



Forum: First Committee (Disarmament and International Security)
Question of: Analyzing the root cause and effects of illegal weapon trade
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Position: Deputy Chair

I. Description of the Issue

The issue of illegal weapon trade, also known as arms trafficking, centers on the clandestine and unauthorized distribution of firearms, ammunition, and explosives across international borders. Arms trafficking can be defined as the covert transfer, sale or distribution of arms from or across the territory of one country to that of another country that bypasses regulatory frameworks established to control and monitor the movement of weapons. This trade typically involves a complex of states and non-states actors, including rogue states, criminal organizations, insurgent groups, and corrupt officials or/and authorities, all operating within a shadowy global market. Illegal weapon trade is intricately linked to staggering human costs and regional destabilization. According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) armed conflicts, including illegal weapon trade that exacerbated these conflicts, have claimed the lives of more than two million people globally since 1989, with over 77.000 fatalities recorded in 2018 alone. Since it provides the means for armed conflicts, terrorism, and organized crimes to flourish, illegal weapon trade is a major driver of global instability. Thus, it poses a significant threat to not only national but also international peace and security. Major arms exporter such as the United States, France, Russia, China and Germany play pivotal roles in producing and regulating the international flow of arms to avoid their misuse by vulnerable member states, including conflict zones and regions heavily affected by this issue, such as Middle East, Africa and Latin America (see fig. 1). Seeing that the proliferation of illegal weapons leads to prolonged conflicts, it is of utmost importance for the member states to focus on identifying effective measures to dismantle trafficking networks, enhancing international cooperation, and strengthening regulatory mechanisms to curtail the illegal circulation of weapons.



Percentages below 10 are rounded to 1 decimal place; percentages over 10 are rounded to whole numbers.

Exporter	Share of global arms exports (%)		Per cent change from 2013–17 to 2018–22 ^a	Main recipients and their share of exporter's total exports (%), 2018–22					
	2018–22	2013–17		1st	2nd	3rd			
1 United States	40	33	14	Saudi Arabia	19	Japan	8.6	Australia	8.4
2 Russia	16	22	-31	India	31	China	23	Egypt	9.3
3 France	11	7.1	44	India	30	Qatar	17	Egypt	8.0
4 China	5.2	6.3	-23	Pakistan	54	Bangladesh	12	Serbia	4.5
5 Germany	4.2	6.1	-35	Egypt	18	South Korea	17	Israel	9.5
6 Italy	3.8	2.5	45	Qatar	24	Egypt	23	Türkiye	12
7 United Kingdom	3.2	4.7	-35	USA	20	Qatar	16	Saudi Arabia	7.7
8 Spain	2.6	2.5	-4.4	Australia	35	Saudi Arabia	19	Belgium	12
9 South Korea	2.4	1.3	74	Philippines	16	India	13	Thailand	13
10 Israel	2.3	2.6	-15	India	37	Azerbaijan	9.1	Philippines	8.5
11 Netherlands	1.4	2.1	-39	USA	27	Mexico	11	Tunisia	7.4
12 Türkiye	1.1	0.6	69	Qatar	20	UAE	17	Oman	13
13 Sweden	0.8	0.9	-16	USA	25	Pakistan	24	Brazil	15
14 Switzerland	0.7	1.0	-34	Australia	21	Denmark	14	Spain	13
15 Australia	0.6	0.3	64	Canada	35	Chile	31	USA	13
16 Canada	0.5	0.6	-9.4	Saudi Arabia	49	UAE	22	USA	4.9
17 Ukraine	0.5	1.7	-70	China	48	Saudi Arabia	13	Thailand	7.5
18 UAE	0.4	0.4	-5.8	Egypt	28	Jordan	27	Algeria	15
19 Poland	0.4	0.1	168	Ukraine	95	Nepal	1.2	Ecuador	0.6
20 Belarus	0.3	0.5	-37	Serbia	33	Viet Nam	25	Uganda	14
21 South Africa	0.3	0.3	6.7	UAE	27	USA	21	India	15
22 Norway	0.3	0.6	-55	USA	27	Ukraine	15	Lithuania	14
23 Brazil	0.3	0.2	35	France	25	Nigeria	15	Chile	12
24 Belgium	0.2	0.1	212	Saudi Arabia	35	Canada	28	Pakistan	21
25 Jordan	0.2	0.2	14	USA	61	Egypt	26	Armenia	7.0

UAE = United Arab Emirates.

