



# Why We **STILL** Need to Freeze Weapons

**ANANT SARIA**



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## The Author



**Anant Saria**

Anant Saria is a Researcher at SCRAP Weapons, participating and contributing to the general strategy, social media and communication for the organization.

He is also pursuing his Masters degree in International Studies and Diplomacy from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London.

He has researched on issues of international security, climate change, human rights, contemporary diplomatic practice, foreign policy and international relations.

He has a keen interest in disarmament and development and how the two interlink to enhance human security.





## INTRODUCTION

Months after the initial call for a global ceasefire was made by United Nations Secretary General (UNSG), Antonio Guterres, the UN Security Council passed a resolution supporting the call for a global ceasefire for 90 days. The resolution for a global ceasefire has provided an opportunity to pursue a steadier, longer-term approach to international security. This can be done by addressing arms manufacture and trade through establishing a moratorium to Freeze Weapons Production and Supply. The trends observed amidst an unprecedented global pandemic - COVID-19 - have exposed the inadequacy of the current healthcare infrastructure. States need to prioritize diversion of resources from military and arms to healthcare and human security.

## SHORTAGES IN HEALTHCARE INVESTMENT

COVID-19 has challenged healthcare systems worldwide (Nicola, et al., 2020, p. 188). Since workers in the healthcare sector cannot work remotely, protective equipment is imperative for the safety of healthcare workers. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), N95 face masks, ventilators, testing and accessibility for healthcare are key to fighting the pandemic (Ibid.). However, despite the need for more protective equipment and medical infrastructure to deal with the pandemic efficiently, states continued to invest in arms and military.

The media briefing by the World Health Organization (WHO), held on 6 May 2020, highlighted the gaps in public healthcare investment, which puts global security and economic development at risk. With the pandemic, healthcare workers have replaced soldiers as frontline heroes. Governments should shift their focus from a traditional militarised view of global security, to one which maximises human security, including by coordinating the international community to push for collective effort and investment into healthcare, coordination, the chase for vaccines, acquisition of healthcare equipment, etc..

State leaders must capitalize on the global ceasefire and move to Freeze Weapons to free up resources – economic, human, and infrastructural – so that they can be redirected to fight the disease.

## MILITARIZATION AMIDST COVID-19

According to an estimate from the UN, up to 5 billion people risk missing out on healthcare in 2030 if governments do not step up to boost coverage for citizens. This estimate highlighted the global gaps in health, and the need for states to prioritize human security over militarization. Nevertheless, despite these healthcare needs, trends amidst coronavirus lockdowns have shown continued prioritization of military expenditure. Several examples show that governments continued military spending amidst needs for investment in healthcare and protective equipment to fight COVID-19.

India went through with a multi-billion-dollar arms deal with Israel at the beginning of the pandemic, while doctors within the country were suffering from a shortage of PPE kits and resources. Healthcare professionals were forced to use raincoats and helmets due to shortage in protective equipment. As a developing country with the second largest population in the world, India was viewed as a potential hotspot where the virus could spread rapidly while the healthcare infrastructure in the country was not sufficient and healthcare inaccessible for a large portion of the population. Despite all these factors, the government decided to invest more in acquisition of arms instead of preparing for the disease. Today, India is the 3rd worst hit country by the pandemic, and there are still uncertainties when the virus peak will be reached, although the country has already relaxed its lockdown measures.

Canada lifted a suspension on arms exports to Saudi Arabia and renegotiated a multi-billion-dollar contract to export light armored vehicles. Suspension of the ban and finalization of an arms deal with multi-billion dollars being invested shows that here too military spending has been prioritised over healthcare, even while the world struggles with a pandemic.

China has cited international threats and insecurity caused by the coronavirus as a reason for inflated defense budgets, despite the economic fallout of COVID-19 lockdowns and the impact of the virus on its population. The armed forces of China and the United States have remained active in the South China Sea despite the massive socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. China also engaged in border issues with India, flexing its military might amidst a raging crisis within its borders. The world saw both countries sparring, while neither were in a state to afford a full scale war, and while India was unable to guarantee healthcare protection to its citizens amidst COVID-19 outbreak.

The government in Pakistan released its coronavirus budget with inflated military spending. The country faced an economic catastrophe and saw citizens struggle to access healthcare to fight coronavirus. Pakistan was identified as a country with one of the fastest rates of infections of COVID-19 by the WHO, and has significant shortages of PPE and ventilators to contain the virus. Despite these glaring issues, the military budget of the country increased. This shows the explicit privileging of militarization over healthcare and human security.

The European Union (EU) faced uncertainties regarding defense budgets due to the demanding levels of resource allocation towards fighting COVID-19. However, this is seen as a massive threat and the EU member states are being urged to ensure high resource allocation to defense and military to ensure security in Europe. Defense budget cuts are being dismissed as rash, despite a shrinkage in the available resources. The need to allocate resources to healthcare and fighting the pandemic is being ignored and EU leaders are being urged to keep allocation of expenditure towards military and defense high.

The above examples illustrate that arms expenditure is being prioritised over human security, and that there is resistance to considering the divestment opportunity presented by COVID-19. These examples are not exhaustive. More instances can be seen in the increased profits for arms manufacturers, higher exports, more deals, etc. These trends highlight the cracks in policies and structures of governance. COVID-19 has provided us with an opportunity to design the new normal. It is essential that leaders of states, international organizations and civil societies unite to design a world post COVID-19 where the importance of human security and the redundancy of unending investment in military and arms is reflected.



## CONCLUSION

In spite of shrinkages in available resources due to the economic impact of COVID-19, coupled with the devastating impact of the pandemic on populations, world leaders have continued to remain in favor of increasing the already disproportionate investment in militarization. Rising trade and exports of arms show increased investment in the military, at the expense of investment in human security. The global ceasefire resolution passed by the UNSC presents an opportunity for leaders to pursue an extended, united effort to Freeze Weapons Production and Supply. This will allow states to divert resources from arms towards the most pressing contemporary security problems - climate change, healthcare, poverty, etc. The resources freed up from military investment can be used to meet the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, and help accelerate human security multifold globally.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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# ABOUT SCRAP WEAPONS

SCRAP is a holistic approach to global disarmament that proposes adopting an international legally binding agreement for general and complete disarmament. It draws on best practices of past agreements to expand the idea of what is possible in disarmament.

SCRAP comes from the initiative of students, alumni and staff at the Centre for International Studies and Diplomacy (CISD) at SOAS, University of London, and is actively supported by a committee of academics and NGO officials with governmental experience.

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The Strategic Concept for the Removal  
of Arms and Proliferation (SCRAP)  
SOAS University of London  
10 Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square,  
London  
WC1H 0XG

Phone: 020-7898-4322

Email: [scrap.weapons@soas.ac.uk](mailto:scrap.weapons@soas.ac.uk)



[WWW.SCRAPWEAPONS.COM](http://WWW.SCRAPWEAPONS.COM)