

DISEC



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Director's Letter

Dear Delegates,

My name is Yasmin and I am beyond honoured to be your Director for the Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC) alongside your Chair Nicholas Woo, and Assistant Director Keira Uy.

Ever since I watched delegates deliver their intriguing, political, and witty speeches at my first ever conference, my fascination for this activity was ignited. I realised that the world of MUN is a divergent learning path that is not linear in any case. This journey has not only nurtured my unrivalled passion for the intricacies of political debate but has also enabled me to forge countless friendships, create cherished experiences, and accumulate unforgettable memories.

I understand that it can be daunting to speak up during a conference, especially as a novice delegate. By taking this first step, you stand to gain both confidence and tangible rewards from your BCMUN experience. To prepare for the conference, I urge you to read the background guide thoroughly and conduct country-specific research on the topic of the *Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons*. It is my sincere hope that this committee will provide an extraordinary experience for each of you as you engage in political debate and foster cherishable memories. Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at disec@bcmun.org. On behalf of the dais team, I look forward to meeting all of you!

Sincerely,

Yasmin Kahkesh

Director of DISEC | BCMUN 2023

Committee Description

The Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC), as the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, occupies a central role in the matrix of global governance structures.¹ Historically conceived after World War II, DISEC's foundational ethos is embedded in the larger trajectory of international diplomatic efforts aimed at ensuring global peace through disarmament and security.² DISEC's mandate, while seemingly straightforward in its focus on disarmament and security, is underpinned by a complex web of geopolitical, economic, and technological considerations.³ One of its primary responsibilities includes the scrutiny of global disarmament issues and the regulation of a wide spectrum of weaponry, from nuclear arms to small arms and light weapons.⁴ This section of focus is a testament to the changing contours of international conflict – where both state-centred nuclear deterrence and non-state actor-driven insurgencies present distinct, yet interrelated, challenges.

A critical overview of DISEC's endeavours reveals both its strengths and limitations. On the one hand, its resolutions, though non-binding, serve as influential normative frameworks that guide state behaviour. They have the potential to establish global norms, shape diplomatic discourse, and can pave the way for binding international treaties. On the other hand, DISEC's effectiveness is often contingent upon the geopolitical dynamics of the day.⁵ As with many international institutions, its resolutions can sometimes be stymied by the strategic interests of powerful member states, reflecting the perennial tension between state sovereignty and collective global interests.

Moreover, DISEC's collaborative engagements with other specialised UN bodies, while augmenting its holistic approach, also highlight the interconnectedness of contemporary security challenges.⁶ For instance, links between arms proliferation and developmental challenges underscore the imperative for integrated solutions.⁷ DISEC's pivotal role in the architecture of global security cannot be understated. However, an analytical exploration of its operations, situated within the larger tapestry of global politics, reveals a dynamic interplay of challenges and opportunities. As the committee navigates an increasingly multipolar world order, its strategies, effectiveness, and adaptability will continue to be subjects of academic and policy scrutiny.

¹ <https://www.un.org/en/ga/first/>

² <https://www.un.org/en/our-work/maintain-international-peace-and-security>

³ <https://imuna.org/nhsmun/nyc/committees/disecc-disarmament-international-security-committee/>

⁴ <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/disarmament>

⁵ <https://www.crisisgroup.org/b8-united-states/ten-challenges-un-2022-2023>

⁶ <https://www.ufrgs.br/ufrgsmun/2018/web/files/disecc.pdf>

⁷ <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15252.doc.htm>

Topic Overview

The proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) has historically been a point of concern within the domain of international security studies, and the Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC) has been at the forefront of addressing this issue.⁸ SALW, encompassing a range of weapons from handguns to portable grenade launchers, have distinct characteristics that separate them from larger, more sophisticated arms systems.⁹ Historically, their ease of transfer, portability, and the minimal training required for their operation have made them the preferred choice in various theatres of conflict ranging from civil wars to large-scale insurgencies.

