

General Assembly 1

Measures against illegal arms trade



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Forum: General Assembly 1

Issue: Measures against illegal arms trade

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Introduction

For many decades, the trade in weapons including the illegal trade has been one of the most profitable businesses in the world as the income increases every year. The easily accessible and available scope causes human suffering, crime, and terror among populations. In addition, the illegal arms trade can destabilize a region, and heighten human rights abuses and political repression. Countries that are already struggling with issues such as internal or external conflicts, extensive crime, and developing economies are harmed extensively as they have the most difficulty patrolling this business and therefore they struggle to attain internationally agreed upon goals.

Definition of Key Terms

Black markets: Any market where the exchange of goods and services takes place in order to facilitate the transaction of illegal goods and/or to avoid government oversight

Gray Markets: a market/trade that legally sells new products outside of a company's authorized distribution channels.

illicit: Forbidden by law, rules, or custom.

Licit: Not forbidden

Destabilize: Upset the stability of (a region or system)

Scope: general Term for all important weapon systems including battle tanks, armed personnel carriers, artillery, fighter jets, attack helicopters, warships, missiles, and small arms and light weapons.

Lucrative: Producing a great deal of profit.

Arms Embargo: a restriction or a set of sanctions that applies either solely to weaponry or also to "dual-use technology.



General Overview

Introduction and weapons:

The illegal trade of weapons refers to the unauthorized and unrestricted trafficking of multiple types of weapons, such as firearms, ammunition, explosives, and other related military equipment outside of legal frameworks, across and within national borders worldwide. The scope of arms trafficking is categorized into Small Arms and Light Weapons referred to as SALW and Heavy Weapons. The SALW includes handguns, rifles, and light machine guns. These are quite popular as they are easily accessible and simple to conceal. Then Heavy Weapons include larger firearms, missiles, and military equipment which are also commonly traded but are more difficult to conceal. The Small Arms Survey estimates that of the one billion firearms in global circulation as of 2017, 857 million (85 percent) are in civilian hands, 133 million (13 percent) are in military arsenals, and 23 million (2 percent) are owned by law enforcement agencies.

Key Actors/Groups:

There are many key actors in the illegal arms trade such as criminal organizations, terrorist organizations, and corrupt officials. Criminal organizations use it as a lucrative source of income and to maintain power. Similar terrorist organizations use it to acquire weapons for their illegal activities. Corrupt officials often engage in the trafficking of illegal arms by facilitating their movement or choosing to overlook activities by exploiting their position. They do this either out of personal ideologies or more commonly for personal gain or because of bribery. Related to corrupt officials there are cases where governments get involved in the illegal trade of arms for reasons such as economic/financial motives or attempts to influence a conflict either internal or external. Their involvement can range from directly supplying a group to secretly facilitating a shipment of weapons. Adding on another group that is a key actor in the trade business are arms manufacturers and brokers. Their activities are originally legal as making and exporting weapons in an ethical way is legal, however, when they engage in the illicit trade of weapons by selling their weapons outside of an authorized network it is illegal. Another small involvement in the illegal arms trade is individual traffickers. These people often engage in the physical trading of weapons on a much smaller scale. In addition, their motifs, like the motifs of many other groups are also for profit. Overall the motifs within the worldwide business are the immense profit that can be made from it, the fact that illicit arms can sustain an ongoing conflict by arming certain groups with weapons, and certain parties such as terrorist groups can use weapons to conduct attacks. Understanding the involvement and motifs of all people and groups within the illegal trade of arms is crucial to tackling the issue and finding effective strategies.

Methods:

Not only are the different groups important, but understanding their methods is just as significant. The way that these weapons are being traded so easily is through methods such as transport across borders, black markets, the use of false documents, and more. Most common is that arms are being smuggled into countries across their borders especially if there is weak border control or corruption. Smugglers can do this through means such as hiding in compartments of vehicles or crossing through remote/unmonitored areas. If the border control is weak or corrupted it is easy for the smugglers to bribe or pay off the patrollers allowing them to freely cross the border. Secondly, black markets are popular as they aren't patrolled by governments. These markets connect buyers, sellers, and others



through covert networks to sell goods, such as weapons. The networks are secret and encrypted making it difficult to track down the source and destination of a traded weapon. Another popular method used by criminal organisations are the use of forged documents to conceal the origin and destination of a weapon to ship it off to its destination without complications. Ironically some traffickers use legal routes to do their illegal business by concealing weapons between legitimate goods hoping to exploit the weaknesses with the cargo inspection. These legal routes are mostly on land but sea and air routes shouldn't be disregarded. Much cargo is transported through those routes as well.

