

Karta 1



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I. Introduction

Who supplies gangs with their guns? Where do terrorists get explosives, firearms? When criminals call, the illicit arms trade answers. For decades, this market has intensified armed conflicts, undermined state sovereignty, and empowered terrorist networks by enabling a constant flow of weapons to whomever can pay for them. Its reach destabilizes societies, threatens public safety, and destroys lives. In vulnerable areas burdened by civil war, insurgency, armed conflict, or weak governance, the widespread availability of illicit arms has fueled violence, prolonged conflicts, and significantly increased civilian suffering. In numerous regions, communities are left exposed to armed groups that operate without restraint, resulting in mass displacement, widespread human rights violations, and countless civilian casualties. This unchecked spread of weapons often brings about the collapse of essential infrastructure, including healthcare systems, education, and public services, trapping affected regions in cycles of poverty and instability that are nearly impossible to escape.

Despite efforts by Member States to address this issue through national export controls, stricter border enforcement, and domestic legislation, these measures have proven



insufficient when implemented in isolation. This issue cannot effectively be addressed through unilateral action or isolationist policies, as it is a global threat that demands a unified, coordinated international response. This year's conference theme, *betteR togetheR: Reshaping and Repurposing Multilateral Structures as a Response to Growing Isolationism*, could not be more relevant. Only through collective action and renewed commitment to multilateralism can the international community hope to curb the illicit arms trade and build a more secure and stable world.

II. Key Terms

1. Arms and Disarmament

The term "Arms", short for "Armaments", refers to any type of weaponry or equipment used in combat, self-defense or warfare. To be armed is to carry an arm, and to disarm is to take a weapon or weapons from a person. On an international level, disarmament is the act of reducing or abolishing arms, weapons, and armed conflict. The United Nations have recognized that multilateral disarmament and general arms limitation are central in the pursuit of international peace and security. For this reason, the Disarmament and International Security Committee, or First Committee, was created. It deals with matters concerning threats to security, global peace and, of course, disarmament.¹

2. The Black Market

The infamous Black Market is defined by the trade and exchange of goods and services that, by any means, violates legal restrictions or regulations. It operates by evading national or international regulations and maintaining anonymity. Essentially, it is the illegal global economy. Some of the major markets within the black market include the drug trade, the illicit arms trade and the illegal services market (illegal mining, prostitution, murder-for-hire).²

¹ <https://www.un.org/en/ga/first/#:~:text=The%20First%20Committee%20deals%20with,structured%20into%20three%20distinctive%20stages:>

² https://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/blackmarket.asp#:~:text=Some%20examples%20of%20black%20market%20activity%20include:,checks%20*%20Maki ng%20legal%20markets%20more%20accessible



3. The Dark Web

The Dark Web is the part of the internet that hosts the Black Market. To access, it requires specialized software and therefore ensures a high degree of anonymity for both buyers and sellers. To reduce traceability, payments on the Dark Web are typically conducted using cryptocurrencies. Bitcoin used to be the most widely utilised cryptocurrency across the illegal market, but since law enforcement agencies started developing methods to trace it, others such as Monero, Litecoin or Zcash have gained popularity.³

4. Insurgency

Insurgency is a form of conflict in which a non-state group uses violence to challenge or overthrow a government or authority. Rather than fighting in large, organized battles, insurgents rely on methods like ambushes, sabotage, and hit-and-run attacks, often blending into the civilian population to avoid detection. These movements are usually driven by political, ideological, or social goals and often depend on local support to survive over long periods. Insurgencies help the illicit arms trade flourish: To sustain their operations, Insurgents need weapons, constantly. Since they are typically unable to access arms through legal channels, insurgent groups rely on black markets and smuggling networks to obtain firearms, ammunition, and explosives. The presence of insurgencies increases the demand for illegal weapons and thus sustains and expands the illicit arms trade.⁴

5. Legal Arms Stockpiles and Diversion

Legal arms stockpiles are collections of weapons or other military equipment that are held, owned, and controlled by authorised actors under national or international law. These actors include state armed forces, police, licensed manufacturers and dealers, and legally-registered civilian owners. Many illicit weapons begin as legally produced and distributed arms but cross into illegal circulation due to theft, corruption, illicit resale, or loss of regulatory control. This process is known as „diversion“.⁵