The 20th century witnessed a dramatic increase in the production and circulation of SALW, fueled in part by the Cold War era, during which superpowers frequently supplied such weapons to allied non-state actors as a means of indirect engagement.¹⁰ Post the Cold War, many of these weapons found their way into the black market, further destabilising regions already fraught with tension.¹¹ In the contemporary era, SALW have come to be associated not only with organised state actors but also with non-state actors, including insurgent groups, terrorists, and transnational criminal organisations. The unchecked circulation of these arms exacerbates regional conflicts and has been directly linked to prolonged warfare, such as in the African Great Lakes region where easy access to arms has complicated peacekeeping efforts.¹² Additionally, in urban settings, the availability of these weapons has been implicated in escalating rates of criminal activity and violence.

It is within this backdrop that DISEC's engagement becomes paramount. The committee's mandate to foster international cooperation and ensure disarmament provides it with the legitimacy to address the SALW issue. While there have been notable initiatives, such as the UN Programme of Action on SALW and the Arms Trade Treaty, challenges remain. Factors like weak regulatory frameworks in certain states, lack of consistent international reporting mechanisms, and the sheer volume of these weapons in circulation impede comprehensive disarmament.

⁸ <https://press.un.org/en/2021/sc14656.doc.htm>

⁹ <http://www.peacebuildinginitiative.org/indexeb23.html?pageId=1861>

¹⁰ <https://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience/docs/WP2%20International%20markets%20for%20security.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48591310>

¹² <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15249.doc.htm>

Timeline

January 10, 1920 – The League of Nations was established after World War I with the aim of promoting international cooperation and preserving global peace.¹³ Its establishment marked the first attempt to control the trade of weapons on an international scale. However, the league lacked enforcement mechanisms and was ultimately unsuccessful.

September 1, 1939 - September 2, 1945 – World War II saw a massive proliferation of small arms and light weapons, as countries rapidly produced and distributed them to their militaries and allies. After the war, many of these weapons were left in circulation, leading to an increase in violence and instability in many regions.¹⁴

August 12, 1949 – The Geneva Conventions adopted after World War II addressed the issue of humanitarian treatment in war, including the use of weapons. Although not focused solely on small arms and light weapons, it laid the groundwork for future international laws regulating arms proliferation.¹⁵

November 1947 – The first AK-47 pattern rifle was tested by the Soviet army.¹⁶ As of the most recent analysis in 2004, 100 million exist in circulation.¹⁷

1991 – The end of the Cold War saw a surplus of small arms and light weapons previously used or stockpiled by the superpowers. These weapons were often sold or given to developing countries, leading to a surge in global small arms trade and contributing to regional conflicts.¹⁸

April 7, 1994 - July 15, 1994 – The Rwandan genocide, where small arms played a crucial role in the mass killings, highlighted the devastating impact of the proliferation of these weapons. The international community faced criticism for its lack of action, prompting further discussions on arms control.¹⁹

May 31, 2001 – The United Nations adopted the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition. It was the first legally binding instrument on small arms adopted at the global level, marking a significant step in international efforts to curb their proliferation.²⁰

¹³ <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-history/rise-to-world-power/us-in-wwi/a/the-league-of-nations>

¹⁴ https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/icrc_002_0734_arms_availability.pdf

¹⁵

<https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/war-and-law/treaties-customary-law/geneva-conventions/overview-geneva-conventions.htm>

¹⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/technology/AK-47>

¹⁷ <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/266561468141574815/pdf/wps4202.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/zh/firearms/module-3/key-issues/history-of-legitimate-arms-market.html>

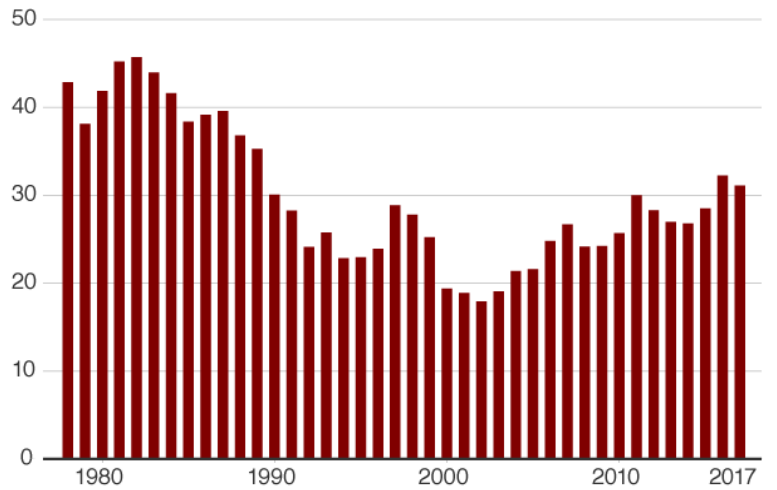
¹⁹ <https://www.oecd.org/countries/rwanda/50189764.pdf>

