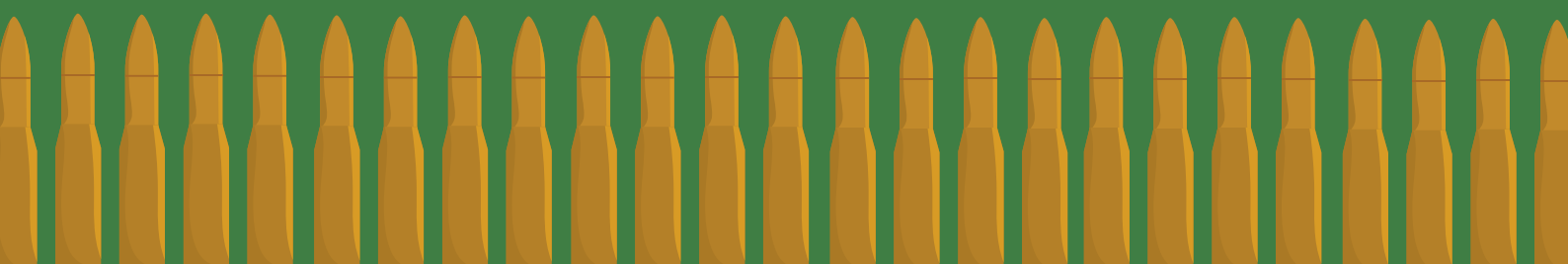
KEY ISSUES AND PROCESSES PERTINENT TO THE MANAGEMENT OF CONVENTIONAL AMMUNITION

REPORT OF THE FIRST THEMATIC SEMINAR

UNIDIR



Acknowledgements

Support from UNIDIR core funders provides the foundation for all of the Institute's activities. This project is supported by the Governments of Germany and Switzerland.

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About the research team

James Bevan is an internationally recognized weapon and conflict analyst. Specializing in the tracing of illicit weapons and ammunition in conflict zones, he has nearly a decade of policy-shaping field research behind him. Formerly a senior field researcher for the Small Arms Survey, he has since worked as a United Nations sanctions inspector, in addition to having provided counsel and instruction on issues related to armed conflict and the illicit proliferation of weapons and ammunition to numerous governments, international organizations and private entities. In 2011, he founded Conflict Armament Research Ltd., a company that provides technical expertise and investigative support to governments and international organizations on weapons and armed conflict. The company operates in a number of fields, including in-theatre research on armed conflict and weapons trafficking, support to sanctions monitoring groups and criminal investigations and training on weapons and ammunition.

Himayu Shiotani is Programme Lead and focal point for conventional arms control at UNIDIR. He manages the Conventional Arms Programme, which covers issues related to weapon and ammunition management; integration of conventional arms control into conflict prevention and management; adapting conventional arms control to address urban violence; and supporting the implementation of multilateral agreements and instruments relevant to conventional arms. Prior to his work with UNIDIR, he worked as a Research Associate at the James Martin Center for Non-Proliferation Studies in Monterey, California. He holds a Master's degree in International Policy Studies, with a Certificate in Non-Proliferation Studies, from the Monterey Institute of International Studies.

Manuel Martinez Miralles is a Researcher in UNIDIR's Conventional Arms Programme. He joined UNIDIR after five years of working on peace and disarmament issues at the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament, and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNLIREC). He has spearheaded more than 40 training, awareness and implementation initiatives in 15 Latin American and Caribbean countries training more than 300 government officials. Manuel is part of the pool of experts for the Arms Trade Treaty Outreach Project funded by the European Union and the United nations SaferGuard Quick-Response Mechanism for Ammunition Management. He holds a Master's degree in Public Administration from the Monterey Institute of International Studies.

Sebastian Wilkin is a Programme Assistant with UNIDIR's Conventional Arms Programme. He is an English-qualified lawyer from New Zealand, with a BA in Law from Oxford University and an Advanced MA in International Public Law from the University of Leiden. He has previously worked as an associate in the London Office of the law firm Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer LLP and as an intern and consultant with the United Nations Development Programme in Timor-Leste.

Brian Wood is an independent consultant on legal, policy and empirical research, analysis and training issues regarding the international arms trade and illicit trafficking. In this capacity he has worked for the United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and UNIDIR, as well as the Peace Research Institute in Oslo, the Small Arms Survey in Geneva, the International Peace Information Service in Antwerp and the Geneva Centre for Security Policy. He was head of Amnesty International's research, policy and advocacy on military, security and policing issues between 1994 and 2016 and played a leading role in the development of proposals for the Arms Trade Treaty and for the European Union's common positions on arms exports and brokering, and its regulation on trade in security technologies. He has also worked directly with governments on training issues. Currently, he is also studying for a doctoral degree at the Middlesex Law School in the United Kingdom.

