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The background of the cover is a dark, low-key photograph. In the foreground, several spent bullet casings are scattered on a dark surface. In the mid-ground, three silhouetted figures are visible against a lighter, hazy background. One figure in the center is leaning forward, holding a long-barreled rifle or machine gun. Two other figures stand on either side of them. A small red traffic cone is visible on the left side of the scene.

Addressing the linkages between illicit arms, organized crime and armed conflict

LAUREN PINSON

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Support from the core funders of United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) provides the foundation for all the Institute's activities. This research and publication is supported by the Governments of the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. It is the result of a collaboration between UNIDIR's Conventional Arms and Ammunition Programme and the Firearms Trafficking Section of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Bárbara Morais Figueiredo of UNIDIR and Max Menn of UNODC provided guidance and substantive contributions throughout the research process and preparation of this publication. The author is also thankful for the invaluable inputs and overall direction provided by Paul Holtom and Manuel Martinez Miralles of UNIDIR and Simonetta Grassi of UNODC.

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CONTENTS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR	iv
ABBREVIATIONS	v
1. Introduction	1
1.1. Conflict and Crime	1
1.2. Illicit Arms, Organized Crime, and Armed Conflict	4
Methodology	5
Key Terms	6
2. Exploring Linkages between Arms Trafficking, Organized Crime, and Armed Conflict	9
2.1. How Does the Source of Illicit Arms Link Conflict and Organized Crime?	9
2.1.1. Stockpile Looting after State Collapse or Battlefield Capture for Weapons Access ...	10
2.1.2. Insecure Stockpiles and Corrupt Officials as Source of Diversion	12
2.1.3. The Diversion of Legacy Weapons to OCGs	13
2.1.4. Authorized Arms Transfers as a Potential Source of Diversion	14
Key Takeaways	15
2.2. How Does the Process of Illicit Arms Acquisition Link Conflict and Organized Crime?	16
2.2.1. OCGs as Arms Traffickers to Conflict Regions	17
2.2.2. Illicit Arms Trade for Revenue Generation or Access	17
2.2.3. Overlap in Illicit Arms Supply Networks	17
2.2.4. Control over Territory that Leads to Ties between OCGs or Arms Traffickers and NSAGs	19
Key Takeaways	19
2.3. How Do Linkages between Armed Conflict, Organized Crime, and Arms Trafficking Affect Violent Crime Levels and Conflict Dynamics?	20
2.3.1. Role of Increased Firepower and Sustainability of Supply in Igniting or Prolonging Violent Competition	20
2.3.2. Role of Illicit Arms Access in Generating a Spiral of Instability	21
2.3.3. Role of Illicit Arms in Enabling Crime that Finances Conflicts	23
Key Takeaways	24
3. Options for Integrated and Comprehensive Approaches to Tackle the Illicit Arms, Organized Crime, and Armed Conflict Nexus	26

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ABBREVIATIONS

CVR	community violence reduction
DDR	disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
ELN	Ejército de Liberación Nacional
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia
NSAG	non-State armed group
OCG	organized criminal group
SALW	small arms and light weapons
WAM	weapons and ammunition management



1. INTRODUCTION

Linkages between illicit arms, organized crime, and armed conflict can reinforce one another while also escalating and prolonging violence and eroding governance.¹ Financial gains from crime can lengthen or intensify armed conflicts by creating revenue streams for non-State armed groups (NSAGs). Beyond undermining the monopoly of the State on the use of force, armed conflict also creates an environment that can enable organized crime to prosper. In this context, when hostilities cease and parties to a conflict move towards a peaceful resolution, the widespread availability of surplus arms and ammunition can contribute to a situation of ‘criminalized peace’ that obstructs sustainable peacebuilding efforts.

Illicit arms and ammunition clearly link conflict to crime as well as crime to conflict. Illicit arms can both enable and fuel an armed conflict, while different conflict phases provide opportunities for the diversion of arms and a potentially lucrative income source for organized arms trafficking networks. NSAGs and organized criminal groups (OCGs) use illicit arms to engage in conflict or perpetrate crime respectively, while both types of groups can also be involved in the trafficking of arms. Furthermore, there are often-blurred lines between these types of groups, particularly in conflict and post-conflict settings.

Researchers and practitioners have examined the nexus between two of these three security challenges: armed conflict, organized crime, and illicit arms. Yet, there has been limited research examining the linkages between all three of these security challenges. In response to this knowledge gap, this issue brief explores the different ways in which illicit arms connect armed conflict and organized crime and provides suggestions on how to better address these interconnected challenges. This brief may further inform practitioners and policymakers by framing the conversation for future decision-making and research.

1.1. Conflict and Crime

The number of active conflicts has grown over the last two decades (fig. 1),² and since the mid-1990s more civil conflicts have recurred than started new.³ Internationalized civil conflicts account for most of the global increase in conflicts in recent years.⁴ Intra-State conflicts in this current wave often have characteristics that increase the likelihood of a longer duration, such as fighting factions⁵ or external involvement.⁶ NSAGs sometimes engage in illicit economies as a source of funding, including in criminal pursuits such as looting, extortion and kidnapping, resource extraction, and the production and sale of other illicit commodities.⁷ This can be viewed as both a cause and consequence of recurring and prolonged armed conflicts.

1 While the terms “conflict” and “armed conflict” are used interchangeably in this brief, all references to “conflict” shall be understood as meaning “armed conflict”.

2 Julia Palik, Siri Aas Rustad, and Fredrik Methi, “Conflict Trends: A Global Overview, 1946–2019,” PRIO Paper (Peace Research Institute Oslo, 2020), <https://www.prio.org/Publications/Publication/?x=12442>

3 Sebastian von Einsiedel, “Civil War Trends and the Changing Nature of Armed Conflict,” Occasional Paper 10 (United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, March 2017), https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:6156/Civil_war_trends_UPDATED.pdf

4 Civil conflicts where at least one foreign government has troops supporting State forces or an NSAG.

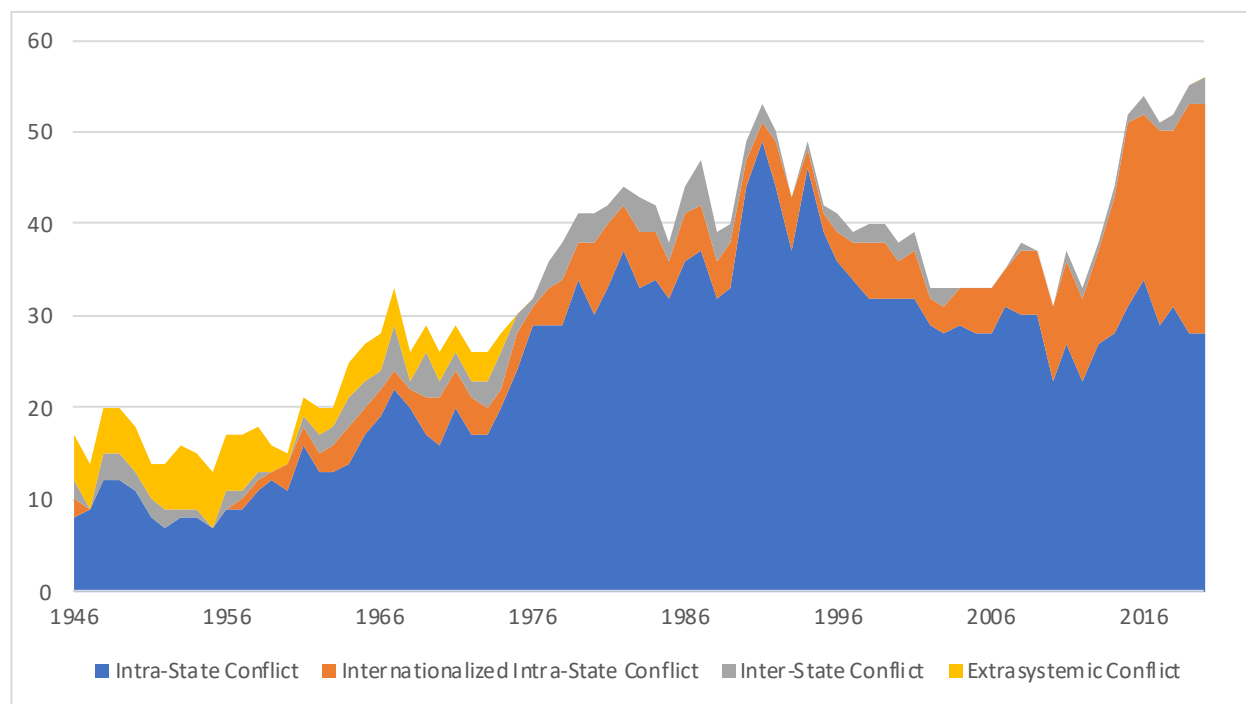
5 Barbara F. Walter, “The New New Civil Wars,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 20, no. 1 (May 11, 2017): 469–86, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-060415-093921>

6 Sebastian von Einsiedel, “Civil War Trends and the Changing Nature of Armed Conflict,” Occasional Paper 10 (United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, March 2017), https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:6156/Civil_war_trends_UPDATED.pdf

7 Nicholas Barnes, “Criminal Politics: An Integrated Approach to the Study of Organized Crime, Politics, and Violence,” *Perspectives on Politics* 15, no. 4 (2017): 967–87, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592717002110>

1. INTRODUCTION

Figure 1. Number of Conflicts, 1946–2020



Sources: Conflict data are drawn from the Uppsala Conflict Data Programme (UCDP)/Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) Armed Conflict Dataset, version 21.1.⁸ According to the dataset, the types of conflicts are defined as:⁹

- An **intra-State conflict** is between a government and a non-government party, with no interference from other countries.
- An **internationalized intra-State conflict** is between a government and a non-government party, with at least one of the parties to the conflict receiving troop support from other governments that actively participate in the conflict.
- An **inter-State conflict** is between two or more governments.
- An **extrasystemic conflict** is between a state and a non-state group outside it's the state's territory.

This issue brief highlights some of the linkages between organized crime and conflict across conflict phases—including potentially sparking the crisis, lengthening the conflict by providing resources, and threatening the consolidation of peace and development due to political ties or economic incentives. Security Council resolutions have increasingly highlighted the challenging security implications posed by organized crime in conflict-affected and fragile settings, noting

⁸ <https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads>, last accessed on 23 July 2022; Davies, Shawn, Therese Pettersson & Magnus Öberg (2022). Organized violence 1989–2021 and drone warfare. *Journal of Peace Research* 59(4); Gleditsch, Nils Petter, Peter Wallensteen, Mikael Eriksson, Margareta Sollenberg, and Håvard Strand (2002) *Armed Conflict 1946–2001: A New Dataset*. *Journal of Peace Research* 39(5).