^a Figures show the change in volume of the total arms exports per exporter between the two periods.

Figure 1: https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/2303_at_fact_sheet_2022_v2.pdf

Top 25 largest exporters of major arms and their main recipients from 2018 to 2022

II. Definition of Key Terms

- **Arms Trade Treaty (ATT):** An international treaty, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2013, aimed at regulating the international trade of weapons, encompassing SALW (see below), with the goal to prevent and eliminate the illegal weapon trade and encourage accountable arms transfer.
- **Cryptocurrency transactions:** Financial transactions using digital currencies (such as Bitcoin), which enable arms traffickers to transfer funds securely and anonymously, bypassing traditional banking systems and regulatory oversight.



- **Illicit Arms:** Weapons that are traded, possessed or used in violation of national or/and international laws. This term encompasses both illegally manufactured weapons and those diverted from legal channels.
- **Informal money transfer systems:** Non-bank financial networks, like hawala (see fig. 2), that allow arms traffickers to move funds across distances discreetly and efficiently, without the need for physical money transfers, making it harder for authorities to trace illicit transactions.
- **Interpol:** Interpol, or International Criminal Police Organization, facilitates cooperation among national police forces and law enforcement agencies across its 195 member states. Its primary mission is to assist in detection and prevention of international crime by providing a platform for communication, data sharing and operational support.
- **Money laundering:** The process by which arms traffickers disguise the origins of their illegal profits, typically through a series of transfers and transactions involving legitimate businesses, to integrate illicit funds into the formal economy and make them appear lawful.
- **Sales:** The predominant form of transfer, which typically entails the exchange of weapons for money and other goods. Sales can be categorized into commercial exports and government-to-government exports.
- **Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW):** A category of firearms and weapons that are portable, light and easy to use including rifles, pistols, machine guns and grenades.
- **United Nations Program of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapon in All Its Aspects (UNPoA):** The UNPoA, established in 2001, provides a framework for addressing the challenges posed by the illicit trade in SALWs, which includes recommendation for national, regional and international measures to curb this problem.
- **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC):** An agency, which was established in 1997 to address issues related to drug trafficking, organized crime, terrorism, and corruption. It works globally to support countries in implementing comprehensive strategies to combat these threats through research, advocacy and policy development.

