



UNIDIR

REPORT

Examining the Security Council's Use of Conventional Arms Control

BATES GILL



Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Monalisa Hazarika, former UNIDIR Graduate Professional, for her excellent research assistance. He would also like to thank UNIDIR colleagues Paul Holtom, Fiifi Edu-Afful, Hardy Giezendanner, Ursign Hofmann, and Melanie Garcia Flores for their generous advice and information-sharing, and Mae Ballena for her professional support. The author would also like to thank representatives of current and former elected members of the Security Council for their contributions to this research.

Support from UNIDIR's core funders provides the foundation for all of the Institute's activities.

About UNIDIR

The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) is a voluntarily funded, autonomous institute within the United Nations. One of the few policy institutes worldwide focusing on disarmament, UNIDIR generates knowledge and promotes dialogue and action on disarmament and security. Based in Geneva, UNIDIR assists the international community to develop the practical, innovative ideas needed to find solutions to critical security problems.

Note

The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city, or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The views expressed in the publication are the sole responsibility of the individual authors. They do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the United Nations, UNIDIR, its staff members or sponsors.

Citation

Bates Gill, *Examining the Security Council's Use of Conventional Arms Control* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2026). <https://doi.org/10.37559/CWP/26/WAM/09>

Cover image: Security Council Meets on Question Concerning Haiti. Credit: UN Photo/Evan Schneider, 2023

Design and layout: Rick Jones, StudioExile

About the Author



Dr. Bates Gill

Senior Fellow, United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research

Dr Bates Gill has a 35-year career as an institution leader, policy advisor and scholar, including serving as Director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) from 2007 to 2012. He is the author or editor of 12 books, including *Governing the Bomb: Civilian Control and Democratic Accountability of Nuclear Weapons* (Oxford University Press, 2010). Among his international honours, Dr. Gill was made a Commander of the Royal Order of the Polar Star – the highest award bestowed upon foreigners by the Swedish monarch – for his contributions to Swedish interests.

Acronyms & Abbreviations

CAR	Central African Republic
CBM	Confidence-building measure
CVR	Community violence reduction
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
GSF	Gang Suppression Force
HNP	Haitian National Police
IED	Improvised explosive device
MINUSCA	United Nations Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
MONUSCO	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
ODA	Office for Disarmament Affairs
SALW	Small arms and light weapons
SSR	Security sector reform
T-WAM	Transitional weapons and ammunition management
WAM	Weapons and ammunition management

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	6
1. Introduction	9
2. Conventional Arms Control and the Security Council	12
3. The Conventional Arms Control Toolbox	14
3.1 Opening the Conventional Arms Control Toolbox	14
3.2 Using the Toolbox for Conflict Prevention	18
3.3 Tools Must Adapt to Systemic Change	19
4. Challenges	22
4.1 Role of Geopolitics	23
4.2 Sovereignty, Self-defence and Security Concerns	24
4.3 Role of Other Relevant Bodies and Instruments	25
4.4 Technical and Capacity Challenges	26
5. Addressing Challenges, Leveraging Opportunities	28
5.1 Strengthening Linkages	29
5.2 Engaging Proactive Elected Member States	31
5.3 Deepening Understanding and Capacity	32
6. Conclusion	34

List of Boxes and Figures

Figure 3.1: The Conventional Arms Control Toolbox and Conflict-Prevention Cycle	18
Box 5.1: UNIDIR Support for the Use of the Security Council's Conventional Arms Control Toolbox	33
Box 6.1: Avenues for Further Research	34



UN helicopter, DRC. Credit: Charlotte Gisler

Executive Summary

The United Nations acknowledges in principle that conventional arms control tools can aid in conflict management. Yet structural, political and capacity challenges – plus a sometimes limited awareness among Member States about these tools – often stifle their application in practice.

To help address this gap, this report assesses the perspectives of members of the United Nations Security Council on the value and use of conventional arms control tools for preventing and mitigating conflict and other forms of armed violence.

The report seeks insights on several questions:

- ▶ What are the elements of a conventional arms control “toolbox” that can be utilized across the phases of conflict to prevent and mitigate armed violence?
- ▶ What are some of the principal challenges facing members of the Security Council that limit greater integration of practical arms control tools with approaches to the prevention of conflict and other armed violence?
- ▶ Are there particular settings or circumstances of conflict and other armed violence that Council members believe may be more amenable to conflict prevention, management and resolution through the use of practical arms control tools?

- ▶ What steps can be taken to address challenges and to better leverage opportunities to more effectively understand practical arms control tools and the role that they can play to support prevention, management and resolution of conflict?