⁹ UCDP Definitions, https://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/#tocjump_27984084349541805_11

1. INTRODUCTION

the imperative to integrate crime-prevention mandates into United Nations responses at all phases of conflict.¹⁰

The distinction between criminal and conflict actors is often blurred.¹¹ OCGs may provide NSAGs with illicit arms, ammunition, explosives and other equipment and commodities to be used in conflict and attacks, thereby becoming a conflict party themselves, or they may purchase conflict goods from NSAGs, such as illicitly mined precious metals or diamonds, to introduce them to legal markets. NSAGs may engage in illicit economies to help fund an ongoing conflict or to earn profit from a conflict, and access to illicit arms may enable and secure these criminal side ventures. Political motivations and actions are not mutually exclusive from criminal ones.¹² NSAGs sometimes use revenues generated by criminal activities to fund the acquisition of arms, ammunition, and other materiel before and during armed conflicts. By engaging in illicit economies, NSAGs can gain the resources to sustain fighting longer than would otherwise be possible. Furthermore, earning a profit may result in NSAGs having an incentive to continue the conflict, posing further challenges to conflict resolution efforts and undermining prospects for lasting peace by fostering an environment conducive to ‘criminalized peace’ – transitional or post-conflict settings characterized by high levels of criminality and intercommunal violence and the proliferation of illicit economic activities.¹³

In these contexts, ties to organized crime continue to have a rippling effect. Those who profited from illicit economies and other organized criminal activities during the conflict may also benefit from and further contribute to instability in the post-conflict environment. This includes both OCGs that were bolstered by the conflict and NSAGs that may no longer have a political purpose but still have opportunities for continued criminal activities. In the absence of effective criminal justice responses, criminal networks may flourish or create parallel power structures due to a lack of, or co-opted, government institutions. In some post-conflict societies, OCGs may also have power in transitional political arrangements. If not addressed as part of post-conflict reconstruction and broader peacebuilding efforts, organized crime may become entrenched within a country. The continued operation of criminal networks without accountability may also decrease trust in public institutions, undermining post-conflict governance and development.¹⁴ In combination, these factors also increase the likelihood of conflict recurrence.

10 GITOC, “Organized Crime and Its Role in Contemporary Conflict: An Analysis of UN Security Council Resolutions,” Policy Note (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, September 2018), <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/TGIATOC-UNSC-Policy-Note-1962-web.pdf>

11 John de Boer and Louise Bosetti, “The Crime-Conflict ‘Nexus’: State of the Evidence,” Occasional Paper 5 (United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, July 2015), https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:3134/unu_cpr_crime_conflict_nexus.pdf

12 Nicholas Barnes, “Criminal Politics: An Integrated Approach to the Study of Organized Crime, Politics, and Violence,” *Perspectives on Politics* 15, no. 4 (2017): 967–87, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592717002110>

13 James Cockayne, John de Boer, and Louise Bosetti, “Going Straight: Criminal Spoilers, Gang Truces and Negotiated Transitions to Lawful Order,” Crime-Conflict Nexus Series 5 (United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, April 2017), https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:6426/Going_straight.pdf; Arthur Boutellis, “The Changing Role of Conventional Arms Control in Preventing and Managing Violent Conflicts” (Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2018), <https://www.unidir.org/publication/changing-role-conventional-arms-control-preventing-and-managing-violent-conflicts>

14 Louise Bosetti, James Cockayne, and John de Boer, “Crime-Proofing Conflict Prevention, Management, and Peacebuilding: A Review of Emerging Good Practice,” Occasional Paper 6 (United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, August 2016), https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:5850/OC_06_Crime_proofing_Conflict.pdf; Vanda Felbab-Brown, “Tackling Crime and Illicit Economies Isn’t Just a Technical Exercise—It’s an Intensely Political One” (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institute, April 20, 2017), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/04/20/tackling-crime-and-illicit-economies-isnt-just-a-technical-exercise-its-an-intensely-political-one>

1.2. Illicit Arms, Organized Crime, and Armed Conflict

Illicit arms and ammunition are key enablers of armed conflict and organized criminal activities. NSAGs use illicit weapons to engage in a conflict, and sometimes increase a conflict’s intensity and duration. OCGs use illicit arms to carry out crimes and, more broadly, to assert and sustain power. OCGs also sometimes participate in arms trafficking to source weapons or earn revenue.¹⁵

Figure 2. Linkages between Illicit Arms and Ammunition, Organized Crime, and Armed Conflict

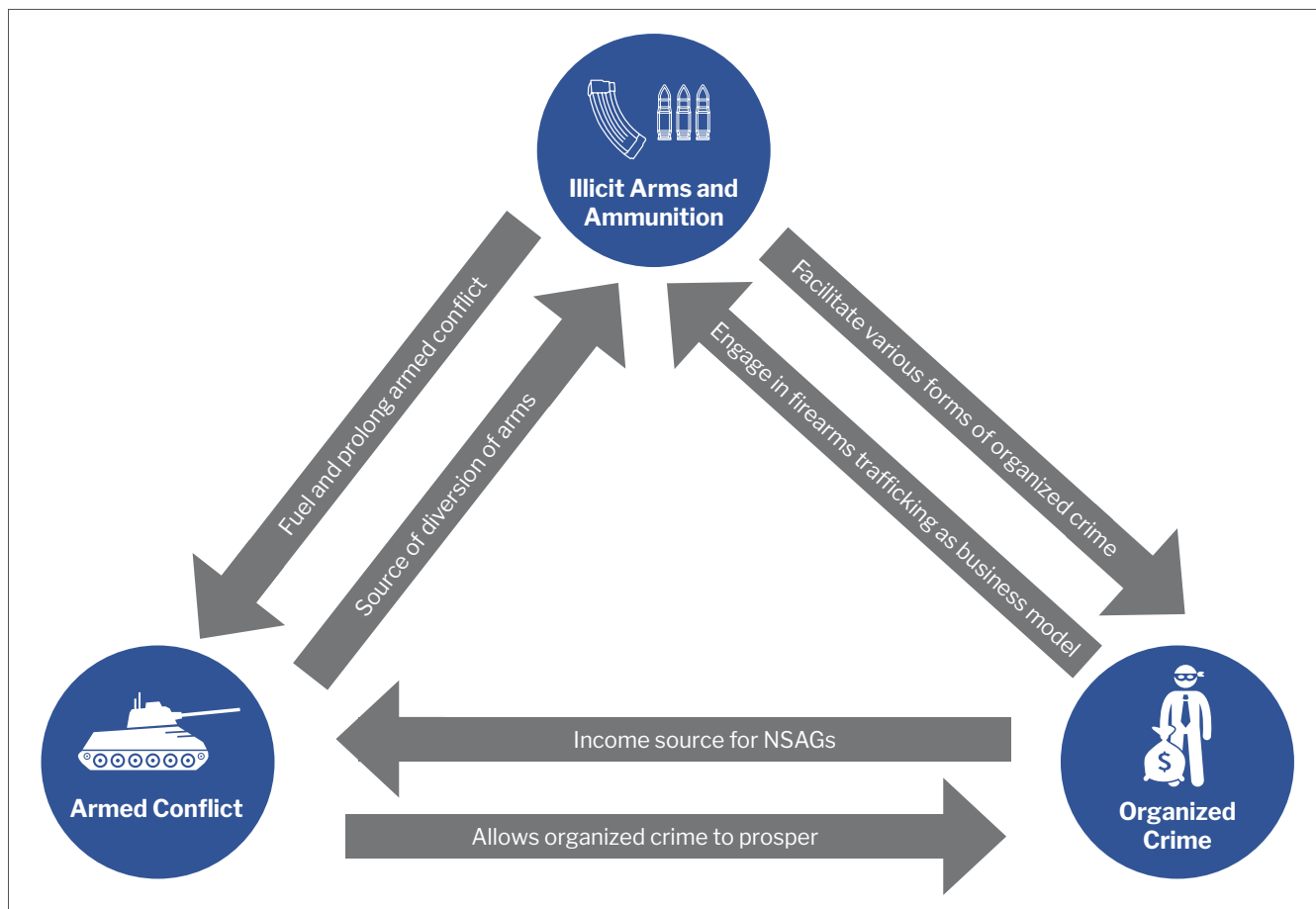


Figure 2 illustrates the different types of connections between these three concerns, highlighting their interconnected nature and showing how illicit arms often flow in two different directions within conflict-affected settings. In one direction, conflict is a destination—creating demand for arms and ammunition (e.g. arms flows to conflict areas in order to cover the demand of the conflict parties); in the other, conflict is a source—providing a supply of illicit arms (e.g. surplus arms stemming from armed conflicts, battlefield captures, and looted stockpiles that are transferred either to other conflicts or to non-conflict areas). Armed conflict and State fragility provide opportunities for the diversion of arms to the illicit market, including through and to criminal groups. Since NSAGs typically seek to diversify their sources of illicit weapons,¹⁶ they may use criminal networks to purchase illicit arms, including from other conflict-affected areas.

15 UNODC, “Digest of Organized Crime Cases: A Compilation of Cases with Commentaries and Lessons Learned” (Vienna, Austria: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, October 2012), https://www.unodc.org/documents/organized-crime/Digest_Organized_Crime.pdf

16 Michael Bourne, *Arming Conflict: The Proliferation of Small Arms* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230592186>

1. INTRODUCTION

The large-scale acquisition of illicit arms by NSAGs and OCGs is typically linked to regional economies of armed conflict or other forms of organized crime.¹⁷ Large, interregional arms transfers are rare without government support, though unauthorized re-exports may enable the diversion of arms without the original exporting government's approval, and shipments sometimes move through transit States without their authorization. Illicit arms acquisition within fragile and conflict-affected regions often involves small batches of firearms trafficked across borders.¹⁸ However, as shown in several illustrations throughout this issue brief, some NSAGs and OCGs have also been able to access weapons through larger transfers and trafficking beyond neighboring States.

Organized crime, armed conflict, and illicit arms trafficking—separately and in combination—undermine political stability, good governance, and sustainable development. Corruption in particular serves as a reinforcing factor for increased connections between OCGs and NSAGs. For instance, corrupt officials—such as those who accept bribes and allow OCGs to operate with impunity—can erode public confidence in governing institutions, which may serve as a motivator of conflict. While underdevelopment, weak institutions, and a lack of resources tend to drive crime and conflict, illicit arms—whether in the hands of OCGs or NSAGs—have a facilitating function by exacerbating power, undermining State control, and providing an opportunity for violence.

METHODOLOGY

This issue brief draws primarily upon desk research and literature reviews, though some of the insights are drawn from fieldwork interviews conducted during 2018 and 2019, in addition to interviews conducted online with representatives from States and regional organizations that provide international assistance to address illicit arms trafficking. The illustrations included throughout were selected as a geographically dispersed set of examples that cover a range of different arms–crime–conflict connections. Contemporary examples are provided to present more relevant parallels for current decision makers. The examples provided are meant to illustrate known connections between arms trafficking, organized crime, and conflict, but are likely not representative of all such connections.

17 Nicholas Marsh and Lauren Pinson, “Arms Trafficking,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Smuggling*, ed. Max Gallien and Florian Weigand, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003043645>

18 Ibid. UNODC, “Global Study on Firearms Trafficking 2020” (Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2020), https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Firearms/2020_REPORT_Global_Study_on_Firearms_Trafficking_2020_web.pdf.

KEY TERMS

The key terms referenced throughout the issue brief are defined below for clarity and consistency.