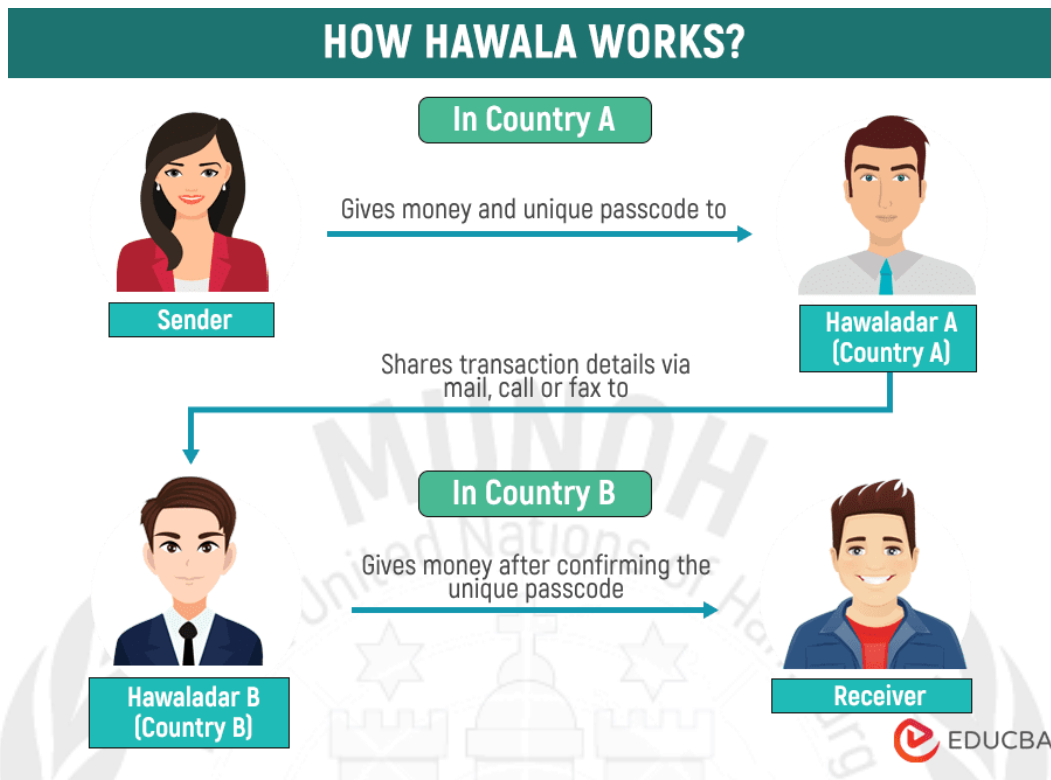


Figure 2: <https://www.educba.com/hawala/>

The process of hawala

III. Background information

Reasons and causes for illegal weapon trade

The illegal weapon trade thrives on a multitude of interconnected factors. In conflict zones, armed groups perpetuate demand for weapons to sustain their operations and gain advantage over adversaries, often resorting to illicit channels when they can't access legal ones. Weak governance and widespread corruption allow traffickers to exploit gaps in law enforcement and border controls, facilitating the secretive movement of arms across borders. Economically, the trade is highly profitable, attracting criminal syndicates that use the profits to fund other illicit activities. Political instability amplifies these challenges by weakening state control over arms stockpiles and allowing weapons to fall into unauthorized hands. Surpluses of military-grade weapons and inadequate international control exacerbate the problem, enabling surplus arms to enter illicit markets.



Technological advancements play a dual role in facilitating both production and distribution of illicit weapons. Innovations in manufacturing, such as 3D printing, enable the secret production of firearms with minimal oversight. Meanwhile, the dark web and encrypted communication channels provide platforms for illicit transactions, complicating efforts to trace and stop illicit arms shipments.

Effects of illegal weapon trade

The illegal trade of weapons has profound and far-reaching effects on societies worldwide, impacting social, political, and economic dimensions in complex ways.

Socially, the proliferation of illicit weapons exacerbates violence within communities, leading to significant loss of life, displacement, and psychological trauma. This environment of insecurity restricts freedom of movement, disrupts access to essential services like healthcare and education, and erodes social cohesion.

Politically, the trade undermines governance and state authority. Weak regulatory frameworks and corruption facilitate the flow of illicit arms, empowering non-state actors and prolonging conflicts. This challenges efforts to establish peace, stability, and effective governance, particularly in conflict-prone regions.

Economically, the illegal arms trade diverts resources away from productive sectors towards security measures and humanitarian aid. This perpetuates poverty and hampers economic development, as regions affected by armed violence struggle to attract investment and rebuild infrastructure.

Process of arms trafficking

The process of arms trafficking typically begins with the sourcing of weapons from various origins. These may include surplus military stockpiles, illicit manufacturing facilities, or legal markets where arms are acquired through fraudulent means. Weapons traffickers employ diverse methods to transport their illicit goods such as concealed compartments in vehicles, false declarations in shipping containers or exploiting legitimate trade routes and transportation networks (see fig. 3).

Logistical support plays a crucial role in facilitating arms trafficking as traffickers often collaborate with transport companies, middlemen, and facilitators, who specialize in navigating customs and border controls. Bribery of officials at ports of entry or remote border crossings further facilitates the movement of weapons without detection.

Once weapons reach their destination, they enter distribution networks controlled by criminal organizations, insurgent groups, terrorist organizations or other non-state actors. These networks have established channels to supply arms to end-users, including combatants in conflict zones or criminal elements involved in organized crime activities.

Financial transactions associated with arms trafficking are conducted through illicit means to obscure the financial trail and mask the identities of those involved. Methods like money laundering, informal money transfer systems or cryptocurrency transactions are commonly used to pay for illicit arms.

The end-use of illicit weapons varies widely depending on the buyers and their motivations. In conflict zones, trafficked weapons exacerbate armed conflicts, prolong violence, and contribute to humanitarian crises by supplying combatants with firepower. In criminal contexts, illicit arms enable organized crime activities such as drug trafficking, extortion, and kidnappings.

