

**Forum:** Disarmament and International Security Committee

**Issue:** *The question of preventing illegal smuggling of weapons to and by non-state actors.*

**Student Officer:** Jannis Grendel, Fiete Faßbender, Lorik Qerimi

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## Introduction

Illegal arms trafficking is increasing drastically every year, which is partly due to the increasing number of armed conflicts. This allows non-state actors (NSA) to buy and sell arms illegally to other armed groups, like small arms and light weapons (SALW). The corresponding possession of these weapons, regardless of their classification, leads to the destabilization of the attacked state. This includes the attack on statehood and also the threat to human rights. Political repression, as well as the civilian threat of terror and an increasing number of crimes, are an integral part of the hostile agenda. Armed groups deliberately and skillfully exploit their advantage of equipment to achieve their goals, oftentimes violently.

The UN, through the 2013 General Assembly, had already established the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), which specifically works to mitigate armed conflict as well as strategically combat the illicit arms trade and its devastating humanitarian consequences. For instance, it is internationally established that an arms trade also becomes illegal and dangerous when the responsible state knows that such an operation will have severe consequences for national security. Thus, the question is not only to what extent the UN can address this problem but more likely to what extent member states can actively contribute to the solution.

Despite the ATT as well as other international active agreements/treaties, the arms trade remains both strong and widespread, especially in Africa and the Middle East, and is a major threat to civil

society and humanitarian rights.

## Definition of Key Terms

### **Non-State Actors**

Non-State Actors are an organization or individual that has significant political influence but is not allied to any particular country or state.

### **Disarmament**

Disarmament is defined as “the reduction or withdrawal of military forces and weapons.” However, the term goes far beyond that, as The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) establishes, “Disarmament is not only about eliminating weapons; it is also about creating opportunities to think about security in new ways, to reprioritize our budgets, and to rethink our sense of ourselves as nations in community with one another.”

### **Defense**

Defense, in its broadest sense, is defined as the “capability of resisting attack.” In a governmental aspect, as expressed by the UN, it can also be defined as “the military and industrial aggregate that authorizes and supervises arms production appropriations for defense contracts.”

### **Collective Security**

Collective security is understood as a “system by which states have attempted to prevent or stop wars. Under a collective security arrangement, an aggressor against any one state is considered an aggressor against all other states, which act together to repel the aggressor.”

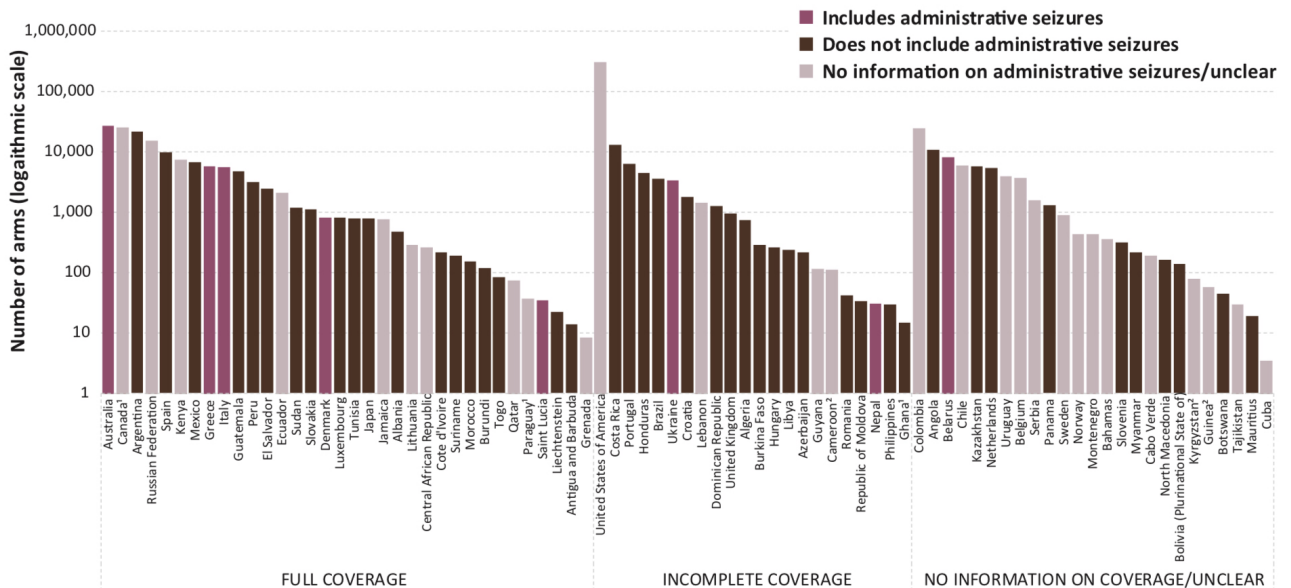
### **Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)**

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) defines SALWs as “any man-portable lethal weapon that expels or launches, is designed to expel or launch, or may be readily converted to expel or launch a shot, bullet or projectile by the action of an explosive, excluding antique small arms and light weapons or their replicas.”