Illicit arms trafficking¹⁹ is defined in accordance with the definition used in the United Nations Firearms Protocol, supplementing the United Nations Organized Crime Convention, which is legally binding for States Parties, as: “the import, export, acquisition, sale, delivery, movement or transfer of firearms, their parts and components and ammunition from or across the territory of one State Party to that of another State Party if any one of the State Parties concerned does not authorize it [...]”²⁰ This issue brief extends to small arms and light weapons (SALW), in line with the politically binding Programme of Action on small arms, and as defined in the International Tracing Instrument.²¹ In sum, illicit arms trafficking encompasses cross-border transfers that have not been authorized by at least one of the States involved, but does not include State-to-State transfers.

Diversion encompasses “the rerouting and/or the appropriation of conventional arms or related items contrary to relevant national and/or international law leading to a potential change in the effective control or ownership of the arms.”²² Diversion can take place at any stage of the transfer chain and life cycle of a weapon, and some of the main types of diversion include looting following State collapse, battlefield capture, leakage from government or civilian stockpiles due to ineffective physical security and stockpile management, arms embargo violations and State-sponsored diversion.²³ State-sponsored diversion can involve a State supporting the direct supply of arms from the manufacturer to an unauthorized end user or the retransfer of legally imported arms to an unauthorized end user or for an unauthorized use, sometimes in violation of end-user certificates.²⁴

Conflict phases: The phases of conflict include stable peace, unstable peace, crisis, conflict, ceasefire, and post-conflict.²⁵ *Stable peace* includes some level of cooperation and engagement between parties, with a low probability of conflict due to non-violent dispute resolution. When disputes are not resolved, tensions increase between parties into an *unstable peace*: crisis probability increases due to greater self-defence measures among parties, though violence is sporadic at most. During *crisis*, armed groups are ready to engage, low-level skirmishes may take place, and there is a high probability of conflict. Without crisis diffusion, *conflict*—sustained fighting between armed groups—may break out. Sometimes a *ceasefire* supports the reduction of tensions. During the *post-conflict* phase, peacebuilding and conflict resolution can help to de-escalate tensions in a return to peace or the conflict can escalate through phases again.²⁶ As noted in this brief, conflicts may fluctuate between phases, even for significant periods of time. Partly due to the impact of organized crime activities, the lines between conflict phases are often blurred.

19 This issue brief does not include trafficking of components for improvised explosive devices or chemical, biological, and radiological weapons.

20 General Assembly, “United Nations Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime,” article 3 (e), UN document A/RES/55/255 (2001).

21 General Assembly, “Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects,” UN document A/CONF.192/15 (2001); General Assembly, “International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons,” UN document A/C.1/60/L.55 (2005).

KEY TERMS

Non-State armed groups: NSAGs are defined as “armed groups of actors distinct from the armed and security forces of a State, and without authorization from the State in which they are based or operate to possess and use conventional arms”.²⁷ This issue brief uses NSAG to describe groups armed without State authorization and as a synonym for armed non-State actor.²⁸ Specific NSAG subcategories are used within some illustrations as a reflection of the source material. In order to distill the relationship between organized crime and armed conflict, organized criminal groups are referenced separately from NSAGs when making such a distinction is possible.

Organized crime: This issue brief uses the terms *organized crime* and *organized criminal group* (OCG) in the context of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime definition of an organized criminal group: “a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences [...] in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit.”²⁹ Therefore, in the context of this issue brief, organized crime can be understood as any unlawful activity carried out by organized criminal groups.

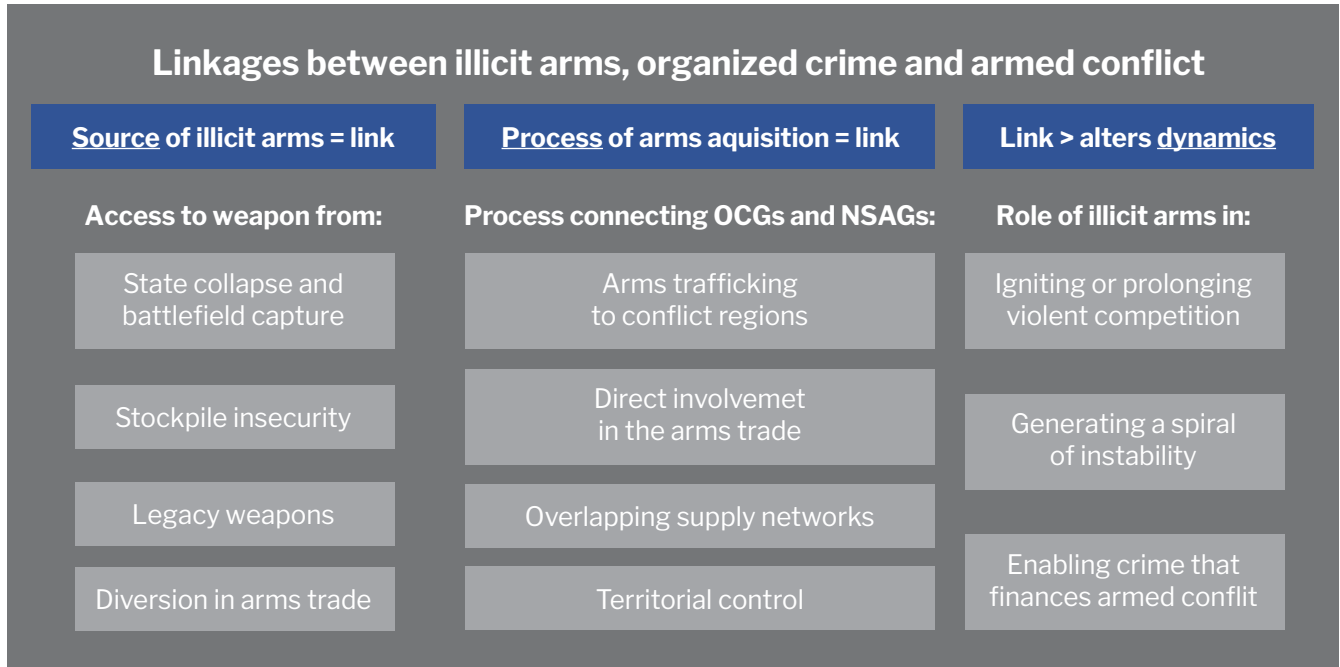
This issue brief is structured as follows. Section 2 explores the multiple connections between illicit arms, organized crime, and armed conflict in relation to (1) the *source* of illicit arms supply, (2) the *process* of illicit arms acquisition, and (3) shifts in the *dynamics* of conflict and organized crime. Section 3 provides suggestions on how to better respond to these interrelated challenges by integrating conflict prevention strategies, conventional arms control measures, and criminal justice responses.

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- 22 Brian Wood, “The Arms Trade Treaty: Obligations to Prevent the Diversion of Arms,” ATT Issue Brief #1 (Geneva, Switzerland: UNIDIR, Conflict Armament Research, and the Stimson Center, 2020), <https://www.unidir.org/publication/arms-trade-treaty-obligations-prevent-diversion-conventional-arms>
 - 23 Alfredo Malaret Baldo et al., “The Arms Trade Treaty: Diversion Analysis Framework,” ATT Issue Brief #3 (Geneva, Switzerland: UNIDIR, Conflict Armament Research, and the Stimson Center, August 31, 2021), <https://www.unidir.org/publication/arms-trade-treaty-issue-brief-3-diversion-analysis-framework>
 - 24 Conflict Armament Research Diversion Digest, Issue 1–3, <https://www.conflictarm.com/publications>; Brian Wood, “The Arms Trade Treaty: Obligations to Prevent the Diversion of Arms,” ATT Issue Brief #1 (Geneva, Switzerland: UNIDIR, Conflict Armament Research, and the Stimson Center, 2020), <https://www.unidir.org/publication/arms-trade-treaty-issue-brief-3-diversion-analysis-framework>
 - 25 Simon Yazgi, Hardy Giezendanner, and Himayu Shiotani, “Addressing Conventional Arms Risks and Impacts to Prevent Conflict and Build Peace: What More Should the United Nations Do?,” Report of the First Community of Practitioners Workshop (Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2020), <https://unidir.org/publication/addressing-conventional-arms-risks-and-impacts-prevent-conflict-and-build-peace-what>
 - 26 The definitions of conflict phases are adapted from Michael S. Lund. However, this issue brief does not include a durable peace phase, uses the term ‘conflict’ rather than ‘war’ for the peak phase, and includes ceasefire as a unique phase. Michael S. Lund, *Preventing Violent Conflicts: A Strategy for Preventive Diplomacy* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996).
 - 27 Alfredo Malaret Baldo et al., “The Arms Trade Treaty: Diversion Analysis Framework,” ATT Issue Brief #3 (Geneva, Switzerland: UNIDIR, Conflict Armament Research, and the Stimson Center, August 31, 2021), <https://www.unidir.org/publication/arms-trade-treaty-issue-brief-3-diversion-analysis-framework>
 - 28 Héloïse Ruadel, “Armed Non-State Actors and Displacement in Armed Conflict” (Geneva Call, October 2013), <https://www.genevacall.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Armed-non-State-actors-and-displacement-in-armed-conflict1.pdf>.
 - 29 General Assembly, “United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime: Resolution,” article 2 (a), UN document A/RES/55/25 (2000).



2. EXPLORING LINKAGES BETWEEN ARMS TRAFFICKING, ORGANIZED CRIME, AND ARMED CONFLICT

Figure 3. Overview of Main Linkages between Illicit Arms, Organized Crime, and Armed Conflict



2.1. How Does the Source of Illicit Arms Link Conflict and Organized Crime?

While there are a wide range of sources for the diversion of arms and ammunition to the illicit market and unauthorized end users, the following appear to be the primary sources of arms and ammunition for groups involved in armed conflict and organized crime activities:

- **First**, stockpile looting after State collapse and battlefield capture of weapons in conflict-affected settings provide opportunities for large-scale access to military-grade weapons by NSAGs and OCGs.
- **Second**, poorly secured national stockpiles and corrupt government officials provide a source for the diversion of arms into the illicit market, including to other conflict settings.
- **Third**, legacy weapons—arms recycled from prior conflicts—within a population or from NSAGs constitute a source of illicit arms for trafficking into both conflict and non-conflict settings.
- **Fourth**, authorized arms transfers to fragile or conflict-affected settings may become another source of arms to NSAGs and OCGs if measures to prevent and mitigate their diversion are not put in place.

2. EXPLORING LINKAGES BETWEEN ARMS TRAFFICKING, ORGANIZED CRIME, AND ARMED CONFLICT

Escalation through conflict phases increases demand for illicit arms. A de-escalating conflict decreases demand, which sometimes results in an increase in illicit supply. When States fluctuate through conflict phases or resolve conflicts without putting in place a comprehensive disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programme or related arms control measures to reduce the number of weapons in circulation, weapons may continue to circulate, even beyond the borders of the State affected by conflict. Conflicts moving between phases—especially lulls in violence—allow for ebbs and flows of illicit weapons out of the conflict zone due to changes in demand. These shifts rarely allow for a viable national DDR programme or other sustained arms control measures to be put in place.³⁰ As a result, when the demand for arms within a conflict decreases, criminal networks may take advantage of the potential source of illicit arms.³¹

After a conflict, the diffusion of weapons—whether every former combatant returns home with their weapon or weapons are kept in State-owned storage facilities—creates several opportunities for the diversion of arms. Arms may be dispersed into the community or among former members of an NSAG, or trafficked out of the area when a conflict declines or ends. The higher availability of weapons in a post-conflict society may facilitate their use in criminal activities and allow for a quicker escalation to violence, while insecure government stockpiles may provide a concentrated source of arms and ammunition, including military-grade weapons.