²⁰ <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/firearms-protocol/the-firearms-protocol.html>

Global weapons trade

Exports, 1978 – 2017

USD Billions



Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

BBC

Graph of the years following the implementation of the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms.²¹

April 2, 2013 – The Arms Trade Treaty was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly to regulate the international trade in conventional arms, including small arms and light weapons. Its adoption was a major milestone in the fight against the illegal arms trade.²²

January 29-31, 2017 – The African Union launched an initiative aimed to end all wars, civil conflicts, gender-based violence, violent conflicts, and prevent genocide in the continent by 2020. While ambitious, the initiative signalled a commitment by African nations to address the issue of small arms proliferation.²³

Historical Analysis

The interplay between SALW and the global security dynamics, as addressed by DISEC, unveils a complex narrative entrenched in historical precedents, shaped by geopolitical shifts, and moulded by evolving disarmament endeavours. This intricate matrix draws attention to both historical inflection points and emergent contemporary challenges that DISEC faces in its quest to foster international peace and security.²⁴

Cold War Dynamics

The Cold War era is instrumental in understanding the initial surge in SALW's prominence.²⁵ The bipolar scaffold of global politics, primarily defined by the U.S. and USSR's tense

²¹ https://www.unodc.org/documents/legal-tools/Model_Law_Firearms_Final.pdf

²² <https://legal.un.org/avl/ha/att/att.html>

²³ <https://dppa.un.org/en/un-support-to-au-initiative-silencing-guns-africa>

²⁴ <https://www.un.org/pga/73/2018/10/08/first-committee-disarmament-and-international-security/>

²⁵ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s42597-022-00073-9>

stand-off, inadvertently catalysed SALW as critical tools of geopolitical manoeuvring.²⁶ These weapons were not just chosen for their cost-effectiveness or ease of deployment. They were strategic assets that enabled superpowers to exert influence, often in regions far from their borders, without the direct military confrontations that could risk global conflict. Regions such as Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Africa became unfortunate arenas for ideological warfare facilitated by SALW.²⁷ The long-lasting repercussions of these engagements were a dual-edged sword. On one hand, the geopolitical objectives of the superpowers often left these regions in states of protracted internal strife. On the other hand, a robust infrastructure for arms distribution was inadvertently set up, which would persist and morph into channels for illicit arms trade in the subsequent post-Cold War era.²⁸

SALW Proliferation

The transition into the post-Cold War era was accompanied by a different set of challenges. Regions previously destabilised by the presence of SALW became hotbeds for conflict, even in the absence of superpower instigation. Africa stands out in this context, where the accessibility of these weapons aggravated existing tensions and conflicts. The Rwandan Genocide in 1994, for instance, serves as a harrowing reminder of the potential consequences of unchecked SALW proliferation. This period also saw the rise of non-state actors who, unburdened by the protocols and niceties of international diplomacy, aggressively leveraged the established networks of SALW trade for their objectives.

Evolving Approach in the 21st Century

Recognizing the shifting landscape, DISEC undertook proactive measures to address the challenges posed by SALW in the 21st century. Their initiatives, such as the 2001 Programme of Action (PoA), underscored an evolving understanding of the multifaceted nature of global security threats.²⁹ The problems were no longer purely state-centric, and the solutions needed to be more comprehensive than before. The 2013 Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) epitomised this holistic understanding.³⁰ Rather than isolating SALW as a singular issue, the ATT emphasised the interconnectedness of conventional arms trade concerns, understanding that unchecked arms proliferation had implications ranging from forced migrations and human trafficking to regional destabilisation.³¹

