



## **Intercepting Weapons Flows to Rebellion Groups**

**General Assembly 1**

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## Introduction

Wars necessitate the allocation of resources. Combatants require resources to finance the conflict, procure weapons and equipment, and pay soldiers. Following the end of the Cold War, many combatants and would-be rebels sought alternative sources of revenue, funding the majority of their military operations through partnerships with armed groups, arms merchants, international organized crime, and corrupt governments that extend far beyond war zones to the world's capitals and major financial centres.

Civil wars are fuelled by a variety of economic activities and resource flows. Some are legal, while others are illegal; some are required for civilian welfare (which may precede or be exacerbated by conflict), while others are predatory. Although some of these activities directly feed armed conflict, most economic behaviour contributes to conflict in more diffuse and indirect ways, with some also playing a critical role in civilian populations' livelihoods.

This complex reality poses a two-fold challenge for policymakers: accurately assessing the impact of discrete economic behaviours on conflict dynamics and designing effective policy responses.

Currently, there is an alarming number of weapons being supplied to rebellion groups spanning from Syria to Nigeria in illegal manners. It can be argued that these rebellion groups need a flow of weapons in order to protect their people or nations, but a large majority of these rebellion groups are only causing additional harm to the area and people.

This research report will tackle the cause and effects of illicit arms trade and how to prevent or solve the issue.

## Definition of Key Terms

### **Brokering**

Brokering is a term widely used when referring to the arrangement or negotiation of a situation. In this issue brokering occurs when groups broker deals for the flow of weapons, money and military aid that benefit both sides but in many cases, not their surroundings.

### **Trafficking**

Trafficking is a very wide term that generally refers to the act of conducting business in an often illegal way. This means the buying, selling or transporting of goods that are not usually available in the free market. In this Issue Weapons/arms trafficking will be the most heavily discussed, however, there are many other linked trafficking issues such as Human trafficking and narcotics trafficking that affect these.



### **Illicit Arms**

Illicit arms are simply used when discussing weapons or arms that are illegal. Illicit arms trafficking is often discussed as to when gunrunning - when there is illicit trade of contraband, ammunition and small arms.

### **Combatant**

A combatant is simply a nation, group of people or person that is engaged in fighting during a war. In this case, many combatants will be mentioned from both the rebellion groups and governments.

### **Commercial Partnership**

This is when at least two people or groups of people work under the same name. Many groups form these partnerships to ensure the flow of weapons remains constant.

### **Resource flows - in war**

The illicit trade of arms to countries and rebel troops. Often used to stimulate the supplier's economy and to support a side in a war without directly interfering.

### **SALW**

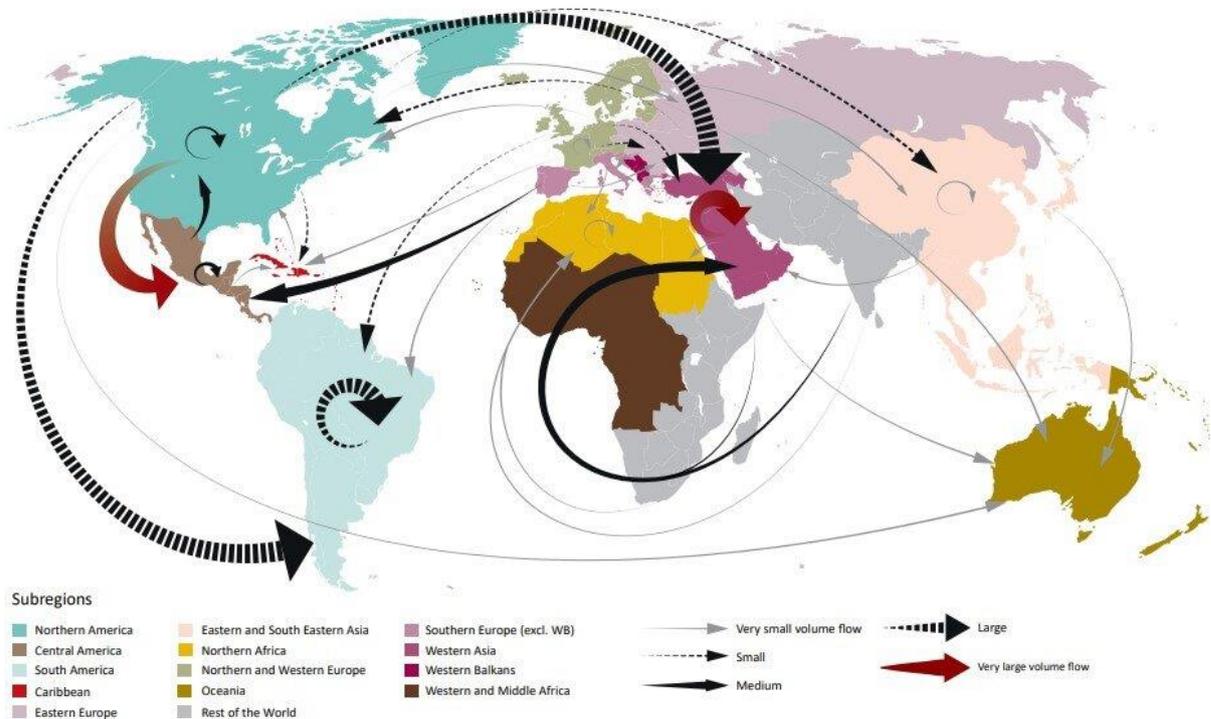
The abbreviation for small and lightweight weapons, mainly used when discussing the export of weaponry.

