislation is just a fancy Latin word for lawmaking. Both houses of congress work together to create and review proposed laws. A proposed law is also known as a bill. And for a bill to be signed into law in needs to be approved by a majority vote in both houses of congress and then finally approved by the president.

The Senate is composed of 100 members—two from each state, regardless of population or area—and each senator serves for six years. Senators have longer terms than both the president and members of the house, which gives them the ability to make hard decisions without fearing voters’ wrath (Longley). The House of Representatives is composed of 435 members elected every two years from among the 50 states, apportioned to their total populations. Members of the House serve severely short terms, which mean they are more likely to vote for the immediate desires of their constituents, or else they will be voted out of office (Longley). Also while a bill can be introduced in either house, most bills start in the House of Representatives.

So if Congress is responsible for drafting, introducing, revising, debating and ultimately approving bill, where does the idea for a law start? And who can propose a bill? The idea and proposal for a bill can start anywhere by anybody (I’m Just a Bill). But the majority of bills or the ideas for bills originate from congressmen or electoral candidates during an election campaign in which they promise, if elected, to

introduce legislation on a particular subject (Johnson 4). Or a congressman may become aware after taking office the need for revision or repeal of a certain law, or even the need for new law. Congressmen can become aware of these needs through their constituents, whether individuals or a group, who create petitions and transmit their proposals to their respective congressmen. Many awesome laws have started this way, through active citizens utilizing their First Amendment right to petition (Johnson 9). Consider the women’s suffrage, civil rights and the infamous prohibition movements of the 20th century. These ground breaking laws and constitutional amendments would not have passed, if it were not for active citizens petitioning their government and their congressmen to listen and to change the laws of the land.

These bills were successful because they were supported by a vocal and persistent group of citizens, who contacted their congressmen, petitioned the government and protested in the streets. So while contacting our congressmen and petitioning our government can lead to the drafting of a bill, even the most popular bill, can “die in committee” (I’m Just a Bill).

After a bill is introduced in Congress is then submitted to a specialized committee for review. The members of that committee and of sub-committees working under it will consider the bill and what action to take on it.

The committee names refer to the type of legislation that each committee deals with: Agriculture, Judiciary, Armed Services, and Appropriations are examples. Each committee will hold public hearings on each bill, will consider amendments to the bill, and ultimately will decide whether to recommend Congress members to vote Yes or No on the bill.

Congressmen usually follow the recommendations of committees in how to vote for the bill. This is because no one congressman can be thoroughly acquainted with all the details of every bill that they vote upon and they rely upon recommendations made by the committees (Johnson 10).

If the bill does not die in committee or on either the floor of the House of Representatives or the Senate, it is sent to the president. If he signs the bill, it will become a law. If the president exercises his right to veto the bill, he will refuse to sign it, give his reasons, and send it back to the house in which it was first introduced. Congress has the power to override a Presidential veto if they can muster a 2/3 vote in each house, but this is extremely hard to do (I’m Just a Bill).

In the end if a bill is signed into law it is a combination of proactive citizens making their voice heard, and good government.

For information to contact your elected representatives please visit these websites:

<http://www.usa.gov/Contact/Elected.shtml>
<http://www.house.gov/representatives/find/>

Get Involved

Be Informed

VOTE