2.1.1. Stockpile Looting after State Collapse or Battlefield Capture for Weapons Access

The capture of weapons from the State during and after an armed conflict provides an opportunity for large-scale diversion into the illicit market. Arms traffickers and OCGs sometimes transport arms acquired in one conflict to other conflict-affected areas. During conflict, battlefield capture and raids on government-held weapons allow NSAGs to acquire military-grade weapons and increase their firepower. In addition, insecure government stockpiles are a potential target of NSAGs, which greatly increases the risk of diversion of arms to the illicit market during any conflict phase, and even more so if a State collapses. Stockpile looting after State collapse can have an impact on conflict dynamics far beyond the immediate conflict zone. Illustration 1 of Tuareg fighters taking weapons from Libyan government sources to northern Mali exemplifies how the lack of government control over arms created an opportunity for their diversion and then onward-trafficking, contributing to the recurrence of another conflict in the region.

30 For more information on DDR and organized crime, see Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS) Module 6.40, <https://www.unddr.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/IDDRS-6.40-DDR-and-Organized-Crime.pdf>

31 For instance, the 2017 EU SOCTA report suggested armed conflicts peripheral to the EU created the potential for large-scale trafficking into the region; “Crime in the Age of Technology,” European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (European Union, 2017), https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/socta2017_0.pdf

ILLUSTRATION 1

Illicit Arms from Conflict-Affected Libya Provided the Opportunity to Escalate Conflict in Northern Mali and Beyond

When the Gaddafi regime collapsed in Libya, the security situation in Mali deteriorated due to an increased cross-border influx of weapons as ethnic Tuareg fighters trafficked weapons from Libya to Mali and joined local Tuareg separatists.³² These weapons increased the military capacity of NSAGs operating in Mali and helped reignite the conflict in the country. The initial strength of the 2012 Tuareg rebellion and the increased influx of illicit arms, including heavy weapons, surprised Malian armed forces. Reportedly, arms traffickers and OCGs engaged in other types of smuggling were also involved in smuggling arms from Libya. The smuggling interests of Tuareg NSAGs conflicted with those of northern elites and the allied Malian state, adding to the rebellion's grievances.

As the armed conflict in northern Mali continued, the source of supply changed. NSAGs seized weapons from the Malian army's national stockpiles, and, on a lesser scale, legacy weapons from earlier conflicts in other countries in the region. Within West Africa and the Sahel, Mali has been a destination country for illicit weapons, with arms trafficked through Niger and, less often, Algeria as of 2018. At times, Mali has also been a source country with arms flowing back in to Libya.

Over time, the armed conflict in northern Mali led to the further deterioration of the security situation and to a spread of jihadist groups to the south of the country, while flows of illicit arms into Mali and the number of actors involved in illicit trafficking increased after 2012. The combination of local insecurity spurred by conflict, extractive industries, and criminal incentives resulted in a spiraling demand for illicit weapons. For instance, gold mining in the Mali-Côte d'Ivoire-Burkina Faso tri-border subregion led more miners and community members to arm themselves to protect their goods and deal with instability in the region. As a result, criminals also sought to increase their own firepower. Beyond gold mining, highway bandits targeting regional roads, traditional hunters, and self-defence groups added to the interconnected demand for weapons. As the number of armed groups in northern Mali grew, "powerful armed actors" took over traditional trading routes, and smugglers increasingly carried weapons to protect their goods. This reinforcing cycle of violence and instability continued to increase the demand for illicit weapons in the subregion. In addition, competition over trade routes in the illicit economy also altered the dynamics of conflicts between NSAGs and local communities.

32 This illustration synthesizes material contained in: Fiona Mangan and Matthias Nowak, "The West Africa-Sahel Connection: Mapping Cross-Border Arms Trafficking," Briefing Paper (Geneva, Switzerland: Small Arms Survey, December 2019), <https://smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-BP-West-Africa-Sahel-Connection.pdf>; Nicholas Marsh, "Brothers Came Back with Weapons: The Effects of Arms Proliferation from Libya," *PRISM* 6, no. 4 (2017): 79–96, https://cco.ndu.edu/Portals/96/Documents/prism/prism_6-4/PRISM%206.4%20Book.pdf?ver=2017-05-12-141931-440; Peter Tinti, "Illicit Trafficking and Instability in Mali: Past, Present and Future," Research Paper, Governance, Democracy and State Fragility (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, January 2014), <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Illicit-Trafficking-and-Instability-in-Mali-Past-present-and-future.pdf>; Re Roberto Sollazzo and Matthias Nowak, "Tri-Border Transit: Trafficking and Smuggling in the Burkina Faso-Cote d'Ivoire-Mali Region," Security Assessment in North Africa Briefing Paper (Geneva, Switzerland: Small Arms Survey, October 2020), <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/resource/tri-border-transit-trafficking-and-smuggling-burkina-faso-cote-divoire-mali-region>; Security Council, "Final Report of the Panel of Experts Established Pursuant to Resolution 1973 (2011) Concerning Libya," UN document S/2013/99, 2013; Security Council, "Final Report of the Panel of Experts Established Pursuant to Resolution 1973 (2011) Concerning Libya," UN document S/2014/106, 2014; Security Council, "Final Report of the Panel of Experts Established Pursuant to Resolution 1973 (2011)," UN document S/2015/128; Secretary-General, "Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Mali," UN document S/2018/541, 6 June 2018; and UNODC, "Transnational Organized Crime in West Africa: A Threat Assessment," February 2013.

2. EXPLORING LINKAGES BETWEEN ARMS TRAFFICKING, ORGANIZED CRIME, AND ARMED CONFLICT

2.1.2. Insecure Stockpiles and Corrupt Officials as Source of Diversion

Insecure government stockpiles and corrupt State officials may facilitate the diversion of weapons to the illicit market irrespective of the conflict phase, as well as in non-conflict settings. The lack of effective physical security and stockpile management creates an opportunity for both conflict and-criminal actors to steal weapons from government stockpiles, while corruption—accompanied by insufficient weapons and ammunition management (WAM) and accountability measures—increases the possible scale and time horizon of such theft. Weak institutional control and corruption weaken arms control—particularly in regions with a large supply of legacy weapons. State officials’ low wages or low morale may also increase the likelihood of their facilitating theft or renting from stockpiles. Arms stolen from government stockpiles by government officials may be sold to OCGs and sometimes trafficked to NSAGs. Illustration 2 highlights the role of former military personnel in El Salvador selling arms from national stockpiles to OCGs.

ILLUSTRATION 2

Salvadoran Military Stockpiles as a Source of Illicit Arms for OCGs

Military storage sites for surplus and collected weapons in El Salvador, which are separate from weapons used by active troops, have been a source of arms for the illicit market.³³ During 2011–2013, Salvadoran authorities investigated Salvadoran military personnel, as high up as the Minister of Defence, for theft and trafficking of surplus and collected arms designated for destruction.³⁴

These investigations revealed how El Salvador’s surplus weapons and weapons collected from NSAGs involved in earlier conflicts became a source of illicit arms for OCGs due to the falsification of arms registry permits and records of destruction.³⁵ For example, 14 rocket launchers that were supposed to have been destroyed were seized in March 2011 at a warehouse in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, owned by an ally of Mexican drug traffickers.³⁶ Police uncovered a similar operation in 2013, under which weapons that were supposed to have been destroyed were to be sold to the Taxis Cartel, an El Salvador-based criminal network, which would transfer the items to the Zetas, a Mexican drug trafficking organization.³⁷ A sting operation showed that a Salvadoran army officer was also willing to sell rocket-propelled grenades, automatic rifles, ammunition, and explosives to the FARC, having already been implicated in the supply of grenades and plastic explosives to gangs in San Salvador.³⁸

- 33 Jacob Parakilas and Iain Overton, “The Devil’s Trade: Guns and Violence in El Salvador” (Action on Armed Violence, October 2014), https://aoav.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/the_devils_trade_lr.pdf. In recent years, international assistance has supported the destruction of weapons, small arms ammunition, and the refurbishment of two weapons storage facilities. For example, see “US Embassy and HALO Trust Destroy More than 24,000 Small Arms Ammunition,” U.S. Embassy in El Salvador, 12 December 2018, <https://sv.usembassy.gov/us-embassy-and-halo-trust-destroy-more-than-24000-small-arms-ammunition>
- 34 Marguerite Cawley, “El Salvador Arms Theft Highlights Military Weapons Trafficking,” *InSight Crime*, 9 July 2014, <https://insightcrime.org/news/brief/el-salvador-arms-theft-highlights-military-weapons-trafficking/>; Seth Robbins, “El Salvador’s Military: Arms Dealer to the Maras?,” *InSight Crime*, 16 June 2014, <https://insightcrime.org/news/analysis/el-salvadors-military-arms-dealer-to-the-maras>
- 35 Mark Ungar, “The Armed Arena: Arms Trafficking in Central America,” *Latin American Research Review* 55, no. 3 (2020): 445–60, <https://doi.org/10.25222/larr.421>
- 36 Castro Fagoaga, Suchit Chavez, and Jessica Avalos, “El Salvador’s Military, Arms Trafficking, and a Mexican Cartel Convergence in Honduras.”, *InSight Crime*, 20 May 2015, <https://insightcrime.org/news/analysis/el-salvador-military-arms-trafficking-mexico-drug-cartel-honduras>. In 2014, the US Bureau of Arms, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives confirmed that the rocket launchers were part of Salvadoran Armed Forces inventory. Three soldiers had previously confessed to stealing weaponry, including 15 rocket launchers of the same type, at least three times, in exchange for payment.

2. EXPLORING LINKAGES BETWEEN ARMS TRAFFICKING, ORGANIZED CRIME, AND ARMED CONFLICT

2.1.3. The Diversion of Legacy Weapons to OCGs

Legacy weapons owned by civilians or held by OCGs constitute a potential source of illicit arms. The risk of arms flowing out of conflict-affected areas to other regions is heightened in the post-conflict period, when local demand for illicit arms decreases but the illicit stock remains. Without comprehensive DDR processes or other related arms control measures such as amnesties, collection programmes as well as regularization or registration of firearms, weapons and ammunition leftover from conflict provide a potential opportunity for OCGs to traffic arms to fragile and conflict-affected States, as well as to other theatres with current demand for firepower, including States with stricter firearms control regimes. As shown in illustration 3, Serbia-based organized criminal groups have trafficked legacy weapons from the armed conflict in the former Yugoslavia to gangs in Sweden. This highlights how legacy weapons can continue to circulate within criminal spheres and move from a post-conflict area to a non-conflict setting, where they may affect the manifestations of organized crime.