To address these questions, the report first provides (in Section 2) brief background information on how the United Nations and the Security Council have framed the issue of integrating conventional arms control within their strategies for conflict prevention and management. The report goes on to outline (in Section 3) the elements of a conventional arms control “toolbox” and how they can be applied to help prevent, manage and resolve conflicts and other forms of armed violence. It then describes (in Section 4) several principal challenges facing the Council that can limit the greater and more diversified integration of practical arms control tools with approaches to preventing conflict and other armed violence. Notwithstanding these challenges, the report can present (in Section 5) promising avenues for Council members and other interested parties to better understand how practical arms control tools can enhance the United Nations’ mission of conflict prevention, management and resolution. This report concludes (in Section 6) with concrete pathways for incoming and serving Security Council members and United Nations entities to strengthen arms control in the Council’s work and suggests avenues for further research.

Key recommendations from the report include:

For incoming elected members of the Council:

- ▶ When preparing and setting priorities for the two-year term, give due attention to conventional arms control. This could include seeking briefings from specialized United Nations and non-United Nations organizations with relevant policy and technical expertise to increase capacity and know-how on the relevance of arms controls for the breadth of the Security Council agenda.

For permanent and elected members of the Council:

- ▶ Convene open debates, Arria formula meetings and other events with conventional arms control as a stand-alone topic or as a means to address broader peace and security issues. This may also support innovation and adaptation of the Council’s arms control toolbox in the face of the evolving peace and security environment, threats, and opportunities. Outcomes from such events could include resolutions, presidential statements, press statements or process-based outcomes such as the establishment of working groups.
- ▶ When holding the pen of relevant geographical files or chairing subsidiary organs, give adequate attention to conventional arms control and prioritize inviting relevant, diverse experts from different specialized United Nations entities and non-United Nations organizations to brief the Security Council or its relevant subsidiary organs.
- ▶ Combine conventional arms control tools and consider them more systematically in relation to relevant thematic matters on the agenda of the Security Council —such as peacebuilding, peace-keeping, security sector reform, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, protection of civilians, women, peace and security, children in armed conflict, counter-terrorism, transnational organized crime, maritime security, and technologies — to effectively contribute to such responses.
- ▶ Ensure that Security Council mandates provide adequate capacities and resources for United Nations missions and other bodies to carry out mandated arms control tasks.

- ▶ Consult specialized United Nations and non-United Nations organizations to provide a conventional arms control lens on relevant Security Council debates and decisions, such as for mandate renewals of peace operations or arms embargoes.
- ▶ Given the scale of the conflict-prevention challenge, building and sustaining peace needs action at all levels, from the international to the local. More can be done to harness the roles of regional and local organizations and actors, such as communities, in support of locally owned prevention strategies that link arms control with community security, development, trust-building and resilience.
- ▶ In the Pact for the Future, Member States underlined the importance of prevention, while initiating the adaptation of United Nations peace operations to evolving needs. This could mean moving from the prevailing post-conflict application of conventional arms control tools as staples of peace operations to stronger use of such tools for conflict prevention. This can entail monitoring arms-related risks for early warning. Reviewing and adapting United Nations peace operations could also mean a more critical re-examination of the relationship between conventional arms, their control and peace operations.
- ▶ New conflict dynamics and technological advances may require new approaches. There is therefore a general need to consider the impacts on conventional arms control tools of technology and its use by both states and non-state actors. For example, to prevent and manage future conflicts, it is likely to become more pressing to consider the increasing presence of uncrewed aerial systems in the arsenals of conflicting parties. Their presence during times of ceasefire negotiations and conflict resolution will affect trust and may require a rethinking of monitoring efforts.
- ▶ In any given situation posing a threat to international peace and security and under the purview of the Council, some conventional arms control tools may overlap. The United Nations Secretary-General has long called for better use of conventional arms control tools to help prevent armed conflict and violence. One way of doing so would be to continue to examine, in greater depth, the linkages between conventional arms control tools and their levels of integration as a means of preventing armed conflict and violence.

For United Nations entities, including the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Department of Peace Operations, the Office for Disarmament Affairs, and UNIDIR, among others:

- ▶ Engage elected Council members proactively and in a coordinated manner to sensitize permanent missions and capitals on the relevance of conventional arms control for the Security Council agenda, and explore opportunities for advice and capacity support.
- ▶ Integrate conventional arms control comprehensively and adequately into existing briefing programmes for elected Council members, or design relevant programmes, as a joint effort by relevant United Nations partners.
- ▶ Strengthen the evidence base on the development and use of conventional arms control tools by the Council and provide advice to support their further development and adaptation in the face of the changing conflict dynamics, threats and technologies.
- ▶ Strengthen the capacities of Member States, United Nations entities, and other international, regional and subregional organizations mandated by the Security Council to carry out conventional arms control tasks. They could also document capacity gaps, lessons and good practices in the application of conventional arms control tools to inform evidence-based Council debates and decisions.