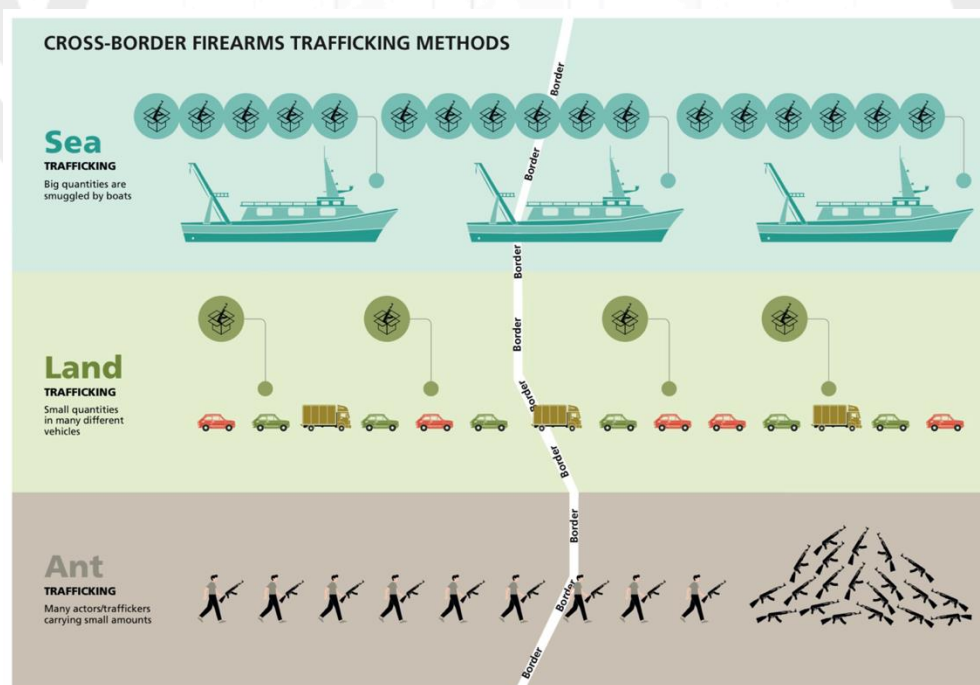


Figure 3: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Firearms/2020_REPORT_Global_Study_on_Firearms_Trafficking_2020_web.pdf

Different methods of cross-border firearms trafficking



IV. Major Countries and Organizations Involved

- **The United States:** The United States as a major exporter plays a pivotal role in global arms trade by supplying a wide range of conventional weapons to various countries, having major influence over international arms policies and practices.
- **Russia:** Russia is a significant arms exporter, particularly of advanced military technology and equipment as it has a long-standing arms production and export dating back to the Soviet era. However Russia has been criticized for exporting arms to countries in armed conflicts or regions experiencing instability, which could exacerbate conflicts, and their lack of transparency when it comes to weapon trade. Additionally, since the onset of the war with Ukraine the demand for weapons in both regions has increased significantly, leading to a rise in illegal arms trafficking both to and from the conflict zones.
- **Ukraine:** Ukraine's involvement in the illegal arms trade has intensified due to its ongoing conflict with Russia. The war has led to a surplus of weapons, many of which are diverted into illicit markets both within Ukraine and neighboring countries. This proliferation of arms has heightened security risks and contributed to regional instability in Eastern Europe, posing challenges for international efforts to curb illicit arms trafficking.
- **Brazil:** Brazil is marked by high levels of violence and organized crime, which drive demand for illicit weapons. Corruption and weak governance allow traffickers to operate without much fear of getting caught while Brazil's robust domestic arms manufacturing industry often sees weapons diverted to illegal markets. Its strategic location and extensive borders make it easy for arms to move across South America, exacerbating regional security issues.
- **Yemen:** Yemen, which has the highest rate in arms trafficking, is involved in a protracted conflict, where illicit weapon trade plays a crucial role in sustaining the conflict and exacerbating humanitarian conflicts.
- **Afghanistan:** Afghanistan currently faces challenges related to arms trafficking due to the ongoing conflict and the presence of armed groups, contributing to instability and loss of numerous lives.



- **Syria:** Like the other two countries, Syria has experienced several cases of arms trafficking amid the ongoing civil war with weapons flowing into the country from various sources, only provoking the situation further.
- **UNODC:** The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime primarily focuses on drugs, crime and terrorism but also addresses transnational organized crime networks involved in illicit activities, including arms trafficking and provides legal assistance, statistics/data, and public awareness.
- **Interpol:** Interpol is an organization, which aids global law enforcement by facilitating information sharing and international police cooperation with the focus on enhancing border management, providing training, and promoting adherence to international legal standards to disrupt illegal arms networks effectively.