Contemporary Challenges

The contemporary geopolitical landscape, particularly highlighted by protracted crises such as the Syrian civil war and the emergence of formidable entities like ISIS, has shed light on

²⁶ <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/the-ice-is-cracking-a-deep-dive-into-cold-war-redux/>

²⁷ https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/4402/1/S9900680_en.pdf

²⁸ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26999246>

²⁹ https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/Durban_text_en.pdf

³⁰ <https://www.thearmstradetreaty.org/hyper-images/file/TheArmsTradeTreaty1/TheArmsTradeTreaty.pdf>

³¹ <https://www.icct.nl/project/small-arms-light-weapons-salw>

the intricate challenges presented by Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW).³² These situations, which have occurred in various parts of the world, serve as poignant reminders to DISEC that the concerns surrounding SALW are not just limited to the domain of arms regulation. Instead, they deeply intertwine with broader socio-political and economic dynamics, affecting the very fabric of societies and influencing global stability.

Recognizing the gravity and multi-dimensional nature of these challenges, DISEC has proactively adjusted its approach. Instead of solely adopting a reactionary stance, the committee has displayed a strong inclination towards anticipatory diplomacy. This proactive strategy involves putting a spotlight on preventative measures that can curb the uncontrolled proliferation and misuse of SALW before they escalate into a full-blown crisis.³³ Intelligence collaboration stands at the heart of this strategy, where sharing of timely and accurate information between nations and agencies becomes pivotal. Furthermore, the emphasis on regional cooperation underscores the importance of collective and coordinated action.³⁴ Through these combined efforts, DISEC aims not merely to respond to existing crises but to foresee and effectively neutralise potential threats, fostering a more secure and stable international environment.

Current Situation

The unchecked proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons remains a paramount concern for international security and stability in today's world.³⁵ DISEC, a crucial branch of the UN, grapples with the multifaceted nuances of this issue in the contemporary landscape. This assessment provides a deep dive into the prevailing scenario surrounding the proliferation of SALW, anchoring it within the broader discourse of the Committee's mandate and current endeavours.³⁶

Growing Accessibility and Technological Advancements

In the 21st century of the rapidly evolving global landscape, the accessibility to Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) has reached an unparalleled level, unmatched in any previous era.³⁷ Technological leaps and advancements, particularly in manufacturing and logistics, have not only made the production of these weapons more efficient but have also facilitated their swift distribution. This acceleration often occurs in a manner that sidesteps traditional regulatory frameworks and the vigilant eyes of established oversight bodies. Further complicating this issue is the dawn of the digital age, which has introduced new dimensions

³² <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-syria>

³³ <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/un-role-and-efforts-combating-proliferation-small-arms-and-light-weapons>

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ <https://disarmament.unoda.org/convarms/salw/>

³⁶ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_208586.htm?selectedLocale=en

³⁷ <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2021/August/20-years-of-un-firearms-protocol-and-programme-of-action-on-small-arms-and-light-weapons-salw-shed-light-on-way-forward.html>

of challenges. The advent of cryptocurrencies,³⁸ for instance, has provided a cloak of anonymity to financial transactions, making them almost imperceptible to conventional monitoring systems. Concurrently, the dark web, a vast and often uncharted virtual realm, offers platforms where clandestine arms deals can transpire with ease, rendering them virtually invisible to national and international monitoring mechanisms.

Geopolitical Hotspots and Non-State Actors

Regions embroiled in conflict, such as the Sahel in Africa, certain parts of the Middle East, and specific areas in Southeast Asia, serve as hubs for SALW.³⁹ Insurgent groups, militias, and terrorist organisations operating within these areas often rely heavily on these weapons. These non-state actors, unrestricted by the boundaries of international treaties and often driven by deeply rooted ideological or sectarian motivations, exploit weak governance and porous borders to acquire these weapons. For DISEC, addressing this issue means not only curbing the supply of these weapons but also understanding and mitigating the underlying socio-political drivers fueling their demand.