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<https://www.crowdstrike.com/en-us/cybersecurity-101/threat-intelligence/dark-web/#:~:text=Dark%20web%20commerce%20and%20cryptocurrency,illicit%20trade%2C%20driving%20regulatory%20scrutiny.>

⁴ https://undir.org/files/2022-09/UNIDIR_UNODC_Addressing_Linkages_Illicit_Arms_Organized_Crime_Armed_Conflict.pdf

⁵ <https://archive-disarmament.unoda.org/convarms/small-arms-stockpile-management/>



III. General Overview

1. What is the Illicit Arms Trade?

The global illicit arms trade refers to the unauthorized production, transfer, and sale of weapons across borders or within countries, in violation of national or international laws. It operates through complex networks involving arms dealers, smugglers, corrupt officials, and intermediaries that conceal transactions through falsified documentation, shell companies, and covert transport routes. Weapons are usually diverted from legal stockpiles, stolen, or manufactured illegally, then trafficked via land, sea, or air using hidden shipments or misdeclared cargo. This shadow system thrives especially in regions with weak governance, ongoing conflict, or high demand for arms, making it difficult to track and regulate while enabling the continuous flow of weapons into the wrong hands.⁶

2. Relevant Data/Information

Across the globe, illegal arms transactions are estimated to amount to over 7 billion USD annually, which makes up roughly 10-20% of the total legal firearms trade. However, it is important to note that, since most of the data used for these statistics comes from the illicit firearms seizures from police and customs services, this number likely represents only a small fraction of all illicit firearms trafficking. In 2014, the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) estimated that there were almost half a million lost or stolen firearms within the EU.⁷ Historically, major illicit arms trafficking routes have almost always emerged in post-conflict regions. In the midst of weak governance, a high demand for weapons, vulnerable people, and most of all, abandoned legal stockpiles of arms, the illicit arms trade flourishes. This will be talked about more in *Major Trafficking Routes and Networks*.

Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs (OMCGs) are notoriously known to be extremely involved in arms trafficking. In many unstable areas, these gangs have taken control over the local population by terrorizing them with weapons from the illicit arms trade. Typically, criminal organizations use weapons trafficking as a supplementary source of income rather than a primary one. Involvement in this market offers contacts and knowledge of established criminal trading routes

⁶ <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/zh/mun/crime-prevention/firearms.html>

⁷ <https://www.imf.org/en/data/statistics/informal-economy-data/reports/eurostat-trafficking-of-arms>



and infrastructure related to it, which is always good for business and other trafficking activity, thus making this market all the more appealing.⁸

3. Types of Illicit Arms

a. Small Arms

These are defined as small, portable firearms, operated by a single user. Assault rifles, pistols, submachine guns and shotguns are all in this category. They are durable, effective, easy to conceal, and relatively inexpensive to produce and acquire, hence making them very popular in illicit trade. Most of them remain functional for decades, allowing them to be reused and resold many times.⁹

b. Light Weapons

Light weapons, while not as portable, are often bought alongside small arms, usually to be used by a small crew. They include anti-tank missiles, grenade launchers and heavy machine guns. They are useful for more than just self-defense or intimidation and can be very effective in armed conflict, as they are fairly destructive.¹⁰

c. The AK-47 (Kalashnikov)

The AK-47 is, by far, the most popular and widely-bought weapon throughout the entire illicit market. It is an extremely simple, reliable and very cheap small arm that was developed in the Soviet Union. Smuggled in Iraq, it may cost as little as 150 to 300 USD, bought on the American Dark-web, it will likely be around 2,600 USD. Interestingly enough, the price of illegal arms is greatly affected by the distance it must travel, due to the induced risk. From simply crossing the border of the US and Canada, a trafficked handgun can have its price increase by 560%.¹¹

d. Ammunition

⁸ https://www.europol.europa.eu/crime-areas/trade-in-illegal-firearms-and-explosives#:~:text=crime_areas.and%20the%20former%20Soviet%20Union.