Impact:

The usage and trade of illegal arms have nothing but a negative effect on our world. The illegal arms trade contributes to human rights abuses, such as gun violence, which leads to many casualties of innocent civilians. It also contributes to the overall violence of our society. Specifically, it increased gender-based violence. Women and girls are often the victims of armed conflict, especially in conflict zones, resulting in psychological and physical damage. Also, illegal arms always seem to find a way into conflict zones initiating new conflicts and aggravating ongoing conflicts causing more casualties and destruction. Illegal arms often fall into the hands of terrorists which increases terrorist attacks causing destabilization and unwanted mortalities in attacked regions. In addition, it can cause political instability in countries causing the government's ability to rule and keep order to weaken which could lead to an even unsafe living environment. Furthermore, most of the time it is directly linked to other illegal activities such as drug and human trafficking as criminals use weapons to facilitate their illicit activities which increases the growth of criminal networks. Although the impact of the illegal arms trade is mainly about security and safety it also has minor economic and environmental impacts. For instance, the funds that are going into the illegal arms trade could have gone into the development of important aspects of society that benefit all such as education, infrastructure, and healthcare. For the environment, it has consequences as the weapons can damage or contaminate ecosystems. Overall the impact the illegal arms trade has on our world is grave.

Major Parties Involved

USA:

The market in the US is large due to the fact that it serves as both a source and destination for difficult to purchase firearms, including machine guns. The US is a major provider of illicit foreign weapons and ammunition in Brazil and is responsible for a large quantity of the arms seized in Mexico. The weapons that are sourced from the US often end up in the hands of gangs, drug traffickers, and terrorist organizations both inside and outside the country. In recent years, the US has seen an increase in gun violence with a record number of domestic gun-related deaths, including suicides, homicides, and mass shootings sparking a global debate on gun control.

The region of middle eastern Africa:

Many African countries such as DRC, Somalia, Sudan, and more are major parties involved in arms trafficking worldwide. Africa is extremely popular for arms trafficking as it provides arms traffickers with a "headquarters", as it has plenty of unoccupied land, and many



countries have a corrupt system making it easy for traffickers to smuggle weapons, etc. The corrupt governments lead to government officials allegedly supplying armed groups with weapons, which are being diverted into illicit circulation. In addition, numerous countries have internal or external conflicts increasing the need for weapons and therefore expanding the flow of illegal arms trafficking.

Russia:

They are the second largest licit arms exporter, supplying major powers in the world such as India and China. In addition, it is host to a vast and rampant illegal arms market. Due to the conflict in Ukraine, the flow of arms trafficking in and out of the country increased immensely, where a significant percentage of the weapons exported from Russia were from black or grey markets. Russia has as well been reportedly receiving munitions and military hardware coming from Iraq through Iranian weapons smuggling networks. The development of the war in Ukraine is having major effects on international arms trafficking.

Timeline of Events

16th-17th century: The European traders laid down the foundation for the international arms trade when they started shipping arms to African, American, and Asian markets.

18th-19th century: Many new developments were being made in the weapon industry which significantly impacted international relationships in Europe. As more developed weapons were being manufactured the already existing tensions between countries began to rise. Towards the end of the 19th century arms manufacturers were privately owned and despite having trade control they had little to no government control.

1945-1950: After World War II there was a rapid increase of surplus military weapons which contributed to the growth of the illegal arms trade.

1950-1980 (Cold War Era): Both superpowers, the USA and Russia, were the two main exporters of that time, exporting arms to their allies around the world and enhancing conflicts in countries such as Vietnam and Afghanistan.

1990-1999 (Post Cold War Era): After the Cold War the major political and economic transitions which followed had a huge impact on the arms trade, mainly in third world countries. The formal dissolution of the Soviet Union caused the fall of many of Russia's arms agreements, while the USA continued to be the main supplier of arms in third world countries.

1994: The Rwandan genocide highlighted the devastating impact that the illicit arms trade has on society. The Rwandan people were prime victims of the illicit trade as the genocide involved significant usage of machetes, firearms, and SALW.

1995: The Dayton Accords, a peace agreement made by the President of Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia, are about outlining a general framework for peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



In addition, the framework included provisions for the control and reduction of arms in the region.

1997: An arms embargo on Sierra Leone is executed by the UN because of the involvement of illegal weapons in the civil conflict. Even when the war was winding down importers continued to import weapons into the conflict causing more casualties than needed.

1997: The UN adopts the Firearms Protocol as a replacement to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), addressing illicit manufacturing and trafficking of weapons.

2006: The UN holds a Small Arms review conference to assess the progress in implementing the 2001 Program of Action on small arms and light weapons. The program provides the framework for activities to combat the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

2013: The UN implements the Arms Trade Treaty, which aims to regulate the international trade of arms to prevent their divergence to the illicit market. The Arms Trade Treaty is signed by 130 UN countries and aims to regulate international trade by establishing international standards that all countries aim to follow.