International Legislation and Compliance Challenges

On the legislative front, commendable progress has been made. Frameworks like the Programme of Action from 2001 and the Arms Trade Treaty from 2013 established international standards for arms regulation, inclusive of SALW.⁴⁰ However, the true challenge emerges in the domains of compliance and enforcement. A multitude of nations lack the necessary infrastructure, capability, or at times, the political resolve to effectively implement these standards.⁴¹ In response, DISEC's endeavours to promote international cooperation, provide technical aid, and motivate states to bolster their regulatory apparatus. A development in the current scenario is the proactive role played by civil society groups in countering the proliferation of SALW. Grassroots movements, often in synergy with global organisations, have championed awareness drives, local disarmament initiatives, and even facilitated dialogues in conflict-ridden areas.⁴² Recognizing their potential, DISEC is increasingly forging partnerships with these entities, aiming to leverage their local knowledge and expansive outreach.

Economic Implications of SALW

The trade in SALW is not just a security conundrum; it carries significant economic ramifications.⁴³ The illicit trade in these weapons is financially lucrative and frequently intersects with other criminal enterprises, including drug trafficking, smuggling, and human

³⁸ <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/cryptocurrencies-digital-dollars-and-future-money>

³⁹ <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel>

⁴⁰ <https://disarmament.unoda.org/convarms/salw/programme-of-action/>

⁴¹ <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15263.doc.htm>

⁴² <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/blog/2021/overcoming-barriers-grassroots-inclusion-peace-processes>

⁴³ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52142.htm

trafficking.⁴⁴ Addressing this multifaceted challenge requires the Disarmament and International Security Committee to adopt a multidimensional strategy that tackles not just the arms themselves but also the economic incentives driving their trade. The present state of SALW, as addressed by DISEC, mirrors the complexities of a global landscape in flux, punctuated by rapid technological progress, evolving geopolitical priorities, and the rise of diverse stakeholders.⁴⁵ While the path ahead is fraught with challenges, the Committee's comprehensive and collaborative approach provides a beacon of hope. Its ongoing efforts reaffirm the international community's commitment to forging a world where peace, security, and sustainable development are not threatened by the shadow of these weapons.

Case Study

Yemen, a country located on the Arabian Peninsula, has been embroiled in a protracted civil war since 2014.⁴⁶ The conflict involves multiple actors, including the Yemeni government, Houthi rebels, and international forces led by a notable Saudi-based Coalition. This case study offers a window into the devastating impact of SALWs proliferation in a war-torn country. The extensive use of SALWs has characterised the Yemen conflict. The availability and accessibility of these weapons have significantly fueled the conflict, causing a dramatic escalation of violence. A primary reason for the widespread availability of these weapons is Yemen's long-standing cultural tradition of firearm ownership, coupled with weak regulatory mechanisms.⁴⁷ Moreover, the porous nature of Yemen's borders has facilitated a thriving illicit arms trade, with weapons entering the country from various sources. There has been documented evidence of significant arms transfers into Yemen, often violating international law and sanctions.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/human-trafficking/>

⁴⁵ <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/risk-and-resilience/our-insights/seizing-the-momentum-to-build-resilience-for-a-future-of-sustainable-inclusive-growth>

⁴⁶

<https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/war-yemen#:~:text=Yemen's%20civil%20war%20began%20in,prices%20and%20a%20new%20government.>

⁴⁷ <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-when-cultural-norms-underpin-gun-ownership>