⁹

[https://atlasinstitute.org/the-illicit-arms-trade-forever-wars-in-the-global-south/#:~:text=The%20Origin%20of%20Illicit%20Arms,\(Geopolitical%20Monitor%2C%202011\)](https://atlasinstitute.org/the-illicit-arms-trade-forever-wars-in-the-global-south/#:~:text=The%20Origin%20of%20Illicit%20Arms,(Geopolitical%20Monitor%2C%202011)).

¹⁰

[https://atlasinstitute.org/the-illicit-arms-trade-forever-wars-in-the-global-south/#:~:text=The%20Origin%20of%20Illicit%20Arms,\(Geopolitical%20Monitor%2C%202011\)](https://atlasinstitute.org/the-illicit-arms-trade-forever-wars-in-the-global-south/#:~:text=The%20Origin%20of%20Illicit%20Arms,(Geopolitical%20Monitor%2C%202011)).

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arms_trafficking



Although not a firearm, ammunition is a cornerstone of the illicit arms trade and is often considered part of it. While weapons are reusable and lasting, the hunger for ammunition is insatiable. Even in the non-illicit world, an ammunition shortage can be a death sentence.

e. Explosives

Explosives are materials and devices that, in illicit trade, are often improvised/homemade or made out of illegal materials, making them exceptionally unstable. They include pipe bombs, Molotov Cocktails, Modified Explosives and Binary Explosives.^{12 13}

f. Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Materials

The illegal trade of weapons made of CBRN materials is considered a serious threat to international security, as they hold immense destructive power and have only ever been used for mass destruction. Chemical weapons are hazardous industrial chemicals, toxins and warfare agents that are either poisonous or fatal. Biological Weapons are bacteria, viruses or toxins that cause diseases or illnesses, and are, in most cases, fatal. Radiological Weapons are materials that emit ionizing radiation to cause radiation sickness which is, at best, treatable. Lastly, Nuclear Weapons are weapons made of materials such as uranium and plutonium that devastate by detonating.¹⁴

4. Major Trafficking Routes and Networks

a. Sahel-Sahara Corridor

Stretching across countries such as Mali, Niger, Chad, and Sudan, the Sahel–Sahara corridor has, since the collapse of Libyan state authority in 2011, emerged as one of the largest illegal trafficking routes globally. Weapons from former Libyan stockpiles, most of which were originally supplied during the Cold War, enter the circulation and spread southward through long-standing smuggling routes. This region’s vast, barely governed desert terrain enables under-the-radar movement with minimal state oversight. Arms are often traded in secret markets located in border towns, where weapons can be exchanged for cash or natural resources. This corridor

¹²

<https://www.atf.gov/explosives/tools-services-explosives-industry/explosive-products-and-devices/illegal-explosives#:~:text=Improvised%20Explosive%20Devices,to%20possess%20under%20federal%20law>.

¹³

<https://www.atf.gov/explosives/tools-services-explosives-industry/explosive-products-and-devices/binary-explosives#:~:text=Binary%20explosives%20are%20pre%20packaged,Part%20555%20%2D%20Commerce%20in%20Explosives>.

¹⁴ https://www.unodc.org/documents/Maritime_crime/CBRN_Handbook.pdf



heavily sustains regional insurgencies and extremist groups, which continuously recycle weapons through capture, resale, and redistribution. Trafficking here usually involves both small-scale exchanges and larger shipments destined for conflict zones. The corridor thus functions as both a transit route and a regional marketplace for illicit arms.¹⁵



Map of the Sahel-Sahara Corridor¹⁶

b. US-Mexico Border

The US–Mexico border is one of the most extensively documented corridors of illicit arms trafficking in the world. This route became prominent in the late 20th century, along with the rise of organized crime and drug cartels, as firearms legally purchased in the United States started being diverted into illicit markets across the border. A defining trait of this particular route is its north-to-south flow. Weapons are usually trafficked using a strategy law enforcement agencies call the “ant trade”: instead of big shipments, small numbers of firearms are transported repeatedly. This makes these illicit transactions harder to trace, and despite the small scale of each transaction, the collective volume is immense; with thousands of weapons