## Background Information

Getting an overview of the scale of weapons illegally transferred into a country is difficult. A possibility is to take a look at the number of arms seized, although these numbers are also influenced by the intensity of police controls regarding firearms. The following graphic regards multiple factors such as the coverage of data regarding the included seizures, which is why it gives a good overview.

FIG. 2 .... Total number of arms seized, by country and type of coverage, 2016-17 (average)



<sup>1</sup> For Canada, Ghana and Paraguay data were available for 2016 only.

<sup>2</sup> For Cameroon, Guinea and Kyrgyzstan data were available for 2017 only.

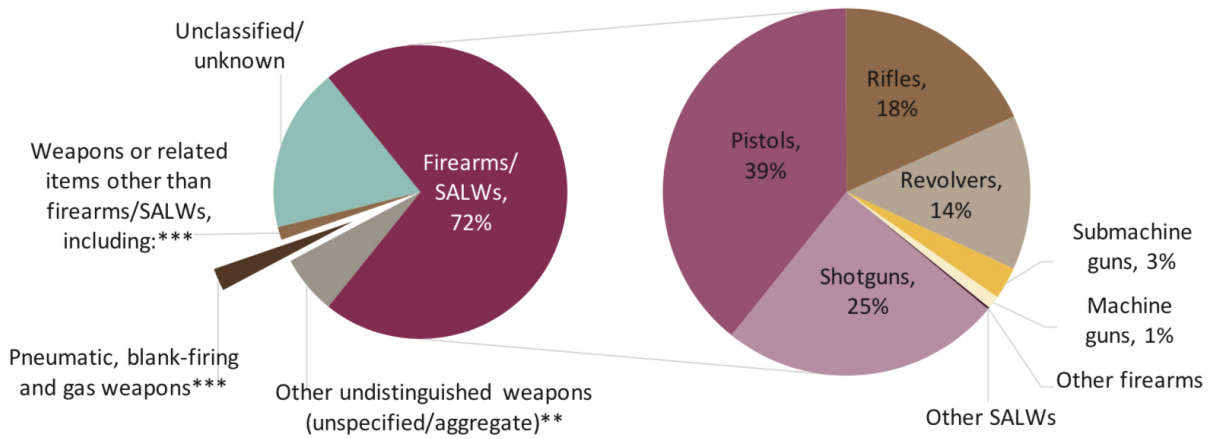
Sources: UNODC IAFQ and other official sources.

The Diagram shows that the country with the biggest number of arms seized by far is the United States of America. Although, it is to be noted that it is one of the biggest countries by population, which is important to keep in mind when looking at all the statistics provided by this and the following diagrams. Also, when drawing information from this statistic, one should regard that some countries, such as Cuba, do not provide full information on the coverage, which means that some of the data might not portray realistic values for the number of illegal weapons smuggled and in use.

The next statistic separates the seized arms into categories. The diagram on the right is a further

separation of the SALW portion from the left.