Shadow and light over a UN peacekeeper, DRC. Credit: Charlotte Gisler

1. Introduction

The link between the spread of illicit arms and armed conflict seems clear: without arms, there would be no armed conflict. Nevertheless, the conflict-prevention strategies of the United Nations rarely integrate practical measures for conventional arms control, despite high-level calls within the organization for them to do so.¹

The United Nations acknowledges in principle that conventional arms control tools can aid in conflict management. Yet structural, political and capacity challenges – plus a sometimes limited awareness among Member States about these tools – often stifle their application in practice. Much more can be done to address some of these challenges, to take greater advantage of emergent opportunities, and to further deepen understanding of how such conventional arms control tools can contribute to peace and security.

With these developments in mind, this report assesses the perspectives of members of the United Nations Security Council on the value and use of conventional arms control tools for preventing and

1 Simon Yazgi, “Good Offices and Guns: Arms Control and Conflict Prevention”, UNIDIR, 6 November 2020, <https://unidir.org/good-offices-and-guns-arms-control-and-conflict-prevention/>.

mitigating conflict and other forms of armed violence, with a focus on the period 2020–2025. It aims to address several questions:

- ▶ What are the elements of a conventional arms control “toolbox” that can be utilized across the phases of conflict to prevent and mitigate armed violence?
- ▶ What are some of the principal challenges facing members of the Security Council that limit greater integration of practical arms control tools with approaches to the prevention of conflict and other armed violence?
- ▶ Are there particular settings or circumstances of conflict and other armed violence that Council members believe may be more amenable to conflict prevention, management and resolution through the use of practical arms control tools?
- ▶ What steps can be taken to address challenges and to better leverage opportunities to more effectively understand practical arms control tools and the role that they can play to support prevention, management and resolution of conflict?

In addressing these questions, the research for this report included a review of relevant sources, with a particular focus on Security Council resolutions, debates, press releases and meeting records, as well as a series of online and in-person interviews with current and former United Nations personnel, serving officials of United Nations Member States, and other experts, including consultative meetings held in New York in June 2025 and June 2026 and in Geneva in November 2025 and May 2026.

The research also benefited from previous and ongoing work undertaken by UNIDIR on national, regional and multilateral frameworks for through-life weapons and ammunition management (WAM) as well as on the prevention of armed conflicts and armed violence.² This includes support provided to states and other interested entities on the use of various tools developed by UNIDIR or by other United Nations entities with the Institute,³ as well as the provision of advice, support and capacity-building for members of the Council.

This report is structured as follows. It first provides (in Section 2) brief background information on how the United Nations and the Security Council have framed the issue of integrating conventional arms control within their strategies for conflict prevention and management. The report goes on to outline (in Section 3) the elements of a conventional arms control “toolbox” and how they can be applied to help prevent, manage and resolve conflicts and other forms of armed violence. It then describes (in Section 4) several principal challenges facing the Council that can limit the greater and

2 Simon Yazgi and Erica Mumford, *The Arms-Related Risk Analysis Toolkit: Practical Guidance for Integrating Conventional Arms-Related Risks into Conflict Analysis and Prevention* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.37559/CAAP/21/PACAV/04>; 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?* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.37559/CAAP/20/ASC/20>; J. Arthur Boutellis, *The Changing Role of Conventional Arms Control in Preventing and Managing Violent Conflicts* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.37559/CAAP/18/PACAV/06>; and UNIDIR’s Preventing Armed Conflict and Armed Violence workstream, <https://unidir.org/work/preventing-armed-conflict-and-armed-violence/>.

3 United Nations, Office for Disarmament Affairs, *Options for Reflecting Weapons and Ammunition Management in Decisions of the Security Council*, Aide-Memoire, 3rd edn. (New York: United Nations, 2025), <https://media-publications.unoda.org/documents/aide-memoire-third-edition.pdf>.



210 child soldiers were released through a Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program in the town of Pibor, South Sudan. The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), UNICEF and the South Sudan National DDR Committee partnered together to achieve the release. Credit: UN Photo/Nektarios Markogiannis

more diversified integration of practical arms control tools with approaches to preventing conflict and other armed violence. Notwithstanding these challenges, the report can present (in Section 5) promising avenues for Council members and other interested parties to better understand how practical arms control tools can enhance the United Nations' mission of conflict prevention, management and resolution. This report concludes (in Section 6) with concrete pathways for incoming and serving Security Council members and United Nations entities to strengthen arms control in the Council's work and suggests avenues for further research.