¹⁵ https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta_sahel/TOCTA_Sahel_firearms_2023.pdf

¹⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sahel>



estimated to cross into Mexico daily. This border exemplifies how legal supply chains can feed illicit networks through diversion rather than outright illegal production.¹⁷

c. Golden Triangle (Myanmar, Thailand, Laos Intersection)

The Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos intersection, also known as the Golden Triangle, has long been associated with narcotics trafficking, but is equally significant as a link for illicit arms. Its role in the arms trade emerged mostly during the Cold War. Over time, weapons circulated beyond their original conflicts, building the foundation of a persistent regional black market. Today, the area remains a hub for illegal trafficking of all sorts due to its rugged terrain, weak border enforcement, and presence of numerous non-state armed groups. Weapons are often trafficked alongside drugs, utilizing the same routes and protection networks, which reduces both costs and risk for traffickers. Unlike more linear routes, trafficking here is highly networked, with arms circulating between multiple actors rather than moving strictly from source to destination.¹⁸



Map of the Golden Triangle¹⁹

¹⁷ <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/firearms/module-4/key-issues/smaller-scale-trafficking-activities.html>

¹⁸ https://www.unodc.org/cld/en/bibliography/2022/synthetic_drugs_in_east_and_southeast_asia_latest_developments_and_challenges.html

¹⁹ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Golden-Triangle-region-Southeast-Asia>



d. Balkan Route

The Balkan route became a critical source of illicit arms after the fall of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, which left large quantities of military-grade weapons unsecured. Little by little, these stockpiles flowed into black markets and trafficked westward into European Union countries. This route typically runs through countries such as Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Albania. Firearms from the Balkans have been linked to organized crime networks and, in some cases, terrorist attacks in Europe, emphasizing not only their maintained decade-old circulation, but also their persistent degree of harm. The trafficking along this route often involves hidden compartments in vehicles or disassembled weapons shipped in parts to evade detection. The route is mainly notable for illustrating how post-conflict environments can generate long-term illicit supply chains.²⁰

e. Durand Line (Afghanistan-Pakistan Border)

The Afghanistan–Pakistan border, commonly referred to as the Durand Line, is one of the most deep-rooted arms trafficking corridors in Asia, shaped by its decades of conflict and geopolitical intervention. Its prominence dates back to the Soviet–Afghan War (1979-1989), where vast quantities of weapons were transported into Afghanistan to later, after the war, diffuse into local and regional markets. The region’s tribal areas, mainly along Pakistan’s former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), became known for illicit arms markets where weapons could be bought, sold, or modified. The corridor continues to function as both a source and transit route, with arms moving into Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. The persistent instability in Afghanistan has sustained demand, while limited state control in border regions facilitates cross-border movement. A notable feature of this route is the production of artisanal weapons, as local gunsmiths replicate and repair firearms to meet ongoing demand. This mix of local manufacture and illicit trade distinguishes it from routes that rely primarily on diversion from industrial stockpiles, such as the US-Mexico Border or the Balkan Route.^{21 22}

²⁰ <https://www.safeseas.net/evidence/2022/10/10/small-arms-and-light-weapons-trafficking/>

²¹ <https://www.rusi.org/publication/small-arms-afghanistan-fostering-conditions-disarmament>

²² <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/smuggling-dynamics-under-taliban-rule/context>



Map of the Durand Line²³

5. Humanitarian Impact

By enabling violence on a massive scale, the global illicit trade of weapons is a direct driver of humanitarian crises across the globe. Conflict zones, where arms regulation is weak and the demand for weapons is high, are particularly affected, as weapons supplied to these areas often end up being used against civilians, destroying homes, hospitals and schools. This devastation leads to mass displacement, deepens poverty, and creates long-term instability, while also facilitating terrorism and prolonging cycles of violence. Thousands of people are killed, injured, and forced to flee their homes daily due to armed conflict and gun violence. In places like Haiti, where an estimated 600,000 illegal firearms are in circulation, illicit weapons have fueled gang violence and contributed to the collapse of essential services and infrastructure. In active conflicts, the influx of bombs, artillery, and explosives accelerates the destruction of critical infrastructure and pushes civilians further into poverty and insecurity. Outside war zones, the widespread availability of illicit firearms creates chronic instability that undermines access to healthcare, education, and basic safety. Ultimately, the illicit arms trade intensifies and prolongs conflicts, erodes human rights and social stability, and creates enduring humanitarian crises that affect entire populations.^{24 25}