List of acronyms and abbreviations

GGE	Group of Governmental Experts
IATGs	International Ammunition Technical Guidelines
PSSM	physical security and stockpile management
UEMS	unintentional explosions at munitions site

Key findings

- **UNIDIR's first seminar on managing conventional ammunition identified two key issues:**
    - **unsafe and unserviceable ammunition**, which presents a high risk to safety of people and critical infrastructure resulting from unplanned explosions; and
    - **diversion of ammunition to unauthorized/unintended users**, which can fuel insecurity and enable the escalation of armed violence and conflict.
- **Useful tools exist to support safe and secure management of conventional ammunition stockpiles**, namely the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines (IATGs). However, there are **various challenges to utilizing existing tools comprehensively**. Participants deliberated on means and methods for strengthening **national ownership**, improving **resource mobilization**, and building sustainable programming in relation to **international cooperation and assistance**.
- The seminar identified the merit of **situating stockpile management measures within a wider supply chain framework** to encourage the safe, secure, and accountable management of conventional ammunition throughout its lifecycle.
- **Participants identified preventing and mitigating the risk of ammunition diversion as a potential area of focus for upcoming UNIDIR seminars**. Participants noted that a dedicated framework is lacking to address this challenge at the multilateral level. Areas to examine include:
    - **transfers**;
    - **stockpiles**;
    - **disposal**, including managing recovered material; and
    - **monitoring**.

1 Introduction

This report presents the findings from the first of a series of seminars convened within the framework of UNIDIR's 'Framing and Informing Key Issues and Processes Pertinent to the Management of Conventional Ammunition' project. UNIDIR will convene further seminars during 2019.

This project aims to facilitate dialogue and generate ideas in order to help States frame key issues and inform them about processes pertinent to conventional ammunition management on which progress can be made at the national, regional and multilateral levels. Elements and findings from this seminar series are relevant to States' preparations for the open, informal consultations organized within the framework of resolution A/RES/72/55,[1] as well as other relevant conventional ammunition management initiatives.

This report is intended to serve as an introduction for government officials, diplomats and non-technical audiences to the key issues and processes of conventional ammunition management.

1.1 AIMS OF THE FIRST INFORMAL THEMATIC SEMINAR

The first thematic seminar, which took place 26–27 November 2018 in Geneva, Switzerland, brought together practitioners and policymakers to discuss all aspects of the management of conventional ammunition. This informal meeting encouraged the participants, who included national subject-matter experts, national diplomats, representatives of international organizations and independent specialists, to raise and discuss issues without restriction. As a result, this report does not present a particular position, but rather synthesizes the flow of discussion and the key issues that arose during the seminar.

The views presented in this report are best understood as a contribution to the international dialogue on conventional ammunition control measures—a stocktaking of existing issues, initiatives, instruments, and challenges. This discussion is broader than the framework outlined in General Assembly resolution 72/55, and which may have relevance beyond the conclusion of that specific United Nations process.

[1] General Assembly, UN document A/RES/72/55, 2017, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/72/55.

2 Thematic focus areas

2.1 UNPACKING RESOLUTION 72/55

General Assembly resolution 72/55 emphasizes that "thousands of people have died and the livelihoods of entire communities have been disrupted as a result of accidental ammunition depot explosions and that diversion from ammunition stockpiles has contributed to the intensity and duration of armed conflict and sustained armed violence around the world".[2] Participants at the seminar confirmed the seriousness and persistence of safety and security concerns arising from the mismanagement of conventional ammunition. Observing that a decade had passed since the 2008 Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on Conventional Ammunition in Surplus and the resulting International Ammunition Technical Guidelines (IATGs), [3] many stressed the timeliness and importance of resolution 72/55.

