



PLISMUN19

GA1: STUDY GUIDE

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Combating Illegal Arms Markets and Weapon Trading Globally

Presented by Vanesa Kerle, Chair of the GA1

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary times, current events serve as a stark reminder of the urgency and severity of the problem of the illicit arms trade, which, besides constituting a serious threat to international peace and security, represents a stimulant to other global illegal activities.

A direct consequence of arms trafficking is firearms availability, which increases lethality from a wide variety of violent crimes. What's more, there are exceptionally close and organic links with organized criminal activities including money laundering, smuggling, human trafficking, financial crimes and also terrorism. Illegal and irresponsible handling of weapons in general poses a grave danger towards the civilian population.

While some illicit firearms are obtained through the theft of weapons that are originally held legally or that are stolen from other legal sources, the vast majority originates from cross-border trafficking activities. However, due to the blurred distinction between the different types of trafficking and the fact that the activity is illegal, it is rather difficult to quantify the relative importance of different sources of illicit firearms as it is not captured by official statistics. Whilst it is possible to provide a range of estimates, this range remains to be very wide, emphasizing the fact that no accurate quantification of the problem is feasible on the basis of existing available data. Accordingly, reaching a solution to tackle illicit arms market is greatly challenging and efforts to combat such reality undoubtedly require cooperation between authorities in different countries.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

- **Small arms and light weapons (SALW)** - any “*man-portable lethal weapon that expels or launches, is designed to expel or launch, or may be readily converted to expel or launch a shot, bullet or projectile by the action of an explosive.*”¹

¹ http://www.un.org/events/smallarms2006/pdf/international_instrument.pdf

- The term *Small Arms* refers to weapons designed for individual use, including rifles, carbines, sub-machine guns, light machine guns, revolvers and self-loading pistols.
Small Arms also include firearms, ammunitions (see definitions below) and any components of a small arm or light weapon.
- *Light Weapons* are, broadly speaking, weapons designed for use by several persons serving as a crew, including heavy machine guns, grenade launchers, anti-tank weapons, automatic cannons, air defence weapons, etc.
- **Firearms** – any portable barrelled weapon that expels or may be converted to expel a shot along with other destructive devices such as an explosive bomb, gas bomb, grenade, missile, mine, etc.
- **Ammunition** – e.g. cartridge cases, propellant powder, bullets or projectiles, that are used in small arm or light weapon and represent a subject to authorisation in the respective State Party.
- **Grey market** – refers to products which are sold legally as they were manufactured with the consent of the brand, yet are sold at lower prices and outside of the brand owner's approved distribution channels. Accordingly, consumers buying grey market goods are at risk of not having warranties honored.
- **Black market** – illegal trading of goods that are restricted to be bought and sold. In the first kind, black market prices are lower than the official prices as a result of tax evasion. In the second kind, prices are higher than the controlled prices.

GENERAL OVERVIEW

a) HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The volume of the arms trade substantially increased during the 19th century. The continually expanding industrialization in Europe stimulated an unending series of technological advancements in weaponry. In the global context, Belgians and French, along with the Italians, played a major role in the illicit arms trade at that time.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, firearms became a highly demanded commodity in East Africa. Soon, East Africa became the chief destination for imported firearms through trafficking and new private traders. For the most part, these firearms were second-hand military weapons originating from Europe, North America and South Asia. In the second half of the 1890s, the involvement of Belgian and French companies in the arms traffic intensified. Not to forget, the arms trade represented a consequential source of jobs for Europeans.

A crucial and non-negligible event in the history of illegal arms trade was the Cold War (1945 – 1991). The long-standing rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union was rather doubtlessly accompanied by a competition to acquire the most arms. Although primarily focused on nuclear weapons, conventional weapons were of paramount importance in order to sufficiently equip both sides' allies, to sway proxy wars in their favor and to provide an indirect aid to the home country's foreign and domestic policies. An example of illegal arms trading during the Cold War was the Iran-Contra Affair 1985 – 1987, during which senior administration officials secretly executed orders to sell weapons to Iran, despite an embargo, with aims to free some Americans held captive by terrorist in Lebanon.

b) ESTIMATES, STATISTICS

- According to the UNODC the illicit arms trade produces between €125 million to €236 million per year globally, which makes up almost 20% of the total trade in legal firearms.²
- The United Nations 2011 Small Arms Survey estimates that the overall value of the global trade in illicit arms may be worth more than a billion dollars.³
- According to GunPolicy data, there are approximately 67 million unregistered firearms in the EU, in other words: 79% of the estimated total of **81 million in circulation**.