²³ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Durand-Line>

²⁴ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/arms-control/>

²⁵ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/11/1166324>



6. Challenges in Combatting the Illicit Arms Trade

a. Balancing Trade Facilitation and Security

Customs agencies operate under a dual responsibility that can create operational challenges, as they must ensure the smooth flow of legitimate trade while also preventing the movement of illicit goods. This balance is challenging to maintain because coordination is often limited by strict structures that are not flexible enough to deal with complex and unpredictable criminal networks. In addition, different agencies may compete over authority and intelligence, which can divert attention away from their primary objective of combatting smuggling operations.²⁶

b. The Difficulty of Monitoring Large and Complex Borders

Managing the physical transportation and geography of borders can be very challenging, as it involves transport infrastructure such as marine ports, roads, coastlines, airports, and terminal hubs and distribution centers, all of which form a complex spatial system that can be difficult to monitor effectively due to the extensive size of some borders.

c. Lack of Resources in Developing Nations

Many developing countries don't have enough resources such as advanced surveillance, drug-sniffer dogs or trailer professionals to monitor their borders and keep records. Furthermore, when a new government is elected, the people who were trained in arms control are replaced, and the country must start all over again, making it challenging to keep up a long-term fight against traffickers.²⁷

d. The Adaption Cycle of Smugglers

Smugglers are opportunistic and learn from the environment. They often use legal disclosures from court cases to understand how they were caught and subsequently evolve their concealment methods. As enforcement agencies adopt new technologies, smugglers respond with their own, such as using drones or semi-submersible vessels to bypass

²⁶ <https://www.worldcustomsjournal.org/article/93062.pdf>

²⁷ <https://academic.oup.com/edited-volume/61655/chapter-abstract/540207419?redirectedFrom=fulltext>



traditional checkpoints. Smuggling organizations are highly adaptable and are able to shift transportation routes when interdiction rates rise in a specific area.

e. New Technology and the Internet

In the past, arms trafficking involved huge shipments, but today it is becoming "democratized," meaning individuals or small groups can do it. They use the Dark Web and encrypted messaging to sell just a few guns at a time. These small, frequent packages are much harder for law enforcement to detect than one large truckload of weapons.²⁸

f. The Ineffectiveness of Countries Cooperating

Due to the fact that every country has different laws and regulations, criminals can easily move guns from a place with weak rules to a place with strict rules. Many countries sign international treaties but then fail to actually change their local laws or share information with their neighbors.²⁹ This lack of trust and cooperation makes it easy for traffickers to operate across borders.³⁰

IV. Major Parties Involved

1. United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA)

The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) is an office of the United Nations Secretariat established in 1998 to promote disarmament and non-proliferation while strengthening international peace and security.³¹ Its goal is to strengthen disarmament regimes for weapons of mass destruction and promote efforts in the area of conventional weapons, particularly landmines and small arms, which are often the weapons of choice in modern conflicts. UNODA is central to addressing the illicit arms trade by supporting the implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), which establishes common international standards to help eradicate the illicit trade in conventional weapons.³² The office's work in this area is organized through several key functions: first, it coordinates the United Nations

²⁸ <https://www.unodc.org/cld/pt/education/tertiary/firearms/module-4/key-issues/consequences-of-illicit-markets.html>

²⁹ <https://disarmament.unoda.org/en/our-work/conventional-arms/small-arms-and-light-weapons#:~:text=Treaties%20and%20Instruments,for%20cooperatio>

³⁰ https://www.international-alert.org/app/uploads/2021/09/Security-TacklingIllicitArmsTrade_EN_2002.pdf