⁴⁸ <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/yemen>

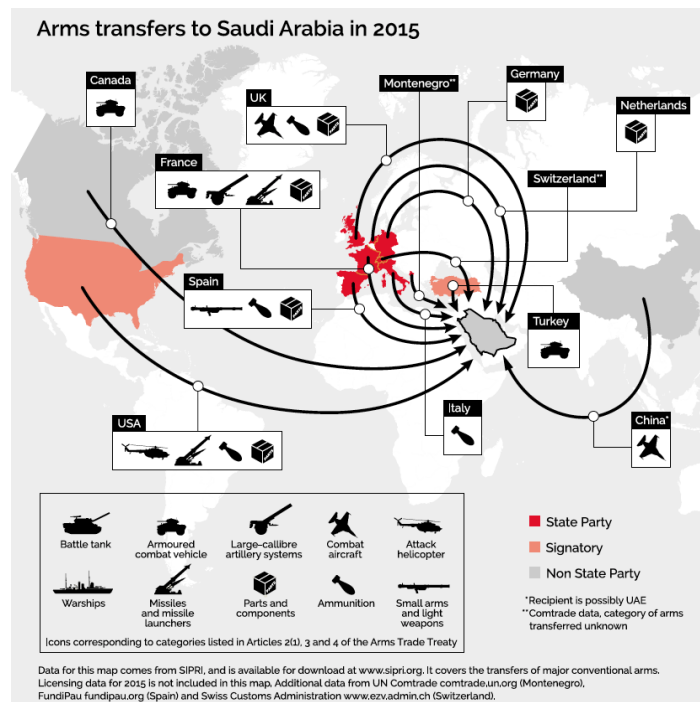


Diagram of Firearm transfers to Saudi Arabia.⁴⁹

The surge in the availability and use of SALW has resulted in devastating humanitarian repercussions.⁵⁰ Communities have borne witness to alarming civilian casualties due to armed confrontations. Furthermore, many have been forced to abandon their homes and lands, leading to massive displacements. The atmosphere is laden with trepidation and insecurity, with civilians constantly fearing for their lives. This situation is further aggravated when SALWs find their way into the hands of non-state actors, which encompass extremist factions and terrorist organisations, amplifying the violence and chaos manifold.

In an attempt to stem this tide, the international community has undertaken numerous initiatives. For instance, the United Nations imposed an arms embargo targeting the Houthi forces. Yet, disappointingly, such measures have not resulted in a substantial reduction in the influx of weapons into Yemen.⁵¹ The inability to enforce these preventative measures effectively can be traced back to the intricacies of intervening in a multifaceted conflict zone. This is further compounded by either the active complicity or the passive negligence of both regional and international stakeholders.

Yemen stands as a poignant case study, shedding light on the catastrophic repercussions of unchecked SALW dissemination.⁵² The continuous flow and misuse of these weapons not

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<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2016/02/states-must-stop-selling-weapons-to-saudi-arabia-amid-yemen-conflict/>

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ <https://www.tbsnews.net/thoughts/yemen-all-sides-are-using-hunger-weapon-364984>

⁵² <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-the-unspeakable-suffering-in-yemen-has-barely-elicited-more-than/>

only perpetuates and intensifies the conflict but also severely hampers peacekeeping endeavours. Moreover, the most wrenching consequence is the untold suffering inflicted upon innocent civilians caught in the crossfire. This harrowing scenario emphatically emphasises the dire necessity for comprehensive solutions. What is urgently called for are more stringent international regulations, fortified border checks, and strategic interventions specifically designed to dismantle the covert networks that fuel the illicit arms trade.⁵³**Past Involvement**

The systematic progeneration of SALW internationally poses a prevalent threat to the long-term development of socioeconomic nations.⁵⁴ However, the United Nations has taken international measures to contribute to the greater good rather than considering it a zero-sum game.

In 2001, the UN created the Programme of Action to Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in SALW in All its Aspects (PoA), obtaining the adoption of all UN member states.⁵⁵ By adopting such a programme, countries agree to establish proper weapon marking, minimize and secure production and arsenal supervision, properly regulate national arms distribution, strengthen collaboration in weapons tracing, and to participate in global cooperation and assistance. Key performance indicators of PoA are evaluated upon the submission of national reports by UN member states, allowing the UN to retrieve feedback to ultimately reinforce collaborative measures within government agencies.⁵⁶ The effective implementation of PoA heavily relies on regional customs and the strength of communal services such as statewide intelligence and police forces, as such organizations ensure programmatic success. Currently, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development encompasses the goal to improve weapon tracing.⁵⁷ Alongside the PoA, both mechanisms compose of the standardizing structure to affirmatively abolish the illicit trade of SALW.