V. Timeline of events

Date	Event
In 2001	Establishment of the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons, promoting international cooperation and measures to combat illicit arms trafficking
In 2011	Launch of the Global Firearms Programme by UNODC, focusing on enhancing national capacities to prevent and combat firearms trafficking
In 2013	Adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), aiming to regulate the international trade in conventional arms and prevent their diversion to unauthorized users
2020-2022	Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on arms trafficking with concerns raised about increased online sales and vulnerabilities in global supply chains
Ongoing	Continued conflicts in Syria, Yemen, Mexico and other regions, especially Congo with its ongoing crisis, drive the demand for illegal weapons

VI. Previous attempts to solve this issue

Measures such as the Arms Trade Treaty, established in 2013, aimed to regulate the legal trade in conventional arms and promote responsible transfers helped reducing human suffering caused by illegal and irresponsible arms transfers and improving regional security and stability.



Additionally, the UNPoA provides a framework for international cooperation to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in SALWs by emphasizing measures such as national legislation, marking and tracing of firearms and international assistance.

Despite these efforts, challenges still persist. Enforcement of regulations can be uneven across countries with varying capacities and political will to implement and enforce stringent controls. The complexity of global supply chains and the involvement of diverse actors, including illicit networks and state actors, pose significant obstacles to effective control measures. Moreover, the persistent demand for weapons in conflict zones and areas of instability continues contributing to illegal weapon trade despite international agreements.

VII. Possible solutions

- **Improving border security:** Investing in advanced technology, such as biometric systems, X-ray scanners, and data analytics can help detect and intercept illicit arms trade at borders and ports of entry.
- **Public awareness and community engagement:** Raising awareness about dangers of illegal weapon trade and involving local communities in monitoring and reporting suspicious activities and especially reintegrating those who has been involved in such activities is important to reduce the circulation of illicit arms trafficking.
- **Tracing and marking firearms:** Implementing better and comprehensive marking and tracing systems for firearms can help track the origin and movement of weapons. The International Tracing Instrument (ITI) and the UN Firearms Protocol can provide guidelines for these measures.
- **Strengthening international cooperation:** Even though international cooperation is mentioned everywhere, it must be emphasized once again since an international problem can only be solved internationally. Enhancing collaboration between countries by information sharing and mutual legal assistance can disrupt transnational arms trafficking networks.



VIII. Questions delegates should consider during research

To effectively prepare for the debates in our committee, you should firstly research your country's stance on arms trafficking, including historical involvement, current policies, and relevant treaties or agreements. Understanding the global landscape of arms trafficking, including key players, major incidents, and ongoing challenges, is also crucial. Additionally, identifying potential allies and adversaries within the committee will help in forming strategic alliances and anticipating opposing arguments.

Each delegate is required to write at least one draft resolution. This document should propose comprehensive solutions to the issue, reflecting your country's policies and interests. Furthermore, delegates must prepare a minimum of two, preferably three, position papers to cover all topics of the forum thoroughly. These papers should clearly outline your country's position, proposed solutions, and any relevant background information.

All documents must be submitted by **September 21st, 2024**. This is a strict deadline, and any documents received after this date will not be corrected by the Student Officers. Documents turned in after the deadline will not be considered in the decision-making process for awards. We look forward to receiving your documents and seeing your well-prepared contributions in the committee sessions.

IX. Relevant UN Treaties and events

- Resolution A/RES/78/46: The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects
<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4030572?ln=en&v=pdf>
- Resolution A/RES/78/54: Assistance to the States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons and collecting them
<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4030286?ln=en&v=pdf>

X. Useful links and sources

- Arms trade – UNODA: <https://disarmament.unoda.org/convarms/att/>



- Understanding the trade in small arms: <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-HB-06-Weapons-ID-ch2.pdf>
- UCDP - Uppsala Conflict Data Program: <https://ucdp.uu.se/exploratory>
- Countries with the highest arms trafficking rate in the world – The Organized Crime Index: https://ocindex.net/rankings/arms_trafficking?f=rankings&view=List
- International arms transfer: https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/2303_at_fact_sheet_2022_v2.pdf
- Global study on firearms trafficking 2020: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Firearms/2020_REPORT_Global_Study_on_Firearms_Trafficking_2020_web.pdf
- The illicit market in firearms: [https://www.unodc.org/documents/e4j/Module_04 - The Illicit Market in Firearms_FINAL.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/e4j/Module_04_-_The_Illicit_Market_in_Firearms_FINAL.pdf)