The arms trade and the question of holding governments and corporate actors accountable is a multidimensional problem that does not only involve understanding the legal implications, such as increased unemployment or incapacity for a country to protect its domestic defence industry. The arms industry is a large industry that employs a lot of people and whose costs the domestic or European arms market does not cover. Suspending exports would have important economic and strategic implications, as seen in Germany’s decision to suspend exports to Saudi Arabia. On 24 March 2020, Germany extended its arms embargo on Saudi Arabia. This comes along with the UK, and Italy who have provided the coalition with military equipment and training. Despite strong international, European, and national legislations against the exports of arms, the issue of human rights and the respect for human rights in the context of the arms trade is a thorn in the side of the community. For example, the bad practices of the arms trade in Yemen and the sale of arms to the UAE are an example of this issue. In addition, the legality and lawfulness of the arms trade in Yemen is at stake, and it has been condemned by the international community. However, it has not fully stopped the European arms trade in Yemen. In fact, the European Union has been accused of continuing to supply arms to Yemen, even though it signed a non-aggression pact with the UAE in 2014.

Many strategic defence companies are dependent on access to foreign markets for survival. Exporting to third countries allows them to have a competitive advantage in the international arms market. However, this advantage comes at a cost. The arms industry is notorious for its human rights abuses, including the use of arms to harm or kill civilians. The arms industry also contributes to the destabilization of regions by providing arms to governments and organizations engaged in military interventions.

The legal and regulatory framework for UK arms exports is designed to prevent the sale of arms to countries that are in violation of international humanitarian law. The UK has a “no arms to war criminals” policy, which means that it will not export arms to countries that are involved in human rights abuses. In addition, the UK has a “no arms to countries that are in the commission of serious violations of international humanitarian law” policy. The UK bases its export decisions on criteria determined within the international treaties, but it has not always followed these policies. For example, the UK exported arms to Saudi Arabia in 2018, even though the UK had previously suspended exports to the country.

The arms trade is a major contributor to the global economy, and it is often used as a means of influence by governments and corporate actors. The arms trade is also often used to support military interventions, which can have negative consequences for the civilian population. It is important to hold governments and corporate actors accountable for their actions in the arms trade, and to ensure that the international community works together to address these issues.