ILLUSTRATION 3

Legacy Weapons from the Western Balkans Trafficked to Criminal Gangs in Sweden

Since the end of the armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, the Western Balkans has been cited as a source of illicit SALW for OCGs in other parts of Europe.³⁹ Legacy weapons and ammunition, which former combatants brought home with them when they returned from conflict zones, as well as arms and ammunition looted from Albania's national stockpile in 1997, continue to find their way into the hands of OCGs.⁴⁰ It can be difficult to conclusively determine the original point of diversion for such arms, as many of the seized and recovered arms were not marked in line with the relevant provisions contained in the United Nations Firearms Protocol and International Tracing Instrument. However, investigations have documented how Serbia-based OCGs have proxies in Sweden—sometimes part of diaspora networks—who have received such weapons from the Western Balkans, which are then used in criminal acts in Sweden.⁴¹ For example, a large-scale regional investigation in 2014–2015 brought charges against an arms smuggling network involving Bosnian and Swedish nationals and led to the seizure of more than a dozen automatic weapons and a hundred grenades.⁴² The seizure of grenades is particularly important, because such items have been provided to Sweden-based OCGs from the Western Balkans as 'gifts' when firearms and ammunition have been purchased.⁴³ The use of grenades by Swedish criminal groups has had a notable impact on Sweden's criminal violence dynamics by altering the modus operandi of multiple Swedish gangs who use them for intimidation.⁴⁴ The police view this increase in detonations and seizures of hand grenades—potentially alongside the movement of military-grade rifles—as an arms race among gangs in Sweden.⁴⁵ Swedish authorities have noted that a lack of clarity on the status of grenades in Sweden's customs legislation meant that trafficking such items did not carry significant penalties. As a result of the increase in the use of grenades in Sweden, these regulatory loopholes have been closed.⁴⁶

37 Charles Parkinson, "El Salvador Arms Cache Exposes Taxis Cartel - Zetas Link," *InSight Crime*, 11 October 2013, <https://insightcrime.org/news/brief/el-salvador-arms-cache-exposes-taxis-cartel-link-to-zetas>

38 Seth Robbins, "El Salvador's Military: Arms Dealer to the Maras?," *InSight Crime*, 16 June 2014, <https://insightcrime.org/news/analysis/el-salvadors-military-arms-dealer-to-the-maras>

39 Ernesto U. Savona and Marina Mancuso, *Fighting Illicit Firearms Trafficking Routes and Actors at European Level: Final Report of Project FIRE* (Milan, Italy: Transcrime at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 2017), <https://www.transcrime.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/FIREFinalReport.pdf>

2.1.4. Authorized Arms Transfers as a Potential Source of Diversion

Cross-border movements of arms bear the inherent risk that diversion occurs either somewhere along the route or after the shipment reaches the final recipient. This risk significantly increases in fragile States or regions with ongoing conflicts, where power structures, lines of authorization and competencies can change from one day to the other. The modalities of diversion of authorized arms transfers are multifaceted and include insufficient validation of official procurement and authorization channels, loss or theft en route or upon arrival due to weak security measures, as well as the lack of physical monitoring and post-delivery verification.⁴⁷

Against this backdrop, art. 11 para. 2 of the Arms Trade Treaty requires States parties to seek to prevent diversion of transferred arms, including by assessing the risk of diversion of the export and considering the establishment of mitigation measures.⁴⁸ Illustration 4 on diversion of authorized arms transfers to post-revolution Libya demonstrates how transfers intended to equip security forces may instead provide NSAGs, OCGs, and terrorists with arms and ammunition, if basic security and preventive measures are not in place during the transfer chain and upon arrival or delivery in the recipient State.

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- 40 “Serbia: The Land of Guns,” Deutsche Welle, 29 December 2016, <https://www.dw.com/en/serbia-the-land-of-guns/a-36946878>; Sami Faltas and Wolf-Christian Paes, “‘You Have Removed the Devil from Our Door’: An Assessment of the UNDP Small Arms and Light Weapons Control (SALWC) Project in Albania,” (South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, 2003), <https://www.seesac.org/f/docs/SALW-Awareness-and-Communication/An-Assessment-of-the-UNDP-SALWC-Project-in-Albania-EN.pdf>.
- 41 GITOC, “The Civil Society Observatory to Counter Organized Crime in South Eastern Europe,” Risk Bulletin 4 (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, February 2021).
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 “Sweden’s Deadly Problem with Hand Grenades.”; BBC, 18 April 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-43667367>; “Swedish Gangs Armed By Balkan Weapon Traffickers.”
- 44 Karis Hustad, “Sweden Has a Problem with Hand Grenades—and Here’s Why,” *Euronews*, 10 April 2018, <https://www.euronews.com/2018/04/10/sweden-has-a-problem-with-hand-grenades-and-here-s-why>
- 45 Ellen Barry and Christina Anderson, “Hand Grenades and Gang Violence Rattle Sweden’s Middle Class,” *The New York Times*, 3 March 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/03/world/europe/sweden-crime-immigration-hand-grenades.html>
- 46 “Why Swedish Gangs Use Hand Grenades (and What the Country Is Doing about It),” *The Local Sweden*, 1 March 2018, <https://www.thelocal.se/20180228/why-sweden-is-battling-hand-grenades-and-illegal-weapons/>; Ellen Barry and Christina Anderson, “Hand Grenades and Gang Violence Rattle Sweden’s Middle Class,” *The New York Times*, 3 March 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/03/world/europe/sweden-crime-immigration-hand-grenades.html>.
- 47 Alfredo Malaret Baldo et al., “The Arms Trade Treaty: Diversion Analysis Framework,” ATT Issue Brief #3 (Geneva, Switzerland: UNIDIR, Conflict Armament Research, and the Stimson Center, August 31, 2021), <https://www.unidir.org/publication/arms-trade-treaty-issue-brief-3-diversion-analysis-framework>
- 48 Brian Wood and Paul Holtom, “The Arms Trade Treaty: Measures to Prevent, Detect, Address and Eradicate the Diversion of Conventional Arms,” (Geneva, Switzerland: UNIDIR, Conflict Armament Research, the Small Arms Survey, and the Stimson Center, 2020), <https://unidir.org/publication/arms-trade-treaty-measures-prevent-detect-address-and-eradicate-diversion-conventional>

ILLUSTRATION 4

Diversions from Authorized Arms Transfers to Libya between 2012 and 2014

Between 2011 and 2018, official arms transfers to Libya that were notified to the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1970 (2011) concerning Libya amounted to more than 65,000 assault rifles, 62,000 pistols, 15,000 submachine guns, 8,000 grenade launchers, 4,000 machine guns and more than 60 million rounds of ammunition.⁴⁹ Significant quantities of these authorized transfers of arms and ammunition were diverted. For instance, between October 2013 and May 2014, bypassing the official military procurement channels, the deputy Libyan Minister of Defence secured arms deals to provide arms and ammunition to security bodies and militias he favoured. Although the Military Procurement Department was the only competent authority for authorizing arms transfers, several authorizations for SALW and related ammunition were signed only by him. The Security Council Committee was notified of such authorizations but did not reject the proposed transfers. In relation to one of these cases, Belarus authorized the export of more than 3,000 tons of SALW ammunition to Libya. Upon arrival at Tripoli International Airport, the Zintani Brigades that controlled the airport took one of the first deliveries. Belarus was not informed and continued to make at least 15 additional shipments. The United Nations Panel of Experts mandated to investigate violations of the sanctions regime concluded that several of these additional shipments were likely to have been received by NSAGs as the deliveries were made to airports in regions outside of governmental control.⁵⁰ The Zintani Brigades also reportedly stole 23 assault rifles, 70 handguns and more than 42,000 rounds of ammunition that were intended for the protection of the European Union Border Assistance Mission.⁵¹

Key Takeaways

- Escalation through conflict phases shifts demand for illicit arms. OCGs may use the opportunity to acquire and traffic weapons from and to conflict and post-conflict settings.
- After a conflict, legacy weapons and surplus stockpiles constitute potential sources for the diversion of arms into the hands of both OCGs and NSAGs.
- When conflicts shift through phases, arms and ammunition may change hands between OCGs and NSAGs which can operate both on the supply side and the demand side.
- Arms transfers to conflict-affected and fragile States constitute an additional potential source of diversion, if they are not safeguarded by basic accountability, security and preventive measures.

48 Brian Wood and Paul Holtom, "The Arms Trade Treaty: Measures to Prevent, Detect, Address and Eradicate the Diversion of Conventional Arms," (Geneva, Switzerland: UNIDIR, Conflict Armament Research, the Small Arms Survey, and the Stimson Center, 2020), <https://undir.org/publication/arms-trade-treaty-measures-prevent-detect-address-and-eradicate-diversion-conventional>

49 Security Council, 'Final Report of the Panel of Experts Established Pursuant to Resolution 1973 (2011) Concerning Libya', 2018, para. 129.

50 Security Council, 'Final Report of the Panel of Experts Established Pursuant to Resolution 1973 (2011) Concerning Libya', 2015, pp. 31ff.

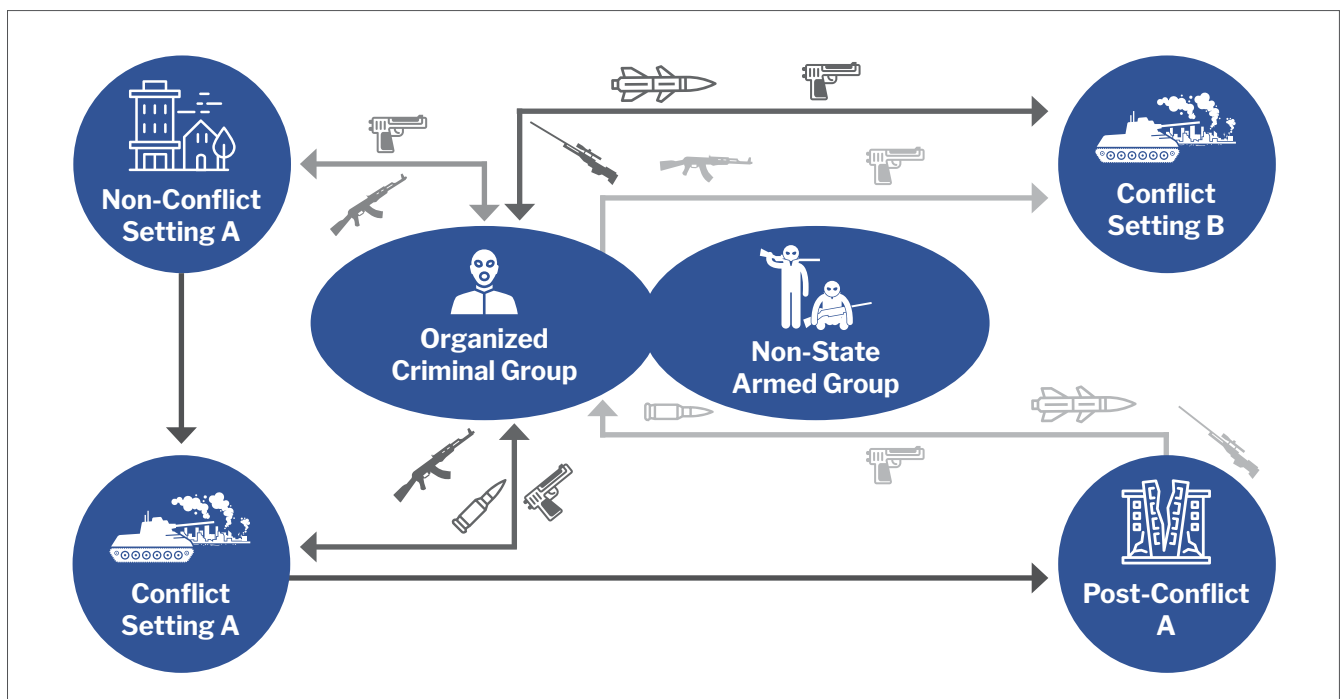
51 Ibid., p. 35.