2014: Arms embargoes are imposed once again by the UN on Houthi rebels, which are a rebel group in Yemen at war with the Yemeni government. The arms embargo aimed to highlight the role of external actors who were importing weapons to exacerbate conflict. In addition, it aimed to reduce the conflict itself.

2020-2023: Many ongoing conflicts within the Middle East and Africa continue to be fuelled by the illicit trade of weapons. Moreover, the advanced technologies that are constantly being made continue to raise new challenges to stop the illegal arms trade.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

The Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (PoA) was implemented in 2001 by the UN. This meant that there was a globally agreed upon set of agreements to stop the illicit trade of arms and control all consequences in the present and future. In addition, it encouraged the cooperation of member states and organizations to accomplish shared goals. Since 2001 the UN has aimed to support the program on national, regional, and international levels. The UN has as well hosted multiple conferences and meetings centred around the program in the following years. However, the basis of the program is to have member states send national reports about their arms trade to the UN. During the first few years, this worked effectively yet as the years passed the frequencies of countries decreased, reducing the efficiency of the program. Member states were not obliged to do anything therefore the efforts of some countries were higher than that of others.



Years later in 2013, the UN introduced the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). This was the first legally binding treaty negotiated by the UN to create standards for the arms trade worldwide. The objective of the ATT is to establish international standards for regulating the international trade in arms, to prevent and eradicate illicit trade in arms, and to prevent the diversion of such arms. The treaty started with a request from the General Assembly for the Secretary General to get the opinions of member states on the basics of an arms trade treaty. In 2007 over 100 countries gave their views and indicated the importance of such a treaty. A Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) was also implemented to give their views on whether an arms trade treaty was possible and how it would be. In resolution 64/48 from 2009 passed by the General Assembly it was decided to hold a United Nations Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty for four consecutive weeks in 2012 to create a detailed legally binding treaty on the international standards for the transfer of arms. During the process of creating the treaty, there was much discussion as many countries had divergent views. However, during the final conference delegations showed a cooperative attitude toward creating an agreed-upon treaty. Although the draft treaty text was not adopted due to objections from the delegations of Islamic Republic of Iran, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and the Syrian Arab Republic the conference did produce a strong draft resolution which was almost globally accepted. Even though the ATT could be highly effective similar to the PoA it lacks global participation and does not force countries to do anything. Since they are global guidelines countries do not face consequences if they do not enforce these guidelines. In addition, the international and illicit arms trade is intricate meaning it isn't that simple.

Possible Solutions

The first solution is to strengthen international cooperation. This means cooperation among countries, organizations, and even populations. If cooperation is enhanced, organizations, countries, and law enforcement agencies can share information, intelligence, resources, and best practices for preventing illicit arms trafficking. Collaboration among developed and developing countries is important as LEDCs often don't have this information, resources, etc. In addition, involving non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in efforts to combat the illicit arms trade can raise awareness, monitor activities, and hold governments accountable. Raising awareness is crucial as it can educate populations about the dangers of arms, specifically illicit arms. It is important to promote responsibility among individuals. As well, individuals can report suspicious behaviour to officials. Involving these smaller groups into the cooperation to prevent the consequences of the illicit arms trade is vital.

Secondly, improving the tracing and marking of arms can reduce the illicit arms trade. For instance implementing a standardized marking procedure, ensuring all weapons are marked with a unique marking such as serial numbers, barcodes, or other distinct identifiers that allow for easy tracking and tracing. In addition, enhancing current tracking technology will ensure that weapons diverting into the flow of illicit arms trade are easily found. Similarly



maintaining complete databases to store information about these marked firearms, including the information about the supplier, importer, and manufacturer of the weapon. The databases should be regularly updated to make sure all data is up to date, making it easier to allocate the weapons. However, it is crucial to guarantee this collaboration among member states for the effectiveness of the before mentioned systems.

Lastly, implementing strict national regulations to reduce the illegal arms trade. Related to the first two solutions, if member states introduce strict regulations on the arms trade such as strong licensing systems, conducting background checks on buyers, and establishing systems for monitoring arms manufacturers and dealers the illicit arms trade should decrease. However again this is only really possible through collaboration among countries, organizations, etc.. Another important element that should be strengthened through these strict regulations is border control. Currently, weak borders are a popular spot for smugglers of illicit weapons, therefore through these regulations borders can become stronger and make it more difficult for arms traffickers. Part of these strict regulations include severe consequences for those who engage in the illicit trade of arms. The idea of harsh consequences serves as a discouragement and could reduce the trade of illegal arms.



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