There appeared to be general agreement that the IATGs provide a comprehensive set of internationally developed measures to address management of conventional ammunition stockpiles. In this respect, resolution 72/55 primarily serves to reiterate the need for international action in areas that are already identified within the IATGs, including:

- better measures to assess the nature and size of surplus (para. 2);
- enhanced measures to secure, make safe, or eliminate surplus (para. 3);
- security measures to address stockpile diversion (para. 4);
- the provision of technical assistance for physical security and stockpile management (PSSM) (paras. 2, 3, 10, 11, and 13); and
- developing surplus indicators required for stockpile planning (paras. 12 and 14);

Moreover, resolution 72/55 encourages the widespread use of the IATGs (paras. 7 and 8). **A number of the expert practitioners at the seminar noted that, if fully utilized, the IATGs would in large part address many of the safety risks associated with States stockpiling quantities of deteriorating and unstable ammunition.** However, participants also noted that ammunition diversion results from many factors that are external to stockpile insecurity. Diversion can result from weaknesses across the full ammunition supply chain. It means that effective international measures to address ammunition diversion needs to extend beyond the scope of stockpile management. The need to situate stockpile management within a broader set of international ammunition control measures was a recurrent theme during the seminar.

2.2 PRE-REQUISITES FOR CONDUCTING ASSESSMENTS OF AMMUNITION SURPLUS

Identifying ammunition surpluses depends on effective ammunition management systems. This is because only States with effective ammunition management systems needed to monitor, account for, and classify ammunition can identify ammunition that is surplus to requirements. Put another way, **the identification of surplus and obsolescence is a by-product of a good ammunition management system**. Conversely, States that lack the management systems to classify ammunition are consequently unable to discriminate between ammunition that is suitable for operational or training requirements and ammunition that is unserviceable, obsolete, or unsafe (that is, surplus).

[2] Ibid.; see preamble paragraph.
[3] See https://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/ammunition/iatg/.

Without an ammunition management system, a State cannot effectively plan, use, and budget within its national defence plans for its ammunition requirements. By extension, States lacking effective management systems have limited means to:

1. forecast ammunition requirements (for example, what national military operations, law enforcement, or peacekeeping duties might require);
2. schedule the use of ammunition according to *shelf-life* rotations;[4]
3. plan and budget for future ammunition purchases; or
4. incorporate ammunition requirements into national defence strategic planning.

In short, a failure to institute effective ammunition management undermines efficient national security planning and budgeting and, ultimately, impacts a State's national security capacity.

Some participants noted that the 2008 GGE process had reached near-identical conclusions to those described above in its discussion on surplus. Identifying ammunition surplus rests on monitoring shelf-life, and surveillance and proof testing; accurately classifying ammunition; forecasting ammunition requirements; and effective accounting. These measures are addressed substantively in various sections of the IATGs, which is why seminar participants again stressed that concerted international efforts should be made to encourage greater IATG utilization.

2.3 ASSESSING AND MANAGING AMMUNITION SAFETY RISKS

Improperly managed ammunition poses a critical risk to safety from the risk of explosive incidents triggered by:

1. **mishandling;**
2. **degradation and instability caused by inappropriate storage or;**
3. **failure to conduct surveillance and proof tests.[5]**

Explosive incidents are collectively termed 'unintentional explosions at munitions sites' (UEMS), of which some 570 verified incidents, the seminar learned, have occurred since 1979—resulting in thousands of deaths and tens of thousands of injuries.[6] While these UEMS result from various causes (for example, handling, maintenance, improper storage, and ammunition instability), more than 75 per cent of UEMS events are directly attributable to activities that fall under the rubric of 'stockpile mismanagement'.[7]

Effective utilization of the IATGs would make a comprehensive contribution to ammunition safety. There was widespread agreement at the seminar that the IATGs, overall, provide an effective framework for addressing stockpile safety. Several participants used the phrase 'life-cycle

[4] 'Shelf life' is the length of time an item of ammunition may be stored before the performance of that ammunition degrades below acceptable levels. Ammunition shelf-life rotation involves prioritizing the use of ammunition with a short remaining shelf life over ammunition with a longer shelf life. This is desirable from the perspective of ammunition safety (stability) and performance, in addition to important factors related to the efficient and cost-effective use of ammunition.

[5] 'Surveillance' is the systematic testing of ammunition properties (including chemical degradation), characteristics, and performance capabilities of ammunition progressively throughout its life cycle. It is used to assess and predict the reliability, safety, and operational effectiveness of ammunition. 'Proof' is the functional testing or firing of ammunition and explosives to ensure its safety and stability.

[6] For reference see the Small Arms Survey's Unplanned Explosions at Munitions Sites project: http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/weapons-and-markets/stockpiles/unplanned-explosions-at-munitions-sites.html.

[7] Ibid.

management' to refer to the system of controls over conventional ammunition intended to mitigate various risks 'from the point of manufacture to the point of disposal'.