## **General Overview**

The illicit arms trade is a widespread and pressing problem, with many countries such as the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China participating in it. The UN has expressed its desire to prevent this trade, but as it stands now it is still an active problem. This trade is most prominent in the Sub-Saharan regions, where civil unrest in many of these regions is common. One of the reasons that banning these weapon flows is so difficult, is that it plays an important yet ambiguous role in the peace and security of the region.

On one hand, it fuels the many conflicts that plague the region, but on the other hand, it allows for legitimate defence and multilateral peace operations. The seemingly simple problem is far from that. However, the widespread concern about the risk of these arm trades has resulted in global discussions about the need for regulation.

Of course, there is also authorised arms trade, a more preferable means of procurement by far, but also more expensive. The five largest exporters of authorised weaponry are: Germany, the United States of America, France, the Russian Federation and the Peoples Republic of China. The five largest legal importers are Saudi Arabia, India, Egypt, Australia and Algeria.



#### *Authorised import and export of arms (Amnesty International)*

Sub-Saharan Africa (excluding South Africa) is responsible for 1.5% of the volume of world imports of major arms in 2006-2010. Although this is low by global standards, with little to no indigenous arms-production capacity in these regions, most of the regions rely on imported arms for any of their weaponry.

Countries all around the world have been supplying these regions with arms, China, Russia and Ukraine consistently being among the largest suppliers. Due to lack of accurate information, it is difficult to tell how many small arms and light weapons (SALW) and other military equipment have been transferred to specific regions, but available open sources of information show that transports of these SALW's in 2006-10 have been common, as many countries and rebel groups have undoubtedly been supplied with a large amount of these weapons.

The motives for arms transfers to Sub-Saharan Africa are diverse, such as the financial revenue - although not as much as if they were sold to other countries- and to strengthen political ties within these countries to secure and better obtain the many precious natural resources that Africa contains. The illegal arms trade generates something between 125 to 236 million euros which represents between 10-20% of the total trade in legal firearms. Considering the lack of information these estimations are far from precise, further stressing the importance of intergovernmental transparency.



Intergovernmental transparency is crucial to continue the debate about how military assistance of Sub-Saharan African states should be taken into account in discussions on arms regulation in the region. While countries in the region have expressed that they want better regulations on the arms trade, their low level of participation in the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNRCA) - the key intergovernmental reporting instruments on conversational arms- casts doubt on their willingness to actively control arms.