2.2. How Does the Process of Illicit Arms Acquisition Link Conflict and Organized Crime?

The process of illicit arms acquisition links conflict and organized crime in at least four ways.

- **First**, OCGs can supply NSAGs and governments facing multilateral arms embargoes with weapons and ammunition to be used in a conflict.
- **Second**, individual arms dealers and brokers may sell weapons to both NSAGs and OCGs; smaller or less connected groups may gain access to illicit arms as a result of weapons being sold to other groups in the vicinity.
- **Third**, both OCGs and NSAGs may directly engage in illicit arms trafficking, to secure their own access to weapons but sometimes also as a source of revenue.
- **Fourth**, the control over territory by NSAGs in conflict-affected or fragile States may allow for the taxing or harbouring of arms smugglers or the taxing at gunpoint of illicit flows of other commodities more broadly.

Figure 4. NSAGs, OCGs and Illicit Arms and Ammunition Flows from and to Conflict Settings



2. EXPLORING LINKAGES BETWEEN ARMS TRAFFICKING, ORGANIZED CRIME, AND ARMED CONFLICT

2.2.1. OCGs as Arms Traffickers to Conflict Regions

Organized criminal networks may directly traffic arms and ammunition to active conflict zones. By supplying surplus arms from a previous conflict to other regions, for instance, or by circumventing arms embargoes, these networks may help to initiate or spread a conflict to other areas. When NSAGs receive more sophisticated weaponry or obtain access to a continued supply of arms and ammunition, illicit weapons can also help to escalate or lengthen a conflict. Illustration 5 details how a Spain-based criminal network trafficked arms to conflict zones subject to multilateral arms embargoes.

ILLUSTRATION 5

Spain-based Criminal Network Facilitating Arms Flows to Conflict Zones

A Spain-based OCG trafficked arms from Ukraine to conflict parties in North Africa and the Middle East, some of which were subject to multilateral arms embargoes.⁵² This criminal network concealed illegal shipments of explosives, weapons, and tanks in cargo ships transporting legally sourced armaments. After more than two years, a joint operation among Spanish agencies, supported by Europol, led to the arrests in November 2020 of seven Latvian, Spanish, and Ukrainian alleged members of the OCG.⁵³ The OCG laundered more than 10 million euros earned from illegal arms sales through the tax havens where the cargo ships were flagged.⁵⁴ Publicly available reports do not detail specifically how the OCG sourced conventional arms from Ukraine or what impact the illicit arms had on the conflict dynamics in the destination countries. Yet, this case shows that OCG can facilitate the delivery of illicit arms to NSAGs.

2.2.2. Illicit Arms Trade for Revenue Generation or Access

Many OCGs and NSAGs involved in illicit arms trafficking not only supply their own group with SALW and ammunition, but also earn revenue by selling to other groups.⁵⁵ NSAGs that rely on arms and ammunition for their operations may temporarily engage in arms trafficking as a source of revenue, acting both on the supply side and the demand side depending on their respective needs and financial situation.⁵⁶

2.2.3. Overlap in Illicit Arms Supply Networks

An overlap in the networks that provide access to illicit arms may allow for some OCGs to acquire weapons alongside NSAGs operating in the same region of a country. In some cases, the same arms trafficking networks provide both OCGs and NSAGs with illicit arms and ammunition. Illustration 6 provides an example of an arms supplier that provides OCGs with illicit arms by using established trafficking routes and distribution mechanisms to NSAGs.

⁵² Publicly available sources do not provide any additional detail on destinations or intended end users.

⁵² EMPACT Firearms, “Operation YAKIR: International Smuggling of Weapons and Explosives,” *Bulletin: Europol’s Newsletter on Firearms and Explosives Trafficking*, December 2020; Europol, “Traffickers Supplying Conflict Zones with Weapons and Explosives Disarmed in Spain,” press release, 21 December 2020, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/traffickers-supplying-conflict-zones-weapons-and-explosives-disarmed-in-spain>.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

ILLUSTRATION 6

Arms Trafficking Network Supplying Illicit Weapons to NSAGs and OCGs in Colombia

When much of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) demobilized following the 2016 peace agreement with the Colombian government, the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) recruited former FARC members who did not take part in the demobilization process, as it sought to gain additional territory for trafficking drugs and other contraband.⁵⁷ Beyond the arms diverted within Colombia, illicit arms are trafficked to Colombia through international criminal networks, including weapons diverted from the Venezuelan army.⁵⁸

In March 2019, Colombian authorities cut off one source of arms supply to the ELN by arresting an arms trafficker after a major investigation and deportation by Honduran authorities. The trafficker was accused of leading a transnational arms trafficking network that supplied not only the ELN, but also dissident factions of FARC and other criminal groups in and around Antioquia, Colombia.⁵⁹ He allegedly procured weapons in the United States and used courier companies to transport arms from Central America to Colombia, where he distributed them through cargo trucks and public buses, with the help of an ELN contact.⁶⁰ His arrest was part of a major INTERPOL operation that led to 560 arrests across eight countries in Latin America.⁶¹

54 Ibid.

55 For instance, in the EU firearms trafficking is a criminal activity often secondary to drug trafficking. “A Corrupting Influence: The Infiltration and Undermining of Europe’s Economy and Society by Organized Crime”, European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (European Union, 2021).

56 Tanya Mehra et al., *Cashing in on Guns: Identifying the Nexus between Small Arms, Light Weapons and Terrorist Financing* (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2021), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep31915.1>.

57 “ELN” *InSight Crime*, 27 March 2017, <https://insightcrime.org/colombia-organized-crime-news/eln-profile>

58 The report does not specify whether weapons from the Venezuelan army are from army officials or army stockpiles. GITOC, “Global Organized Crime Index 2021 - Colombia Report” (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2021), https://ocindex.net/assets/downloads/english/ocindex_profile_colombia.pdf

59 “Proveedor de armas para el ELN en Antioquia fue enviado a la cárcel,” Caracol Radio, 6 March 2019, https://caracol.com.co/emisora/2019/03/06/medellin/1551877009_569323.html. “Alleged Arms Trafficker Who Was Hiding in Central America Has Been Arrested,” press release, Office of the Attorney General of Colombia, <https://www.fiscalia.gov.co/colombia/en/2019/03/05/alleged-arms-trafficker-who-was-hiding-in-central-america-has-been-arrested>; INTERPOL, “Americas: INTERPOL Operation Nets 850 Firearms, 560 Arrests,” press release, 11 March 2019, <https://www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2019/Americas-INTERPOL-operation-nets-850-firearms-560-arrests>

60 Official law enforcement press releases and news articles do not specify how the weapons were acquired in the United States or how the network transported the weapons to Central America. Juan Camilo Jaramillo and Josefina Salomon, “Arrest of ELN Arms Dealer in Colombia Reveals Global Network,” *InSight Crime*, 15 March 2019, <https://insightcrime.org/news/brief/colombia-arrest-eln-arms-dealer>; Nelson Ricardo Matta Colorado, “Así Funciona El Tráfico de Armas En Antioquia,” *El Colombiano*, 11 March 2019, <https://www.elcolombiano.com/antioquia/seguridad/la-trama-de-zeus-y-del-trafico-de-armas-en-antioquia-CH10353753>

61 INTERPOL, “Americas: INTERPOL Operation Nets 850 Firearms, 560 Arrests,” press release, 11 March 2019, <https://www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2019/Americas-INTERPOL-operation-nets-850-firearms-560-arrests>.

2. EXPLORING LINKAGES BETWEEN ARMS TRAFFICKING, ORGANIZED CRIME, AND ARMED CONFLICT

2.2.4. Control over Territory that Leads to Ties between OCGs or Arms Traffickers and NSAGs

When NSAGs control territory within a country, OCGs or arms traffickers may have an incentive to align with them. For instance, arms smugglers embedded themselves within NSAGs taking part in the Malian conflict in order to obtain both political and security protection (Illustration 1). At the same time, NSAG's looting of governmental stockpiles and attacks on military camps and convoys, as well as deliberate arms supplies by corrupt officials to NSAGs, can provide important sources of arms for trafficking networks aligned with these groups.⁶² Arms traffickers may work closely with an NSAG, while still selling weapons to NSAGs and OCGs. Beyond alliances of convenience, OCGs or arms traffickers may also have to pay taxes on their trade to the territory-controlling NSAG. Illicit taxation of smuggled goods and trade can provide an important source of revenue for NSAGs controlling a territory or trafficking routes, as demonstrated in the Central African Republic (Illustration 9).

Key Takeaways

- OCGs supply illicit weapons to NSAGs and even government actors subject to multilateral embargoes, contributing to an increase in arms flowing into conflict zones.
- OCGs and NSAGs may secure continuous access to illicit weapons by relying on transnational arms trafficking networks supplying larger groups within the region.
- Arms traffickers and OCGs may align themselves with NSAGs to operate in territory controlled by them and benefit from their political and security protection.

62 At least during peacetime, these linked traffickers were also willing to sell weapons to rival groups. Fiona Mangan and Matthias Nowak, "The West Africa-Sahel Connection: Mapping Cross-Border Arms Trafficking," Briefing Paper (Geneva, Switzerland: Small Arms Survey, December 2019).

2.3. How Do Linkages between Armed Conflict, Organized Crime, and Arms Trafficking Affect Violent Crime Levels and Conflict Dynamics?

The linkages between armed conflict, organized crime, and illicit arms also influence the *dynamics* of crime and conflict in at least three ways.

- **First**, an increased influx of arms and ammunition or the introduction of a different category of weapon in a context affected by conflict or organized crime can spark or prolong violent competition. Either shift can result in changes in the balance of power or in competitors scaling up their own arsenals.
- **Second**, the nexus of arms–crime–conflict can create a spiral of instability and lead to an increase in the demand for illicit arms for self-protection by the local population and companies. These circumstances create the potential for more violence, generating a greater demand for illicit arms that reinforces the cycle of insecurity.
- **Third**, when NSAGs use illicit arms to facilitate revenue-generating crimes in a conflict setting, these weapons may indirectly finance the ongoing conflict and influence the group’s incentives to continue fighting. As a result, NSAGs with interests in illicit economies may spoil a peace process or undermine post-conflict reconstruction efforts.