However, a number of participants also stressed two particular reasons why many States continue to have unsafe ammunition stockpiles:

1. **The near-complete absence of surveillance and proof tests for the stockpiles of these States, which are essential to monitoring ammunition stability** (in some cases ammunition has the potential to auto-ignite—with catastrophic effects).[8] Surveillance and proof are fundamental safety measures, which require chemical and physical tests to be performed periodically in order to assess rates of ammunition degradation and consequent safety risk; and
2. **The lack of shelf-life information ammunition exporters provide to importing States**—most notably to those States that import ammunition indirectly (for instance, through a mediating agent such as a broker) or that import surplus ammunition that has been retransferred, which may have been stockpiled by another State's defence and security forces prior to export.

In addition, seminar participants suggested that improvements to the existing guidelines (or through new supporting documentation) be considered. Specifically, they think a greater level of detail should be provided about the following:

1. **Unclassified ammunition**—additional guidance on how to deal with ammunition that has not been formally tested and which does not have a recognized hazard classification code and compatibility group;
2. **Surveillance and proof**—additional guidance on the chemical testing processes required to assess the stability of ammunition, conduct proof trials (test firing or launching) to ascertain ammunition safety and stability, and maintain records of information gathered through surveillance and proof tests for essential future reference; and
3. **Shelf-life**—additional guidance to States that lack shelf-life information on their stored ammunition, including suggestions on how States should acquire that information from manufacturers or exporters when it is absent.

The above-mentioned measures to deal with issues of unclassified ammunition and surveillance and proof should be based on empirical data derived from testing and directed by a competent national authority. Both require long-term investments in technical capacity and equipment.

To conclude discussions, two participants voiced observations essentially addressing the same problem from opposite ends of the supply chain. First, there is the matter of whether the approval of an ammunition export authorization should be conditional on the capacity of the recipient State to conduct surveillance and proof tests. Second, whether it should be mandatory for ammunition exporters to provide technical information on ammunition shelf life and expected degradation rates as a prior condition for export.

[8] 'Stability' denotes the physical and chemical characteristics of ammunition that affect its safety in storage, transit, and use. A number of ammunition natures—notably propellants—include stabilizers that inhibit the auto-ignition of otherwise volatile chemical compositions. These are consumable 'ingredients,' which deplete over time. When exhausted, there is an elevated risk of auto-ignition (the ammunition combusts without any external intervention). Ammunition manufacturers retain records of the expected stability and functioning of ammunition, given environmental conditions (such as exposure to heat), over time from the date of production. This information provides a record against which States that conduct surveillance and proof can estimate the rate of progression (chemical stability and physical functioning) of ammunition deterioration over time.

2.4 ASSESSING AND MANAGING AMMUNITION SECURITY RISKS

Ammunition diversion from stockpiles plays a key role in enabling armed conflict and armed violence in different parts of the world. Presenters at the seminar, and other participants, all highlighted the critical role that ammunition 'leakage' from unsecured national stockpiles plays in fuelling armed conflict and crime across the world. Pertinent cases raised included the role of national ammunition stockpiles as a source for terrorist groups in West Africa, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant's use of conventional ammunition sourced from government stockpiles, and persistent problems with diverted government small-calibre ammunition enabling violent crime in parts of Latin America.

Beyond stockpiles, ammunition diversion also occurs by other means. Diversion can occur via false or fraudulent documentation (that is, end-user certification), in-transit diversion, illicit brokering, and unauthorized retransfer to non-State end users. In this respect, participants argued that stockpile security is best understood as one (albeit critically important) component of ammunition supply chain security, but not as a complete solution to ammunition diversion.

Ammunition security management requires a 'supply chain' approach to be effective. Many participants described effective ammunition security as requiring a 'full supply-chain approach' from the point of manufacture to eventual use or disposal. Some argued that, while full utilization of the IATGs would address many aspects of 'stockpile diversion' (that is, loss, theft and looting), diversion elsewhere in the supply chain is unaffected by such measures. It was noted that one merit of considering ammunition within a full supply-chain approach is the potential interplay between export controls and stockpile management. In this respect, because stockpile diversion ultimately impacts gravely on international peace and security—in some areas evidence points to this contributing an estimated 40 per cent of ammunition circulating on illicit markets—persistent stockpile insecurity should be grounds for export denial.