The aforementioned estimates serve as a very broad indication of the quantity of illicitly held firearms. However, it is important to bear in mind that much of the data that is publicly available is regarded as inaccurate and is commonly constituted of overestimates or underestimates.

c) CURRENT SITUATION & THE PROBLEM

‘The trade in arms becomes arms trafficking when the deals undertaken violate existing laws on the movement of arms.’ Particularly troubling is the illegal trade in small arms and light weapons (SALW). While a build-up of small arms alone may not

² UNODC (October 2011). Estimating illicit financial flows resulting from drug trafficking and other transnational organized crimes. Research report. Retrieved from: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Illicit_financial_flows_2011_web.pdf

³ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/e-library/documents/policies/organized-crime-and-human-trafficking/general/docs/dg_home_-_illicit_firearms_trafficking_final_en.pdf, pg. 16

be the reason why the conflicts, in which such weapons are used, arose, their proliferation and excessive accumulation oftentimes aggravates conflicts by reinforcing the feeling of insecurity and increasing the lethality and duration of violence. *“Small arms facilitate a vast spectrum of human rights violations, including killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, enforced disappearance, torture and forced recruitment of children by armed groups or forces. More human rights abuses are committed with them than with any other weapon.”*⁴

As far as the illicit firearms users are concerned, organised crime groups were identified as one of the main groups involved in illegal arms trafficking. What's more, the 2011 Europol Review showed that the possession of firearms by organised crime groups in Europe is rising steadily. An increased use of firearms has been observed across a variety of terrorist and extremist groups as well.

In regards to how the guns are supplied, the global arms market can be divided into three categories: 1) legal and standard sale of weapons by registered corporations, 2) grey market, 3) black market.

Research carried out by International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) indicates that black market trade in SALW ranges from US\$ 2-10 billion a year.

Combating and eradicating the illicit manufacturing and trafficking of firearms along with their components and ammunition is intrinsically very difficult given the hidden nature of the problem. Traders have developed complex and sophisticated methods of procurement, transportation and sale of weapons. A common example is the removal of markings (i.e. serial numbers) on firearms, which makes it difficult to track and trace the origin of different weapons. Furthermore, differences in national legislation entail practical problems as well. For instance, what one nation considers a criminal offence and prosecutes accordingly may be entirely legal in another. Therefore, improving cooperation between law enforcement authorities in detecting and investigating illicit arms trafficking is of considerable significance.

d) CONSEQUENCES

- Illicit firearms' trafficking is closely linked to other criminal activities;
- Illegally held firearms are oftentimes used by organised crime groups to coerce, intimidate or punish their victims, and thereby represent a direct intrusion into and violation of human rights;
- The threat of the use of light weapons is forcing millions of people to flee their homes, resulting in a constantly growing number of refugees and displaced persons;
- The illegal import and sale of weapons provides a lucrative business for organised crime groups and the dealers that service them;

⁴ <https://s3.amazonaws.com/unoda-web/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/english.pdf>

- Often represent the incentive to the creation of armed conflicts, which cause many fatalities such as food deprivation, psychological and emotional damage, loss of education, child abduction, torture and slavery, separation of families, etc.

MAJOR PARTIES INVOLVED

a) AFRICA

Stability of the African continent as a whole remains greatly dependent on the reduction of the number of SALW in conflict-affected regions. Accordingly, African nations would undoubtedly reap the advantages of SALW nonproliferation. Nairobi Secretariat is already cooperating with Eastern Africa Police Chiefs Cooperation Organization (EAPCCO) on developing methods to control and eventually combat the illegal trade.

b) EUROPE

Many small arms traders and primary contributors to the illicit arms trade originate from Europe. Smuggling of SALW occurs mainly in South-Eastern Europe, from where it is sold to unstable regions. The European Union (EU) has undertaken a number of measures aiming at the elimination of the illicit arms trade. Despite their effectiveness remains to be doubted, gradual improvement has been monitored as the EU is coming up with many different solutions which could potentially tackle the arms trafficking problem.

c) LATIN AMERICA

Latin American countries are notorious for criminality. Each year, a staggering number of 73,000 – 90,000 people are killed by guns. According to the World Health Organization, the leading cause of death for people between the ages of 15 to 44 is gun-related. Accordingly, the primary reason of the prevalence of violence in Latin America is the widespread arms trade. One of the biggest black markets in the region, due to which is the ongoing conflict constantly fueled, is functioning in Columbia. Moreover, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina and Chile are regarded as the largest regional producers of small arms.

d) SOUTH EAST ASIA

The overall number of SALW in Latin America rose notably as intra-state conflicts plaguing the region represent a major stimulant to the increasing demand for weaponry. This reality largely contributes to the instability of the region as a whole and nurtures a feeling of insecurity among its citizens. In addition, maritime regions are hard to control. Hence, monitoring the maritime trade routes through which is the arms trafficking mostly carried out is indispensable for the amelioration of the ongoing situation.