Established in 2001 and enforced in 2005, the Protocol against the Illicit Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition (Firearms Protocol) remains the sole counter against the illegal manufacturing of small arms and light weapons at an international level.⁵⁸ The Firearms Protocol provides a cohesive framework to control and regulate permissible arms and arms flows, preventing diversion into illicit trade, and conducting thorough investigations without hindering official transfers.⁵⁹

⁵³ <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/its-time-to-stop-us-arms-sales-to-saudi-arabia/>

⁵⁴ <https://press.un.org/en/2008/gashc3920.doc.htm>

⁵⁵ [https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/un-role-and-efforts-combating-proliferation-small-arms-and-light-weapons#:~:text=In%202001%2C%20the%20adoption%20of,United%20Nations%20Convention%20against%20Tr](https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/un-role-and-efforts-combating-proliferation-small-arms-and-light-weapons#:~:text=In%202001%2C%20the%20adoption%20of,United%20Nations%20Convention%20against%20Transnational)

⁵⁶ <https://unidir.org/sites/default/files/publication/pdfs//a-decade-of-implementing-the-unpoa-analysis-of-national-reports-en-301.pdf>

⁵⁷ <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

⁵⁸ https://www.unodc.org/documents/firearms-protocol/Publications/10-56148_Ebook.pdf

⁵⁹ https://www.unodc.org/documents/organized-crime/Firearms/12-56168_Firearm_booklet_ebook.pdf

Potential Solutions

Revision of Existing Treaties

Currently, there are many Guidelines created by the UN to combat weapons disarmament. DISEC, under the UN, created the; “Arms Trade Treaty ” (ATT) and the; “Youth, Disarmament, Non-Proliferation, and Arms Control.” The “Arms Trade Treaty” has seen mixed success around the world.⁶⁰ The basis of the ATT is to stop SALWs from getting into the wrong hands and for use to commit human rights violations, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and so forth. Since the inception of the ATT 10 years ago, the treaty has had mixed results.⁶¹ The ATT requires that all nations submit an annual report stating their quantity, type, and end users. Some nations lacked transparency when providing these reports and some have yet to submit any. These reports are important to combat SALW how they are used, who is using them, and how nations can curb its effects. Notably, several nations have not signed the treaty such as the United States of America and Russia.⁶² While the US is technically a signatory of the ATT, it has not been ratified by the US government yet, on the other hand, Russia has not yet signed the treaty citing the positives and negatives. Another problem with the ATT is the lack of enforcement. While the ATT is international law, it still relies heavily on nations submitting annual reports and nations enacting legislation to help curb the effects.⁶³

International Assistance

While the bulk of conflicts involving SALWs take place in developing nations.⁶⁴ Since the ATT provides guidelines to combat SALWs, it still heavily relies on national governments to enact legislation to combat SALWs. Many developing nations lack the capabilities to fully address the problem. International assistance can help developing nations who are struggling with combating SALWs. The aid can come in the form of many ways such as increased disarmament programs for nations to demolish surplus weapon stockpiles under proper management can safely dispose of SALW without the fear of it getting used again. Along the lines of international assistance, developed nations can help with increasing the amount of Disarmament, Demobilize, and Reintegration (DDR) programs in developing nations that can significantly decrease the impact caused by SALWs.⁶⁵ These programs can help remove surplus stockpiles of weapons, demobilised combatants, and reintegrate them back into society through vocational programs. While international Assistance has great potential, there still is the underlying problem of trust.

⁶⁰ <https://360info.org/un-arms-trade-treatys-difficult-first-decade/>

⁶¹ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-att-leap-idUSBRE96B10520130712>

⁶² <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/arms-control/>

⁶³ <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL32528>

⁶⁴ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1122271/>

⁶⁵ <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration>

Bloc Positions

Western Bloc

The Western bloc is a fusion of major SALW producers and advocates for global peace and security. Countries like the U.S., France, and Germany are significant players in the arms industry, driving both their economies and global arms supply chains. As such, they might be wary of imposing regulations that jeopardise these economic interests. However, being at the forefront of various international peacekeeping missions and diplomatic initiatives, these nations also understand the catastrophic consequences of unchecked SALW proliferation.⁶⁶ While the economic aspect may call for a moderated approach, the region's commitment to human rights, peace, and global security might tilt the balance towards promoting responsible arms trade, pushing for enhanced international cooperation, and championing more stringent international regulations.