FIG. 1 .... Typical distribution\* of reported seized arms, by type, 2016-17



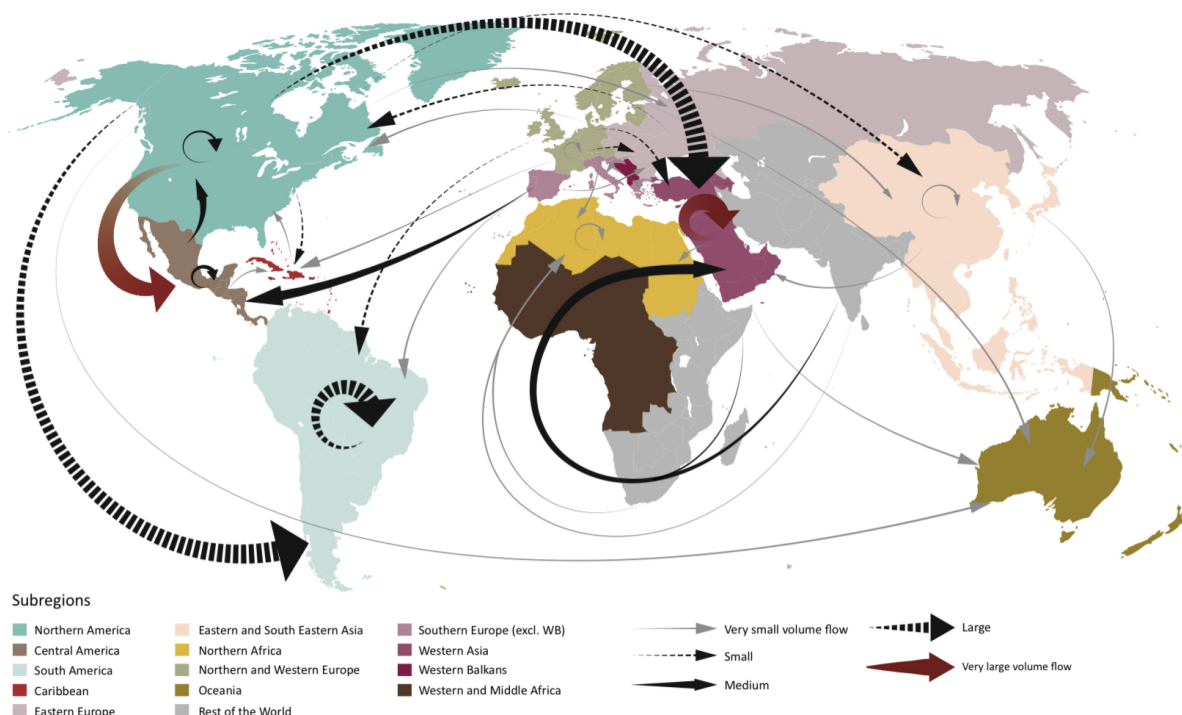
\* Simple average based on data for 81 countries.

\*\* Includes weapons reported under "Other" without sufficient information to allow further classification; some of these weapons may be firearms or small arms and light weapons (SALWs).

\*\*\* For some countries, the reported seizure data included weapons other than firearms/SALWs; however data on such weapons were not explicitly requested by the questionnaire. Hence the share of such weapons is subject to variations in the reporting practice across countries.

Source: UNODC IAFQ and other official sources.

MAP 1 ..... Main transnational firearms trafficking flows (as defined by routes of seized firearms), 2016-17



The breakdown into subregional groupings is based on the standard UN classification (M49), adapted to take into account the availability of data and regions of special interest of the study. Please see Methodological Annex for details.

Arrows represent flows between subregions (not specific countries).

Source: UNODC elaboration of data from Illicit Arms Flows Questionnaire and World Customs Organization.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas).

The last diagram shows the largest firearms trafficking flows. It provides a good transition into the next topic of the major countries involved and should be regarded as a general help to get an overview of how different countries are involved in the issue and what their relations in this regard might be.

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Organizations:

- In Europe: Frontex
- UNRCPD (UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific)
- UNDC (UN Disarmament Commission)
- Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters
- UNIDIR (UN Institute for Disarmament Research)
- UNODA (UN Office for Disarmament Affairs)

Countries:

- USA (By far the most illegal firearms seized)
- Mexico (Big Problem with Cartel violence)

## Timeline of Events Relevant UN Treaties and Events

2001: Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects (PoA)

2005: International Tracing Instrument (ITI)

2013: Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)

## Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

There are periodical reports on the implementation efforts of PoA and ITI, which are reviewed at Biennial Meetings of States and Review Conferences.

Frontex has implemented a policy of support for border guards and customs officials. As a part of this effort, Frontex has created the Handbook on Firearms, which assists authorities to keep improving their skills and informs them about the newest methods criminals use.

## Possible Solutions

“In order to effectively implement the provisions of the PoA, it is essential to strengthen regional customs, law enforcement, and intelligence cooperation through existing regional forums such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Oceania Customs Organisation (OCO), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and other relevant regional organizations.” UNRCPD Asia and Pacific

## Bibliography

Source for key terms:

The Hague International Model United Nations 2018| GA1

Graphics:

UN global study on firearms trafficking (2020)

General:

<https://www.un.org/disarmament/disarmament-fellowship>

<https://unrcpd.org/peace-and-disarmament-education/>

<https://www.europol.europa.eu/crime-areas-and-statistics/crime-areas/illicit-firearms-trafficking>

[Frontex Annual Risk Analysis for 2021](#)