2.3.1. Role of Increased Firepower and Sustainability of Supply in Igniting or Prolonging Violent Competition

Both the quantity and type of illicit weapons and ammunition in a context can alter the crime dynamics and the phase of a conflict. Increased firepower and access to more sophisticated weaponry may redefine engagement across the different phases of conflict, potentially escalating the conflict or altering conflict dynamics with NSAGs claiming more victories or territory. A large weapons seizure or increased interceptions of diverted ammunition by NSAGs can have a significant impact on their fighting capacity, and a sustained influx of arms and ammunition may exacerbate and prolong conflicts. The northern Mali example highlights how arms trafficked from Libya to Mali helped to reignite a conflict, enabled NSAGs to gain initial victories against government forces and increased the demand for arms and ammunition to protect illicit economies and trafficking routes (Illustration 1).

A shift in the type of weapons provided to a non-conflict zone can also have a significant impact on interactions between criminal organizations and law enforcement, including by escalating arms acquisitions among OCGs and requiring law enforcement to arm themselves with different weapons. For instance, post-conflict surplus weapons can affect organized crime dynamics, as shown in the example on Sweden-based gangs (Illustration 3). In addition, a sustained influx of illicit weapons may lengthen conflicts or contribute to a situation of ‘criminalized peace’ in post-conflict and fragile environments, especially where the rule of law has been weakened. As shown in Illustration 7, an increased and continuous influx of illicit weapons derived from national, regional, and transcontinental sources helped to fuel and aggravate farmer–herder conflicts in Nigeria.

ILLUSTRATION 7

Illicit Weapons Fueling and Exacerbating Farmer–Herder Conflicts in Nigeria

In north and central Nigeria, escalating farmer–herder clashes fueled by illicit weapons have been cited as the State’s gravest security challenge, causing more deaths in 2018 than Boko Haram’s insurgency and reportedly displacing over 300,000 people between the end of 2017 and June 2018 alone.⁶³ Although land disputes involving nomadic herding and sedentary farming communities have a long history in Nigeria, the proliferation of illicit arms and ammunition in the region has disrupted balances of power between and within these communities. This has led to increasingly deadly and escalatory cycles of violence.⁶⁴

Groups involved in inter-communal farmer–herder conflicts use not only locally made artisanal weapons, but also factory-produced weapons that were manufactured in Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East. Although many of these weapons and ammunition were lost, stolen, or captured from Nigerian national stockpiles, an equally significant number of weapons appear to have been diverted from State stockpiles in other countries in Africa and beyond. Local groups and communities are acquiring weapons that were smuggled into the country by OCGs through regional trafficking routes, with transcontinental weapon traffickers facilitating the movement of newly-produced Turkish firearms to those involved in farmer–herder violence in Nigeria.⁶⁵

2.3.2. Role of Illicit Arms Access in Generating a Spiral of Instability

Perceived insecurity linked to local crime or conflict often increases the demand for illicit arms within a population or threatened industry, which in turn contributes to higher levels of violence and instability. The presence of NSAGs and OCGs can also affect the nature of smuggling and other criminal activities within a region. For example, when NSAGs disrupt traditional smuggling routes or increase insecurity—including outside of conflict zones—OCGs and even companies and community members may arm (or more heavily arm) themselves to protect their interests. Illustration 8 highlights how insecurity from violent crime and conflict in Papua New Guinea is compounded by a spiraling demand for firearms for self-protection by the local population and extractive industries.

63 International Crisis Group, “Stopping Nigeria’s Spiralling Farmer–Herder Violence,” Africa Report No. 262, 26 July 2018, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/262-stopping-nigerias-spiralling-farmer-herder-violence>.

64 Madeline Velluro and Shannon Dick, “How Arms Proliferation is Driving Herder–Farmer Conflict in the Sahel,” *World Politics Review*, March 2020, <https://www.stimson.org/2020/how-arms-proliferation-is-driving-herder-farmer-conflict-in-the-sahel>.

65 Conflict Armament Research, “Nigeria’s Herder–Farmer Conflict: Domestic, Regional and Transcontinental Weapon Sources,” January 2020, <https://www.conflictarm.com/dispatches/nigerias-herder-farmer-conflict>

ILLUSTRATION 8

Illicit Arms and Escalation of Tribal Conflict and Political Violence in Papua New Guinea

Demand for illegal firearms in Papua New Guinea is driven by a combination of tribal conflict and criminality.⁶⁶ Anecdotal reports indicate that small arms have helped to fuel escalating cycles of tribal conflict in the Highlands, increasing the lethality of violence compared to the use of spears and knives. This amplified violence has undercut the customary rules that used to limit tribal conflict in the country. The higher casualty rates seem to contribute to spirals of intercommunal conflict, as land disputes lead to more violent retributive tribal conflict than in the past.

The government views the illicit proliferation of SALW and ammunition as a major security threat, with increasing firearms trafficking within and into Papua New Guinea adding to the level of insecurity in the country. Conflict, crime, and electoral competition in the Pacific region drive demand for illicit SALW. Homemade firearms are bartered in Papua New Guinea, while many of the machine guns and assault rifles circulating within the country were originally stolen from the police. The police force has also been accused of smuggling firearms into the country. While illicit arms trafficking into Papua New Guinea is regarded as rare, there is evidence of trafficking from Australia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Viet Nam in relation to drug trafficking and resource extraction companies. Elections in Papua New Guinea also increase the demand for arms, with political candidates personally wielding and directly distributing guns to supporters, while civilians stockpile illicit arms to protect themselves in the post-election period should their supported candidate lose.

66 The information provided in this illustration uses the following sources: Sinclair Dinnen, "Internal Security in Papua New Guinea: Trends and Prospects" (Lowry Institute, August 2017), https://interactives.lowryinstitute.org/archive/png-in-2017/downloads/Dinnen_Security.pdf; Catherine Graue, "'Spears to Semi-Automatics': Papua New Guinea's Tribal Conflicts Become More Violent," *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, 3 June 2017, Reliefweb, <https://relief-web.int/report/papua-new-guinea/spears-semi-automatics-papua-new-guineas-tribal-conflicts-become-more>; Stephanie Koorey, "Illicit Small Arms in the Pacific," *Civil-Military Occasional Papers* (Australian Civil-Military Centre, 2016), https://www.acmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-11/Illicit_Small_Arms_in_the_Pacific.pdf; Rebecca Kuku, "Tribal Conflict Worsens in Papua New Guinea as Firearms Rewrite the Rules," *The Guardian*, 26 February 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/27/tribal-conflict-worsens-in-papua-new-guinea-as-firearms-rewrite-the-rules>; "Papua New Guinea: Women and Children Killed in Tribal Massacre," *BBC News*, 10 July 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-48932361>; Helen Davidson, "Guns and Phones Deal 'Maximum' Carnage to Papua New Guinea's Warring Tribes," *The Guardian*, 2 December 2017; Ben Doherty, "Papua New Guinea Police Accused of Gun Running and Drug Smuggling by Own Minister," *The Guardian*, 18 September 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/18/papua-new-guinea-police-accused-of-gun-running-and-drug-smuggling-by-own-minister>; Clifford Fairparik, "PNG Police Minister Says Officers Being Probed for Gun-Smuggling, Fraud," *Asia Pacific Report*, <https://asiapacificreport.nz/2020/09/27/png-police-minister-says-officers-being-probed-for-gun-smuggling-fraud>; Pita Ligaiula, "Rise in Gun Trade for 2022 Election in PNG," *The National/Pacnews*, 8 September 2021, Pacific Island News Association, <https://pina.com.fj/2021/09/08/rise-in-gun-trade-for-2022-election-in-png/>; UNODC, "Transnational Organized Crime in the Pacific: A Threat Assessment," September 2016; and Maxwell Presser and Philip Alpers, "Small Firearms in the Pacific: Regionalism and Non-Trafficking," in *Gun Trafficking and Violence: From the Global Network to the Local Security Challenge*, ed. David Pérez Esparza, Carlos A. Pérez Ricart, and Eugenio Weigand Vargas, *St Antony's Series* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-65636-2_9

2.3.3. Role of Illicit Arms in Enabling Crime that Finances Conflicts

NSAGs operating in illicit economies can finance protracted conflicts, and some may directly engage in criminal pursuits, sometimes altering their strategy as a response to resource needs or conflict cessation. The use of illicit arms to facilitate other illicit revenue generation activities seems to be much more common than the direct involvement of NSAGs in illicit arms trafficking for profit.⁶⁷ Indeed, illicit arms are often used to protect other forms of illicit trafficking or enable rent-seeking, including taxation, banditry, kidnapping, and extortion.⁶⁸ Illustration 9 shows how some NSAGs in the Central African Republic have used illegal arms to facilitate the extraction and taxation of natural resources, which in turn allowed them to finance their operations, control territory, and continue to perpetrate violence.

ILLUSTRATION 9

Arms as an Instrument to Protect Illicit Economics in the Central African Republic

In the Central African Republic, NSAGs continued to engage in violence and perpetrate attacks against government forces and civilians after the signing of the 2019 peace agreement between the government and 14 NSAGs.⁶⁹ Many NSAGs continue to collect revenue through illegal taxation, control of territory, and arms trafficking.⁷⁰ While the challenges to the implementation of the peace agreement are multifaceted, the generation of revenue through illicit activities within the conflict economy is one factor disincentivizing the adherence of NSAGs to the peace accord and contributing to the continuation of the conflict.⁷¹ For example, some experts believe that one of the signatory NSAGs—Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation (3R)—may now be prioritizing illicit income generation over the pursuit of political goals.⁷² 3R originated as a self-defence militia to protect ethnic Fulani herders from reprisal attacks by the Anti-Balaka armed group in the north-west of the country. Since a change in leadership in early 2021, however, 3R has increasingly focused on taxing gold miners and cattle herders.⁷³

Many other armed groups in the Central African Republic have used illicit arms to facilitate criminal activities, blurring the line between NSAGs and OCGs and fueling further violence in the country. In the border area with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, NSAGs and criminal groups have often exchanged hunting weapons and ammunition for gold and precious minerals.⁷⁴ Access to illicit weapons reinforces the ability of NSAGs to generate revenue from illegal mining activities, and challenges over controlling mining sites have led to clashes between and within NSAGs or between NSAGs and local communities.⁷⁵

67 This report focuses specifically on terrorist organizations which fall under the NSAG definition within this issue brief; Reinier Bergema, Tanya Mehra, and Meryl Demuynck, “The Use of Small Arms and Light Weapons by Terrorist Organizations as a Source of Finance,” ICCT Report (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, September 2020), <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2020/09/SALW-Synthesis-Report.pdf>

68 Tanya Mehra et al., *Cashing in on Guns: Identifying the Nexus between Small Arms, Light Weapons and Terrorist Financing* (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2021), <https://icct.nl/publication/small-arms-light-weapons-terrorist-financing-report>

69 United Nations, “Continued Attacks by Illegal Armed Groups in Central African Republic Thwarting Progress towards Implementing Peace Agreement, Special Representative Tells Security Council,” UN document SC/14667, 18 October 2021, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14667.doc.htm>; Security Council, “Final Report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic Extended Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2454 (2019),” UN document S/2019/930, 14 December 2019.