Public debate about arms procurement is often based on incomplete and confusing information which emerges only after key decisions have been made. Another example of why proper information is so vital. Currently, a major problem is the differing effects of supplying these regions with arms. The least controversial arms supplies are those aimed at improving African states' capabilities to participate in peace operations, even though these supplies remain insufficient to fulfil the needs of regional peacekeepers. However, in the majority of the cases, arms supplied to Sub-Saharan Africa have had undesired effects, such as:

1. The supply of arms can be argued to have been an incentive for the recipients to try to achieve their goals via violence instead of dialogue.
2. Arms have been used in human rights violations.
3. Arms recipients often cannot secure their stockpiles and weapons have been lost to stolen, including by rebellion groups.
4. Arms recipients have deliberately diverted weapons to targets of UN embargoes or rebel groups in neighbouring countries
5. Arms supplied to governments have been turned against those governments in military coups.

Considering how heavily the negatives outweigh the positives, it is clear that the arms trade is ultimately a terrible thing. It ensures human rights violations and threatens the stability of an already unstable region.

## Major Parties Involved

### **People's Republic of China**

As consistently among the largest suppliers, along with Russia and Ukraine, China is an active supplier of arms to these Sub-Saharan regions. In particular, China longs for more control over Africa and its natural resources, essentially collecting favours and debt to gain more control over them. China already does this by giving out massive loans and when the country inevitably can't pay it back, China asks for land. The same principle gets applied here. China is using the conflicts within these regions for their own gain, not caring about the many human rights violations that their weapons facilitate.

### **The Russian Federation**

As another one of the largest suppliers of arms, Russia has, according to official data, more than 2 million unregistered arms. Experts however argue that that number is actually closer to 10 million unregistered arms, clearly displaying the inaccuracy of data concerning these illicit arms. The illicit arms exports consist of 5-15% of all the



weapon exports of Russia. In reality, the number could be much higher, as Russia is also trading these arms with weapon embargoed countries and armed conflicts. The revelation of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's plans to supply militants from the terrorist organization FARC, operating in Colombia, with Russian weapons set off one of the biggest International scandals of modern time. It is unlikely that this could have happened without Russian knowledge.

### **Ukraine**

Ukraine has implemented numerous measures to combat corruption, organized crime and IFFs (Illicit Financial Flows) in the country, providing a positive example for the region. Despite this progress, Ukraine still deals with active criminal networks inside and outside the country and remains a transit country for traffickers and launderers. This criminal activity is perceived to be because of the economic burden that is the Russian threat to Ukraine. It is therefore a reasonable conclusion to make that if the Russian threat would cease, the criminal activity in Ukraine would decrease.

### **France**

As one of the largest authorised arms exporters, it is only natural that France would be interested in the prevention of illicit arms trade. In fact, France has been particularly vocal on the matter. France has been taking special action on the matter, the first was a framework *United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects* and since then significant progress has been made.

### **United States of America**

The United States of America has had a divided opinion on illicit arms. George W. Bush opposed many treaties that insist that national controls are better. And the then Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton said that the United States of America would support the talks as long as the negotiation forums, the Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty, "operates under the rules of consensus decision-making". During the Obama administration, president Barrack Obama did turn back most of George W. Bush's policy's on illicit arms trade for the better, but still maintained the United State's insistence that decisions on treaties be unanimous.

## Timeline of Key Events

- 1914-1918      One of the first most widespread cases of illicit arms trade, in World War 1, illicit arms trade was most commonly used to supply local resistance/militia.
- 1939-1945      In the Second World War, illicit arms trade was mostly used to resupply ammunition to the front lines for both the Axis and the Allies. The Japanese for example used long hazardous underground tunnels to supply their frontlines with ammunition and weaponry



1950s to 2000s	In the 20 <sup>th</sup> century, illicit arms trade became far more prominent. According to an AIC report titled, 'The Licensing and Registration Status of Firearms used in Homicide', it stated that between June 30, 1990, and July 1, 1991, 42.5% of the Firearms used to commit homicide were either standard shotguns and/or rifles in which these are a part of the small arms/light weaponry family. handguns and pistols came second only committing about 26%.
2000's to present day	At the start of the 21 <sup>st</sup> century, the world became more and more dependent on innovative technology. The distance between developed and less developed countries started to become a larger and larger gap. Therefore almost out of necessity, poorer countries started to deal in illicit arms, if only as a way to stay competitive on the world stage.