³¹

<https://disarmament.unoda.org/en/our-work/conventional-arms/legal-instruments/arms-trade-treaty#:~:text=Commitment%20to%20regulate:%20Countries%20commit,weapons%20and%20weapons%20stockpile%20management;>

³² <https://disarmament.unoda.org/en/who-we-are/about-unoda>



system on all issues related to the arms trade; second, it builds synergies between the arms trade and efforts to combat the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons; third, it facilitates the prevention of weapon diversion—the process of weapons being sent into illegal markets—through mechanisms like the Diversion Information Exchange Forum (DIEF);³³ and fourth, it provides technical advice and capacity-building to help Member States develop national regulatory systems and safe weapons stockpiles. By fostering transparency and international cooperation, UNODA works to mitigate the human suffering and regional instability caused by the ready availability of illegal weapons and irresponsible arms transfers.

2. European Union (EU)

The European Union identifies illicit firearms trafficking as a priority crime area, noting that this illegal trade generates up to EUR 236 million annually.³⁴ Security is further challenged by the flow of small arms from the Balkans and Eastern Europe, creating proliferation risks as the EU expands toward unstable regions.³⁵ In response, the EU maintains a dual strategy of providing technical assistance to international partners while enforcing strict internal standards for the weapons lifecycle.³⁶ Ultimately, the EU reinforces global peace through the Arms Trade Treaty and its Common Position on exports, which includes mandating strict embargos against aggressors.³⁷

3. United States of America (USA)

The United States is a primary source of illicit arms, via the "Iron Pipeline".³⁸ Because of this, a GAO report found 73% of firearms recovered in the Caribbean trace to U.S. sales.³⁹ More importantly, perhaps, Advisory Opinion 30/2025 defined this trade as a human rights crisis.⁴⁰

³³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Office_for_Disarmament_Affairs

³⁴ <https://www.imf.org/en/data/statistics/informal-economy-data/reports/eurostat-trafficking-of-arms>

³⁵ <https://www.saferworld-global.org/resources/publications/76-organised-crime-corruption-and-illicit-arms-trafficking-in-an-enlarged-eu>

³⁶ <https://unidir.org/unpacking-the-eus-dual-approach-to-tackling-proliferation-of-small-arms/>

³⁷

<https://thearmstradetreaty.org/hyper-images/file/European%20Union%20-%202022%2008%2019%20ATT%20CSP8%20EU%20General%20Statement/Europea n%20Union%20-%202022%2008%2019%20ATT%20CSP8%20EU%20General%20Statement.pdf>

³⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arms_trafficking

³⁹ <https://democrats-foreignaffairs.house.gov/2024/11/new-gao-report-on-gun-trafficking-73-of-guns-recovered-in-caribbean-can-be-traced-back-to-united-states>

⁴⁰ <https://www.ejiltalk.org/the-inter-american-courts-warning-shot-illicit-u-s-firearms-and-the-hemispheric-duty-states-keep-ignoring/>



4. Libya

Following the 2011 revolution, Libya’s unsecured stockpiles transformed the nation into a “supermarket” for illicit arms, fueling regional conflicts in Mali, Gaza, and Syria. Thousands of weapons, including MANPADS, significantly enhanced the military capabilities of various non-state groups. Although proliferation abated after 2013 due to international interventions, a surge in domestic demand later drove up local prices as fighting intensified within Libya itself.⁴¹

5. International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA)

International Action Network on Small Arms is one of the major non-governmental organizations that advocates for the prevention of gun violence by linking civil society organizations worldwide.⁴² As an umbrella network representing over 800 members in 120 countries, it cooperates with international actors to promote the Arms Trade Treaty and increase the participation of women in disarmament processes.⁴³ IANSA is a key NGO for states to know when developing policies for human security through research, advocacy, and effective arms regulation.⁴⁴

V. Timeline of Key Events

Date	Event
1947-1991	The Cold War - Massive quantities of weapons were distributed globally, many of which later leaked into illicit markets after the conflict ended. ⁴⁵
1991	Dissolution of the Soviet Union (USSR) - The collapse of this central power led to the widespread diversion of poorly secured military stockpiles into black markets all over Europe. ⁴⁶
1991-2001	Yugoslav Wars - The large-scale distribution of weapons during these conflicts created long lasting trafficking routes, such as the Balkan Route. ⁴⁷