African Bloc

The African continent, scarred by decades of internal conflicts exacerbated by SALW, will likely adopt a more aggressive stance towards curbing their proliferation. The widespread displacement, civilian casualties, and disruption of development projects due to SALW-related conflicts make the issue a top priority.⁶⁷ While seeking international support for stricter regulations, they might also emphasise the importance of addressing the root causes—be it political instability, socio-economic disparities, or external interference—that fuel the demand for SALW in the region.

Asian Bloc

Asia is a tapestry of contrasting stances on SALW. China and India are not only regional superpowers but are also significant arms producers. Their stance will likely revolve around balancing economic interests with regional stability. Japan, with its pacifist constitution, may champion disarmament and stricter controls on SALW, whereas ASEAN countries, facing issues ranging from territorial disputes to insurgent movements, might prioritise regional security and cooperation.⁶⁸ The common thread for the bloc would be the emphasis on sovereignty, non-interference, and regional collaboration to address the challenges posed by SALW proliferation. The diverse Asian Bloc balances between states like Japan advocating for strict global regulations, and major arms manufacturers like China and India prioritising sovereignty over domestic arms regulations, while also acknowledging the necessity to prevent SALW misuse.

⁶⁶ <https://www.boell.de/en/2013/12/19/weapons-development-and-harmful-arms-proliferation>

⁶⁷ <https://conflictandhealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13031-018-0162-0>

⁶⁸ <https://www.asiapacific.ca/publication/debate-rages-japan-over-whether-revise-worlds-oldest>

Latin American Bloc

Latin America's relationship with SALW is intrinsically linked to its battle against drug cartels and internal insurgencies. The devastating impact of SALW on civilian populations, especially in countries like Colombia and Mexico, underscores the urgency of the issue.⁶⁹ While the bloc would likely advocate for international measures to restrict SALW supply, there might also be a strong emphasis on addressing the demand side by tackling organised crime, strengthening governance, and boosting socio-economic development.

Middle Eastern Bloc

The Middle East's stance on SALW is shaped by its complex geopolitical landscape, riddled with sectarian conflicts, regional rivalries, and varied alliances.⁷⁰ While nations like Saudi Arabia are significant arms importers, Israel is a notable arms producer. The region's intricate web of alliances and oppositions means that while there's a shared understanding of the threats posed by SALW—especially in the hands of non-state actors—there might be differences in the proposed solutions. Trust-building, regional cooperation, and external power influences would play crucial roles in shaping this bloc's position.

Eastern European and Central Asian Bloc

With Russia as a key player, both as a major arms producer and as an influential regional power, the bloc's stance might lean towards preserving economic and strategic interests. The region, with its share of tensions and conflicts, will view SALW through the prism of regional security and geopolitical manoeuvring.⁷¹ They might be cautious of Western-driven initiatives, emphasising instead regional solutions and highlighting the importance of sovereignty and non-interference.

Discussion Questions

1. How has the spread of small arms impacted global conflicts?
2. What are some successful or unsuccessful attempts to control small arms spread?
3. How have groups like ISIS and Boko Haram influenced the use of small arms?
4. How have the internet and 3D-printing technologies affected small arms proliferation?
5. How can we improve laws to control the illegal trade and production of small arms?
6. Based on history, what future steps can be taken to lessen the impact of small arms on global security?

⁶⁹ https://www.unodc.org/pdf/research/Cr_and_Vio_Car_E.pdf

⁷⁰ <https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/9788833653501.pdf>

⁷¹ <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/ukraine-conflict-crossroads-europe-and-russia>

Further Resources

Rapid Spread of Small Arms, Light Weapons Still Threatening World Peace, Exacerbating Plight of Civilians in Conflict Zones, Disarmament Chief Tells Security Council | UN Press:
<https://press.un.org/en/2021/sc14656.doc.htm>

Programme of Action to Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects (PoA):
<https://www.unrcpd.org/conventional-weapons/poa/#:~:text=The%20UN%20Programme%20of%20Action,Small%20Arms%20and%20Light%20Weapons>

Arms Trade Treaty:
<https://legal.un.org/avl/ha/att/att.html#:~:text=A%20consensus%20decision%20to%20address,9%20to%2020%20July%202001>

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