2.5 MULTILATERAL AND REGIONAL PROCESSES TO MANAGE CONVENTIONAL AMMUNITION

Few regional frameworks explicitly define ammunition within their scope of reference. Direct references to the security and safety of stockpiled ammunition are notably infrequent in regional frameworks such as the ECOWAS Convention,[9] the OAS Convention,[10] the Nairobi Protocol,[11] and the EU Common Position on Arms Exports.[12] While noting this, participants said that some of these frameworks nevertheless serve as useful references for action in the field of ammunition management. The ECOWAS Convention in article 16, for example, directs its signatory States to "establish effective standards and procedures for stockpile management, storage and security", listing a range of considerations that broadly align to themes covered by the IATGs.

Existing multilateral frameworks do not comprehensively address the full life cycle of management of conventional ammunition. Participants reflected that some international instruments do not cover ammunition within their scope (for example, the PoA—the United Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light

[9] The Economic Community of West African States Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, their Ammunition and Other Related Materials.

[10] The Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacture of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials.

[11] The Nairobi Protocol for the Prevention, Control and Reduction of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa.

[12] Common Council Position 2008/944/CFSP of 8 December 2008, L 335/99.

Weapons in All Its Aspects[13]), while others are either limited in scope or membership (for example, the United Nations Firearms Protocol, and the Arms Trade Treaty). Many participants voiced concern that multilateral and regional conventional ammunition management initiatives have so far been uneven in scope as well as application.

Opportunities exist globally to raise awareness of the problems and risks associated with conventional ammunition management. Several participants noted that many national governments remain unaware that their defence and security forces operate unsafe or insecure stockpiles. Participants also observed that national authorities sometimes express the view that all units of ammunition are valuable national assets regardless of their technical condition. In this respect, resolution 72/55 and its related processes stand to play a greater role in raising awareness of the importance of safe and secure management of conventional ammunition. Among the ideas put forward by participants to give effect to this are international cooperation and assistance programmes, utilizing existing monitoring instruments to identify risks of diversion, as well as improving data collection and information exchange on illicit flows of ammunition and their impact on the Sustainable Development Goals in order to help to prioritize conventional ammunition management at the regional and multilateral levels.

[13] Several States have committed at the national level to voluntarily apply commitments from the PoA to small arms ammunition.

3 Working groups on key issues

Seminar participants were divided into two groups to discuss in greater depth two critical areas of concern to conventional ammunition management—safety and security. Key objectives of these discussions were to flag areas that are adequately addressed by existing instruments and processes, and to prioritize areas for further international attention.

3.1 SAFETY

The consensus among the participants in this group was that the IATGs provide a comprehensive framework for addressing the vast majority of safety risks associated with ammunition stockpiles. The group's primary attention, therefore, was directed toward how to encourage broader IATG uptake and provide the required financial and technical support to ensure their sustainable utilization. The group summarised these challenges as requiring a combination of political will, funding, and technical expertise.

Regional and multilateral frameworks help to generate trust, foster political will, and support international assistance frameworks and capacity-building programmes in the long term. From the perspective of political will, the fundamental obstacle is often trust, which thus requires long-term engagement by assistance providers. Moreover, it calls for a multi-track strategy, involving combined outreach at regional and national levels, engagement with the 'right' national stakeholders (both political and technical), and the development of multiple-stakeholder sensitization programmes (involving both national representatives and civil society). In this regard, participants emphasized the potential utility of establishing a regional or multilateral framework to facilitate buy-in and engagement on conventional ammunition management.

The group noted that, to ensure sustainability, funding is both critical and problematic. Successful stockpile management programmes are long-term and expensive projects. However, donor budget cycles often fail to reflect this, resulting in short-term, piecemeal, and uncoordinated stockpile management assistance programming. Donor budgeting, the group noted, requires the flexibility to account for delays or shifting priorities during programmes. Moreover, users need to situate their activities within coordinated national action plans if their programmes are to prove mutually supportive and sustainable.

Managing ammunition safety requires specialized technical expertise. The group recalled the seminar's earlier discussions of surveillance and proof and shelf-life rotations, arguing that ammunition management is a 'science'. Managing ammunition safety requires continuous chemical testing and the accounting systems required to monitor ammunition degradation on a rolling basis. From this perspective, States with poor ammunition safety records cannot expect to make advances unless they employ personnel with the appropriate expertise. This, the group argued, requires a heavy investment in training, accountability and, critically, measures to retain trained staff within national stockpile management agencies.