⁴¹

<https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2106621/brothers-came-back-with-weapons-the-effects-of-arms-proliferation-from-libya/>

⁴² <https://iansa.org/about-us/>

⁴³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Action_Network_on_Small_Arms

⁴⁴ <https://reliefweb.int/organization/iansa>

⁴⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Cold-War>

⁴⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/event/the-collapse-of-the-Soviet-Union>

⁴⁷ <https://thedefensepost.com/2020/07/30/weapons-yugoslavia-europe/>



- 2011 Libyan Civil War - The collapse of Libyan state authority opened access to major weapons stockpiles that diverted into the illicit trade and have by now spread all across North Africa, notably through the Sahel-Sahara Corridor.⁴⁸
- 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine - Large-scale military shipments have raised concerns about the potential leakage of weapons into illicit trade.⁴⁹

VI. Previous and Possible Solutions

Previous Efforts

- **The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)**

This treaty sets rules and standards for the general global arms trade, in particular barring exports where there is a considerable risk that arms would be used to commit violations of international law. It emphasizes international human rights and humanitarian law as a basis for the entire global arms trade.⁵⁰

- **Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition**

This Protocol aims to strengthen international cooperation as a means to combat the illicit arms trade. It requires states to criminalize illicit arms production and trade, establish licensing systems to regulate legal firearms activity, and ensure weapons are properly marked and traceable.⁵¹

- **Geneva Conventions, Additional Protocol 1, Article 35**

These principles highlight that not all weapons are lawful and that the employment of weapons that cause injury, suffering or severe damage to the environment is prohibited.⁵²

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<https://prismeinitiative.org/publications/libyas-political-crisis-dina-mansour-ille/#:~:text=For%20over%20a%20decade%2C%20Libya.interests%20of%20the%20intervening%20powers.>

49 <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine/The-Russian-invasion-of-Ukraine>

50 <https://thearmstradetreaty.org/treaty-text.html?templateId=209884>

51

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/organized-crime/intro/UNTOC.html#:~:text=The%20objective%20of%20the%20Protocol.ENGLISH%20%2D%20FRENCH%20%2D%20RUSSIAN%20%2D%20SPANISH>

52 <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/api-1977/article-35>



- **United Nations Registry of Conventional Arms (UNROCA)**

In 1991, The UN General Assembly established the UNROCA to foster transparency in armaments. Annually, Member States are requested to report their international transfers of conventional arms, small arms, and light weapons. This Register is estimated to capture 90% of the global arms trade.⁵³

- **Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)**

This is, internationally, the primary legal framework that prohibits the development, production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons and demands their destruction.⁵⁴

Possible Solutions

- **International and Regional Collaboration**

Considering the fact that the illicit trafficking of firearms is completely linked to transnational organized crime and terrorism, it represents a "network of threats" that endangers peace and security on a global scale.⁵⁵ Consequently, a "collaborative approach" is essential, requiring member states to unite their efforts at both regional and international levels rather than acting in isolation. This is particularly vital in regions like Central Asia, where a unified response is necessary to prevent weapons from falling into the hands of terrorists, especially during emerging regional crises.⁵⁶

- **Capacity Building and Legislative Reform**

A central strategy for combatting this trade involves enhancing the internal capabilities of states through specialized training and the modernization of legal frameworks. By conducting capacity consultations and workshops for hundreds of national experts, this

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<https://disarmament.unoda.org/en/our-work/cross-cutting-issues/military-confidence-building-measures/register-conventional-arms#:~:text=The%20UN%20General%20Assembly%20established,to%20promote%20transparency%20in%20armaments.>

⁵⁴ <https://www.opcw.org/chemical-weapons-convention>

⁵⁵ <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/firearms-protocol/the-firearms-protocol.html>

