

The Global Arms Trade: How Bribes to Politicians from Arms Dealers Keep Wars Going

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With leaders all over the world on the take for millions, the defense industry has spawned a global business that profits from war, supports corruption everywhere, and must, for its survival, fan the flames of civil wars and global conflict.

That is the premise of “Shadow World” — a powerful new documentary. In this week’s podcast, *WhoWhatWhy*’s Jeff Schechtman talks to the film’s director Johan Grimonprez and its writer Andrew Feinstein.



Andrew Feinstein at Occupy Wall Street Photo credit: Control Arms / Flickr (CC BY 2.0)

As a member of the African National Congress in South Africa, Feinstein saw firsthand how the corruption and payoffs worked — and their grim consequences:

Within five years of the advent of our democracy, our country decided to spend \$10 billion on weapons that we didn’t need, that we barely used, and the primary reason for that was that \$300 millions in bribes were paid. And it had a profound effect of South Africa’s democracy.

I tried to investigate the deal... but was stopped by my own political party — which itself had benefited from the bribes...

At a time when South Africa had six million people living with HIV or AIDS, our president at the time, Thabo Mbeki, said that we didn’t have the finances to provide these people with antiretroviral medication.

This story reveals the other side of the arms trade — how it can kill without even firing a shot: by using up precious resources that should have been devoted to controlling lethal diseases and other problems the world faces.

Feinstein has many more horror stories — the worst of which involves former US Vice President Dick Cheney.

His book — [The Shadow World: Inside the Global Arms Trade](#) — and the film based on it, take us through the Reagan and Bush administrations and show us how the arms trade reached the highest levels of government, contributing to or leading to Iran/Contra, 9/11, the war in Iraq, and many seemingly never-ending world conflicts.

The book, published by Picador in 2012, was the first major exposé on the global arms trade. According to the *The Washington Post*, "Feinstein writes with a crusading spirit and a depth of detail that lend *The Shadow World* urgency and authority....A comprehensive treatment of the arms trade, possibly the most complete account that has ever been written."

Here's our podcast, with *WhoWhatWhy's* Jeff Schechtman and the filmmakers.

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