e) ARAB NATIONS

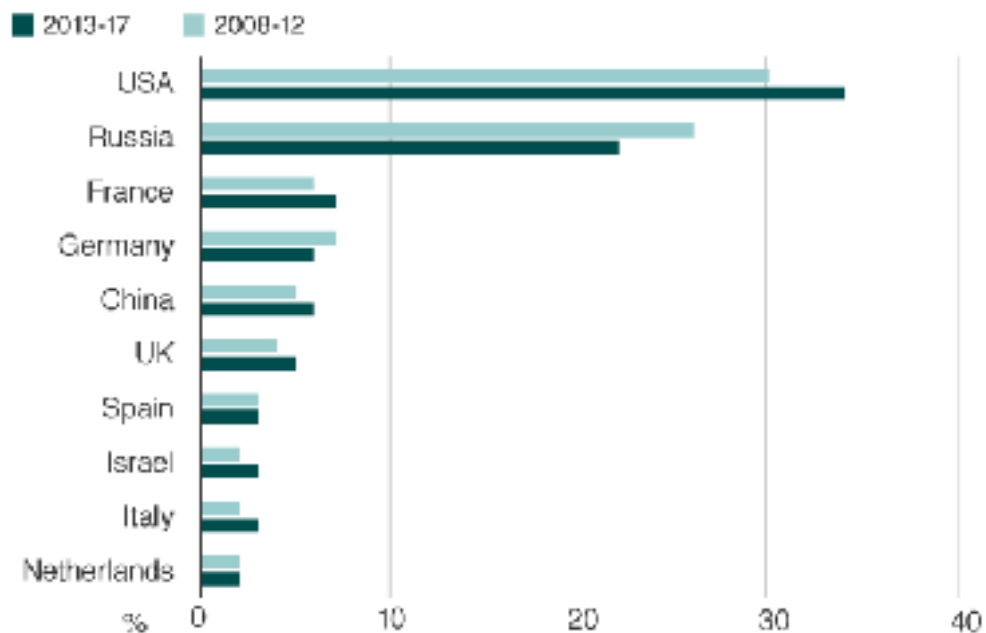
The US-led invasion of Iraq of 2003 along with the issue of Palestinian refugees distinctly added to the already copious amount of small arms in the region. The 2006 Small Arms Survey suggests that Middle Eastern countries rank the highest in gun ownership. It comes as no surprise that arms trafficking enables terrorist organizations to remain in possession of deadly weapons promoting insurgency in urban areas. Arab countries would hence seek to impose stricter regulations upon the illegal trade of arms, focusing especially on the Palestinian Issue, which greatly galvanized illegal arms trafficking and subsequent terrorism in the region.

f) UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

As one of the biggest arms traders, USA has got a major participation in the weapons business. Not only that it represents more than 40% of the world trade of weapons, but 60% of weapons on the 'dark web' originate from the US. Yet still, the United States have demonstrated its unrivaled commitment to combating the adverse effects of the international illicit arms trade by implementing a number of international assistance programs, local laws, national practices and through vigorous engagement around the world. Being part of NATO, the USA keeps close bonds with European states on all Weapon Trade matters. It is of crucial importance to understand that all decisions regarding the trade of weapons will be closely scrutinized by the USA as it may affect its business.

Major arms exporters

Percentage change in market share, 2008-12 to 2013-17



Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

BBC

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM

Since the 1990s, many countries have worked hard to develop an international convention on the illicit arms trade. By unanimously enforcing the **Programme of Action in 2001**, the UN Member States committed themselves to “collecting and destroying illegal weapons, adopting and/or improving national legislation to help criminalize the illicit trade in small arms, regulating the activities of brokers, setting strict import and export controls, taking action against violators of such laws, and better coordinating international efforts to that end.”⁵

In 2006, over a hundred nations in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) have put across their opinions regarding the implementation of a possible **Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)**. After a several years of negotiations, the Arms Trade Treaty entered into force 24 December 2014. The only countries to vote against the treaty as a whole were the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Iran, and the Syrian Arab Republic. “*The Arms Trade Treaty obligates member states to monitor arms exports and ensure that weapons don’t cross existing arms embargoes or end up being used for human-rights abuses, including terrorism. Member states, with the assistance of the U.N., will put into place enforceable, standardized arms import and export regulations and be expected to track the destination of exports to ensure they do not end up in the wrong hands.*”⁶

⁵ http://www.un.org/events/smallarms2006/pdf/press_release.pdf

⁶ <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/un-arms-trade-treaty/>

Furthermore, organizations such as **The United Nations Development Programme** help the affected civilizations to cope with the devastating consequences of illicit arms trafficking.

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