## Previous attempts to resolve the issue

A treaty was signed under the United Nations in Stockholm named "Prohibiting Arms Transfers to Non-State Actors and the Arms Treaty". The UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) commissioned this work as part of its project "Supporting the Arms Trade Treaty Negotiations through Regional Discussions and Expertise Sharing." With UNIDIR's permission, this article has been reprinted. The views expressed here are not necessarily those of the United Nations, UNIDIR, or its sponsors. See Appendix 1 with files.

The United Nations also released information which can be seen in this article based on four main ways to reduce misuse of small arms and overall gun violence. Attempts to resolve this issue affect the overall issue of weapons flow as they aim to reduce the overall production. See released chronicle in Appendix 2.

Additionally, the well-known Arms Trade treaty (ATT) can be seen as an attempt to solve the issue, as it established common rules for weapons trades that encourage fair distribution to the right groups. This treaty however has failed to prevent the flow through corrupt governments or external suppliers. See Appendix 3 for a summary of the treaty.

Finally, France has proposed the *United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects* which, ever since it passed, has helped significantly to reduce the illicit arms trade. It has attempted to control the proliferation of ammunition and to help the sharing of information between countries.

## Possible Solutions

Recognizing the link between the legal and illegal domains in the case of small arms is a critical step toward disarmament. The illegal small arms stockpile is a stockpile of



previously legal arms. This is because almost all small arms in the world were manufactured legally, in factories that were authorized (and often owned) by a national government.

The possibility of the product becoming illegal arises only when it leaves the factory and enters the supply chain. Depending on who has the gun in their possession, the same gun can be legal or illegal at different points in the chain of commerce.

A factory, for example, sells small arms to government agencies and gun dealers in a legal manner. Some of those legal guns are stolen and become illegal as a result of insecure storage by the purchasers. Another common way for government weapons to become illegal is when users (such as soldiers or police officers) sell their duty weapons to criminals to supplement their meagre pay.

The path from legal to illegal can include 'grey' areas where a weapon's legal status is unclear. Soldiers who are retiring or demobilizing frequently keep the guns they used for duty, which is legal in some countries. However, if an ex-soldier is unable to find work, he or she may use the weapon to rob a store (which is illegal) or sell it to a friend (illegal). In a non-conflict country such as the United States, a private citizen with no criminal record could buy a gun from an ex-soldier (legal) or a gunshop (legal), then sell it to a stranger at a garage sale (legal or illegal, depending on local state or city law). The stranger could either sell it to a criminal gang (illegal) or keep it at home (possibly legal), where it could be stolen by a burglar (illegal), or taken to school by his adolescent son to impress his peers (illegal). A firearm's lethal potential is unaffected by its legal status.

Because the legal arms industry supplies the illegal arms market (intentionally or otherwise), the key to reducing the latter is to exert tighter control over the former, preventing legal weapons from crossing over into the illegal domain. Measures to track weapons and identify points of diversion, systems to ensure physical security, and built-in monitoring and verification mechanisms should all be part of that control regime. Weak points in a regulatory framework become loopholes, allowing traffickers and ordinary people to exploit them in order to avoid bureaucratic procedures.

Delegates can therefore encourage more control over the suppliers themselves. Additionally, the well known Arms Trade treaty (ATT) can be seen as an attempt to solve the issue, as it established common rules for weapons trades that encourage fair distribution to the right groups. This treaty however has failed to prevent the flow through corrupt governments or external suppliers. See Appendix 3 for a summary of the treaty.

## Appendix/Appendices

- Appendix 1 - UNIDIR arms treaty  
<https://www.unidir.org/files/medias/pdfs/background-paper-prohibiting-arms->



[transfers-to-non-state-actors-and-the-arms-trade-treaty-paul-holtom-eng-0-259.pdf](#)

- Appendix 2 - Ways to reduce gun violence UN release chronicle  
<https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/small-arms-no-single-solution>
- Appendix 3 - Arms Trade Treaty Summary (ATT)  
[https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/arms\\_trade\\_treaty](https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/arms_trade_treaty)
- Appendix 4- Illegal Arms Trafficking — Illicit trade  
<https://illicittrade.org/illegal-arms-trafficking>
- [U.S. reverses stance on treaty to regulate arms trade | Reuters](#)

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