⁵⁶ <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/en/events/unoct-and-unodc-strengthen-ballistic-and-forensic-capacities-tajikistan-and-uzbekistan>



approach focuses on improving national legislation and fostering cooperation. These targeted efforts are designed to provide officials with the necessary tools and legal authority to effectively disrupt the flow of illegal arms and strengthen criminal justice responses to ensure traffickers are successfully prosecuted.⁵⁷

- **The Deployment of Special Investigative Techniques**

These techniques such as undercover operations, electronic surveillance, and controlled deliveries allow authorities to infiltrate criminal rings and track illegal shipments in real-time, which is vital for identifying the key organizers and financial resources of a group rather than just seizing isolated weapons.⁵⁸ This intelligence-led approach is strengthened by the marking and tracing of firearms at the points of manufacture and import.⁵⁹ By ensuring every weapon has a unique serial number and origin data, law enforcement can trace the path of diverted arms back to the exact moment they left the legal market, exposing the specific actors responsible for the "leakage" into the black market.⁶⁰

- **Disrupting the Physical and Financial movement of illicit weapons**

This requires a multi-pronged strategy that addresses both the sources of the arms and the routes used by traffickers. To physically halt these flows, it is essential to provide structured support for state-building and local law enforcement, particularly in conflict-afflicted regions, to enhance their ability to police remote areas and suppress non-state actors responsible for trafficking. This effort can be strengthened through regional organizations—such as ECOWAS or the Caribbean Community—receiving military intelligence and specialized training from third-party states to better secure porous borders. On the financial front, disrupting the money laundering and globalized finance networks that abet the multi-billion dollar illicit trade is critical for cutting off the resources of terrorist and criminal groups. To stop the flow at its origin, major source countries would need to implement stricter restrictions on civilian weapon ownership to prevent legally manufactured arms from being diverted into the black market in the first place.⁶¹

⁵⁷ https://www.unodc.org/roca/Multimedia/toc_day_2024/combating-the-illicit-arms-trade_-_insights-from-unodcs-expert.html

⁵⁸ <https://www.unodc.org/cld/ar/education/tertiary/terrorism/module-12/key-issues/special-investigative-techniques.html>

⁵⁹

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/firearms-protocol/news/2025/five-ways-countries-can-work-together-against-firearms-trafficking.html?testme%20>

⁶⁰ <https://www.interpol.int/Crimes/Firearms-trafficking/Illicit-Arms-Records-and-tracing-Management-System-iARMS>

⁶¹ <https://atlasinstitute.org/the-illicit-arms-trade-forever-wars-in-the-global-south/>



VII. Conclusion

The illicit arms trade remains a complex, evolving threat to global security, encompassing everything from conventional firearms to catastrophic CBRN materials. This illegal economy is sustained by geographically diverse corridors—such as the Sahel-Sahara and Balkan routes—where post-conflict stockpiles and weak state oversight allow weapons to flow into the hands of insurgents and criminal networks. While established routes like the US-Mexico border rely on "ant trade" methods, the modern landscape is increasingly "democratized" by the Dark Web, which utilizes encryption and cryptocurrencies to evade traditional detection. The human cost is devastating, as these weapons drive humanitarian crises and long-term instability in regions such as Haiti. Although international frameworks like the Arms Trade Treaty and the UN Firearms Protocol provide a legal basis for regulation, their effectiveness is often limited by resource constraints in developing nations and the superior adaptability of smugglers. Consequently, ensuring international peace requires a robust, collaborative strategy that combines specialized investigative techniques, rigorous firearm marking, and the disruption of illegal globalized financial networks to halt the flow of illicit arms at their source.

VIII. Questions to Consider

- What are the main drivers of the illicit arms trade?
- How do gaps in international arms regulations enable the growth of illicit arms trafficking networks?
- To what extent are state actors careless toward the illicit arms trade?
- How does the illicit arms trade influence the duration and escalation of armed conflicts?
- What role do organized crime groups play in the global distribution of illegal weapons?
- How effective are current international efforts at tracking and intercepting illicit arms flows?
- In what ways does corruption facilitate the diversion of legal weapons into illegal markets?



- Should tighter controls on legal arms exports be prioritized as a strategy to reduce illicit trade?

IX. Bibliography & Sources for further research

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