2. EXPLORING LINKAGES BETWEEN ARMS TRAFFICKING, ORGANIZED CRIME, AND ARMED CONFLICT

Key Takeaways

- Continued or increased access to illicit arms and ammunition by NSAGs and OCGs, as well as the introduction of ‘new’ or more sophisticated weaponry within a given context, can have a significant impact on both conflict and organized crime dynamics by increasing the firepower power of OCGs and NSAGs and reinforcing cycles of insecurity and violence.
- NSAGs or OCGs using illicit arms to enable profit-generating activities can lengthen and exacerbate a conflict as well as undermine post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding efforts.

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- 70 Mohamed Diatta, “New Approach to Peace Needed in the Central African Republic,” *Central Africa Report 19* (Pretoria, South Africa: Institute for Security Studies, March 2021), <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/car19v2.pdf>; Security Council, “Final Report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic Extended Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2536 (2020),” UN document S/2021/569, 25 June 2021.
- 71 Security Council, “Final Report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic Extended Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2454 (2019),” UN document S/2019/930, 14 December 2019.
- 72 GITOC, “Observatory of Illicit Economies in West Africa,” *Risk Bulletin 2* (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, November 2021), <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/weaobs-risk-bulletin-2>
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 Security Council, “Final Report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic Extended Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2454 (2019),” UN document S/2019/930, 14 December 2019.
- 75 “Militia Clashes in Central African Republic Kill around 40,” *Reuters*, 28 January 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-centralafrica-security-idUSKBN1ZR2PJ>; “Central African Republic Traders in Deadly Battle over Militia Taxes in Bangui,” *BBC News*, 27 December 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-50925562>



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3. OPTIONS FOR INTEGRATED AND COMPREHENSIVE APPROACHES TO TACKLE THE ILLICIT ARMS, ORGANIZED CRIME, AND ARMED CONFLICT NEXUS

This issue brief has demonstrated how illicit arms and ammunition flows link conflict and organized crime actors across different phases of a conflict, highlighting the multiple challenges resulting from these interconnected threats. The **first section** explored how the *source* of illicit arms—often in conflict-affected or post-conflict areas—links conflict and organized crime, particularly through stockpile looting or battlefield capture of weapons by NSAGs or OCGs, poorly secured national stockpiles and corrupt practices, illicit recirculation of legacy weapons, or diversion of authorized arms transfers. The **second section** highlighted how the process of illicit arms acquisition connects crime and conflict, namely through OCGs and NSAGs directly trafficking arms, sharing an illicit arms supplier, or controlling territory through which illicit arms are moved. The **third section** detailed how these linkages may affect the *dynamics* of crime and conflict in ways that increase violence, undermine development, and impede sustainable peace and stability. In particular, the section analysed how the widespread availability of weapons and ammunition can hinder efforts to manage and resolve conflicts, as well as contribute to a situation of ‘criminalized peace’ in transitional and post-conflict settings. In this regard, further examination of the specific dynamics and conditions leading to criminalized peace is critical to identify appropriate measures to prevent their occurrence and to mitigate their negative effects on post-conflict peacebuilding efforts.

First and foremost, preventing and countering illicit arms and ammunition flows and their connection with organized crime and conflict requires **integrated and comprehensive approaches** that combine conflict prevention and arms control measures with robust and effective crime prevention and criminal justice responses. Building on the synergies between international and regional arms control instruments related to organized crime and conflict, the section below provides key considerations that may help to inform the adoption of more coherent policy and operational responses to address these interrelated threats.

- **Integrating WAM into conflict prevention and post-conflict stabilization strategies.** By ensuring the oversight, accountability and management of arms and ammunition throughout their life cycle, comprehensive WAM measures are critical for disrupting the sources of supply of arms and ammunition for both NSAGs and OCGs, contributing to crime and conflict prevention efforts. In line with relevant international instruments, standards and guidelines, the full set of WAM measures includes the establishment of frameworks, processes and practices for safe and secure materiel production, acquisition, stockpiling, transfers, marking, record-keeping, tracing, recovery, and disposal.⁷⁶ The concrete measures depend on the security situation of the country and may be linked. For example:s.

76 Relevant international instruments include the Arms Trade Treaty, the Firearms Protocol, the International Tracing Instrument, and the Programme of Action. Relevant international SALW and ammunition standards and guidelines are: the Modular Small-arms-control Implementation Compendium and the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines; Savannah de Tessières, Himayu Shiotani, and Sebastian Wilkin, “The Role of Weapon and Ammunition Management in Preventing Conflict and Supporting Security Transitions”, (Geneva, Switzerland: UNIDIR, 2019), <https://unidir.org/files/publications/pdfs/the-role-of-weapon-and-ammunition-management-in-preventing-conflict-and-supporting-security-transitions-en-773.pdf>

3. OPTIONS FOR INTEGRATED AND COMPREHENSIVE APPROACHES TO TACKLE THE ILLICIT ARMS, ORGANIZED CRIME, AND ARMED CONFLICT NEXUS

- **WAM in security sector reform in fragile and conflict-affected or post-conflict settings.** Strengthening national legal and regulatory frameworks for WAM is critical to reduce the risk of diversion and the illicit circulation of weapons and can be a key component of security sector reform processes and broader peacebuilding efforts. Such measures aim at ensuring oversight of arms and ammunition and accountability of persons that have access to them, minimizing the risks of diversion, including through corrupt officials or negligence. This requires effective marking practices as well as comprehensive registries of arms and ammunition, both in civilian and State possession, maintaining information that permits the tracing of these items back to their last legitimate holder. Preventive WAM measures should be enforced by investigations of diversion cases and patterns as well as accompanying criminal justice responses.
- **WAM in the context of arms supplies. International arms transfers, in particular arms supplies to parties to a conflict, pose heightened diversion risks.** Supplying States, in close coordination with the final recipients, should adopt basic accountability measures to track and monitor the transferred arms to support post-conflict recovery and collection campaigns. Such measures may include maintaining records of the transferred weapons in centralized registries, the inclusion of non-transfer clauses in end-user documentation, periodic inspections of national stockpiles, and reporting obligations towards the supplying State or compliance with reporting to the Security Council on arms acquisitions.
- **WAM in DDR and community violence reduction processes.** WAM should be included into the regulatory, operational and technical components of DDR and community violence reduction (CVR) processes with the aim to bring all arms and ammunition present in a country under governmental control. This includes the collection of surplus weapons, including through voluntary surrender programmes, and the registration of all arms that can remain in legal circulation. The widespread availability and proliferation of weapons in post-conflict settings may allow for high levels of criminality and violence, undermining government legitimacy and the rule of law, as well as creating an opportunity for a relapse into conflict. In these contexts, legacy weapons in the hands of returning fighters, NSAGs, territorial defence units and volunteer battalions may also provide a potential source of illicit arms for trafficking by criminal networks, including to other conflict zones, and should be collected or registered.

As part of CVR programmes and other targeted arms control measures, States should also consider ‘guns for development’ as well as weapons collection and management programmes that address weapons in the hands of civilians to prevent their illicit recirculation and to reduce the levels of armed violence within communities. These programmes must be developed in a context-sensitive manner, taking into account the political influence and power structure of OCGs and NSAGs operating in the country or region. In this regard, the Department of Peace Operations and the Office for Disarmament Affairs have developed specific guidance to support efforts to integrate arms control activities into DDR programmes, including WAM at the community level as part of CVR projects.⁷⁷

77 Office for Disarmament Affairs, *Effective Weapons and Ammunition Management in a Changing Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Context*, 2nd ed., 2021, <https://front.un-arm.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/ddr-handbook-2ed-3.pdf>

3. OPTIONS FOR INTEGRATED AND COMPREHENSIVE APPROACHES TO TACKLE THE ILLICIT ARMS, ORGANIZED CRIME, AND ARMED CONFLICT NEXUS

- **Combatting illicit arms transfers to fragile and conflict-affected areas through effective criminal justice responses.** In addressing the diversion of arms and illicit arms and ammunition flows to fragile and conflict-affected areas, States should make use of the full potential of criminal justice responses to combat arms and ammunition trafficking. Customs and law enforcement officers as well as prosecutors in fragile and conflict-affected countries might not be able to carry out their primary functions. Therefore, neighbouring States and those known to be used for facilitating arms flows should bolster their national capacity to investigate OCGs involved in arms trafficking and detect illicit arms flows, as well as to establish jurisdiction over offences related to diversion and arms and ammunition trafficking to or from fragile and conflict-affected areas. In particular, States of origin or transit—which may have more effective criminal justice systems and capacities—should increase their efforts to detect, investigate, prosecute, and adjudicate illicit arms trafficking and related organized crime activities. Effective detection of arms and ammunition trafficking incidents, seizures of arms at the time of their illicit movements, particularly at border crossing points, and the investigation of the involved networks are crucial for stemming illicit flows of arms and ammunition and for preventing their role in facilitating organized crime activities as well as the outbreak, aggravation, spread or resurgence of a conflict.
- **Strengthening efforts to systematically trace arms and ammunition across States.** Effective tracing mechanisms are crucial to map and investigate the dynamics of illicit arms and ammunition flows to, from and between theatres of conflict, as well as the involvement of OCGs in such activities. States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty are required to assess the risk of diversion before authorizing or denying an application to export arms, as well as to assess the risk of their potential use to commit violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, or be used in the commission of organized crime and terrorist acts. Informed export authorizations depend on a thorough understanding of points of diversion and trafficking dynamics. Such tracing results provide important evidence to investigate, prosecute, and adjudicate the criminal networks involved in arms and ammunition trafficking and other forms of diversion. Furthermore, by helping to identify and highlight a growing demand for weapons in specific areas, or among specific groups, tracing efforts can also support national and regional early warning mechanisms and contribute to the prevention or de-escalation of conflicts.⁷⁸ The tools and expertise provided by international and regional organizations as well as non-governmental organizations can support both domestic and international tracing efforts. This includes INTERPOL's Illicit Arms Records and Tracing Management System (iARMS), which allows law enforcement to track whether and where arms have been reported as trafficked, stolen, or lost; reports produced by Panels and Groups of Experts mandated to monitor arms embargoes and investigate violations; field research investigations by expert non-governmental organizations, the results of which are made publicly available. The tracing of such illicit flows is only the starting point and must be accompanied by criminal justice responses to hold the perpetrators accountable.

78 Savannah de Tessières, Himayu Shiotani, and Sebastian Wilkin, "The Role of Weapon and Ammunition Management in Preventing Conflict and Supporting Security Transitions", (Geneva, Switzerland: UNIDIR, 2019), <https://unidir.org/files/publications/pdfs/the-role-of-weapon-and-ammunition-management-in-preventing-conflict-and-supporting-security-transitions-en-773.pdf>

3. OPTIONS FOR INTEGRATED AND COMPREHENSIVE APPROACHES TO TACKLE THE ILLICIT ARMS, ORGANIZED CRIME, AND ARMED CONFLICT NEXUS

- **Enhancing the capacity of fragile and post-conflict States through international cooperation and assistance.** Fragile States and countries emerging from conflict, as well as their neighbouring States, require support through international assistance and cooperation to build their capacities to prevent diversion and to counter illicit arms trafficking and related organized criminal activities. Such efforts should be aligned with broader peacebuilding activities aimed at strengthening local and national resilience against threats emanating from the illicit proliferation of arms and ammunition and their use by OCGs and NSAGs.



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