3.2 SECURITY

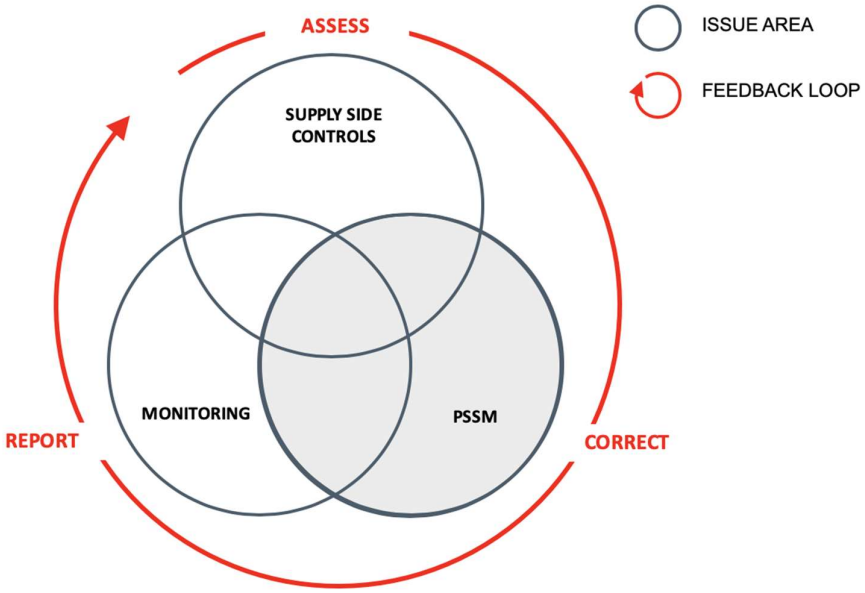
Preventing the diversion of conventional ammunition depends on a range of measures, some of which extend well beyond stockpile management. While the IATGs address most of the physical security vulnerabilities pertaining to ammunition *within* national stockpiles, their use alone or in isolation would not adequately address numerous sources of ammunition diversion across the full supply and distribution chain.

Supply-side measures (notably export controls) could help to incentivize broader application of the IATGs. This is a firm argument for adopting a supply-chain security approach to ammunition management with stockpile management situated within it. Drawing on observations made earlier in the seminar, and attempting to place ammunition control elements into a simple schema, the group suggested the following process:

1. **supply side controls** that assess the risk of ammunition diversion prior to export (encompassing stockpile security in export destinations);
2. the **enhancement of physical security and stockpile management (PSSM)** processes that are designed to combat ammunition diversion; and
3. **combined monitoring mechanisms** designed to detect ammunition diversion, inform export risk assessment, and encourage further advances in PSSM.

As set out in Figure 1 below, all three issue areas intersect, and certain security measures may apply to more than one issue area. A holistic approach to ammunition control should consider each area individually, and as part of an overall ammunition security strategy. The group concluded that this approach differed markedly from the approach of the 2008 GGE, which confined its discussions of ammunition security to stockpile management processes. In addressing any issue area, the group recommended following the "feedback loop" of assessing the area, making corrections and reporting on results (which may, in turn, generate a new assessment).

Figure 1: Security feedback loop[14]



[14] Illustration adapted from the working group on security. The circle representing 'PSSM' is shaded to reflect that it was previously discussed by the 2008 GGE, while 'Monitoring' and 'Supply Side Controls' were not.

4 Seminar conclusions

In its deliberations concerning the strategic issues facing the management of conventional ammunition, the seminar confirmed the centrality of the IATGs in addressing ammunition safety and security risks. Participants at the seminar also considered a wider set of ammunition management issues than those referenced either by the 2008 GGE or in resolution 72/55.

The IATGs remain the only set of international measures to address ammunition comprehensively, predominantly within the field of national stockpile management. In addition, seminar participants reiterated that maximum usage should be made of the provisions regarding ammunition control measures in select international and regional instruments despite their relatively fragmented and limited scope.

Comprehensive use of the IATGs would solve most of the ammunition safety issues national governments encounter. However, their application in isolation would not address the various sources of ammunition diversion, which result from numerous weaknesses along the ammunition supply and distribution chain. The seminar's observations suggest a twin-track approach to conventional ammunition management could be fruitful for States:

1. **Sustain efforts to encourage uptake and use of the IATGs**, with particular efforts placed on sensitization, long-term programming within national action frameworks, and the development of sustainable ammunition technical expertise; and
2. **Consider the systemic aspects of ammunition control more carefully**, recognizing the linkages between supply-side controls, stockpile management, and the critical role of monitoring and reporting as a way to promote coordinated action at national, regional and international levels.

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