2. Conventional Arms Control and the Security Council

In his 2018 report *Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*, the United Nations Secretary-General calls for a better understanding of how disarmament and arms control tools can advance the conflict-prevention, -management and -resolution processes of the United Nations and underscores the need to integrate this understanding into the organization's thinking and actions on conflict prevention.⁴

More recently, in his 2023 *New Agenda for Peace*, the Secretary-General asks that Member States “commit to reducing the human cost of weapons by moving away from overly securitized and militarized approaches to peace, reducing military spending and enacting measures to foster human-centred disarmament”.⁵ Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2024, the Pact for

4 United Nations, Office for Disarmament Affairs, *Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament* (New York: United Nations, 2018), <https://www.un-ilibrary.org/content/books/9789210472098/read>, especially 40–42.

5 United Nations, Secretary-General, *A New Agenda for Peace, Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9* (New York: United Nations, July 2023), <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-new-agenda-for-peace-en.pdf>, 22.

the Future evokes similar themes, inviting Member States to exercise control over weapon flows to “manage the risks that such transfers could facilitate, contribute or lead to violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law”; in the Pact, states also committed to strengthen national and international efforts to combat, prevent and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons (SALW), and to address related risks through national prevention strategies.⁶

The Security Council, in exercising its mandate to address threats to international peace and security, has likewise affirmed that a “comprehensive conflict prevention strategy should include, inter alia, . . . practical disarmament and other measures to contribute to combating the proliferation and illicit trade of arms”.⁷

As early as 1999, links were drawn in Council presidential statements between the proliferation of small arms on the one hand and conflict prevention and peacebuilding on the other.⁸ More recently, in 2021, the Security Council expressed grave concern that the “illicit transfer, destabilizing accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons in many regions of the world continue to pose threats to international peace and security, cause significant loss of life, [and] contribute to instability and insecurity” and stressed the importance of a range of practical disarmament and risk-reduction measures for preventing, managing and resolving conflict and other armed violence.⁹ The Council has also expressly linked illicit flows of conventional weapons to deteriorating security situations in specific countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Haiti, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen.¹⁰

However, as noted above, while these norms and commitments are largely accepted in principle within the United Nations and among its Member States, the application of conventional arms tools by the Security Council faces structural, political and capacity challenges that are not as widely understood as they should be by Member States. Section 4 unpacks these challenges.

6 United Nations, General Assembly, resolution 79/1, “The Pact for the Future”, 22 September 2024, <https://docs.un.org/A/RES/79/1>, Actions 14 and 26.

7 United Nations, Security Council, resolution 2171 (2014), 21 August 2014, [https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2171\(2014\)](https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2171(2014)), 2.

8 United Nations, Security Council, Statement by the President, S/PRST/1999/21, 8 July 1999, <https://docs.un.org/S/PRST/1999/21>; United Nations, Security Council, Statement by the President, S/PRST/1999/34, 30 November 1999, <https://docs.un.org/S/PRST/1999/34>.

9 United Nations, Security Council, resolution 2616 (2021), 22 December 2021, [https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2616\(2021\)](https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2616(2021)).

10 For example, respectively, United Nations, Security Council, resolution 2746 (2024), 6 August 2024, [https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2746\(2024\)](https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2746(2024)); resolution 2645 (2022), 15 July 2022, [https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2645\(2022\)](https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2645(2022)); resolution 2584 (2021), 29 June 2021, [https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2584\(2021\)](https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2584(2021)); resolution 2520 (2020), 29 May 2020, [https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2520\(2020\)](https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2520(2020)); resolution 2514 (2020), 12 March 2020, [https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2514\(2020\)](https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2514(2020)); resolution 2511 (2020), 25 February 2020, [https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2511\(2020\)](https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2511(2020)).



Blue Helmets serving with United Nations Interim Force In Lebanon. Credit: UN Photo/Pasqual Gorriz

3. The Conventional Arms Control Toolbox

This section provides a closer examination of what “conventional arms control” entails. To begin, it is important to note that a fundamental difference between conventional arms control and other fields of arms control is that most, if not all, states possess conventional weapons and ammunition of various types.¹¹ For many states, these play an important role in maintaining their monopoly on the legitimate use of force and upholding their responsibility to protect their citizens. Conventional arms control – domestically, bilaterally among a group of states, by all Member States, or by the Security Council – requires a certain degree of trust, common interest, and willingness to cooperate. It seeks to manage, control, limit, or reduce conventional arms to increase stability, build trust, and prevent armed conflict and violence. The higher the political stakes in a situation that poses a threat to international peace and security under the Council’s purview, the more relevant conventional arms control tools become.¹²

3.1 Opening the Conventional Arms Control Toolbox

The conventional arms control toolbox contains the 12 specific measures and activities identified and defined below.

11 See Adedeji Ebo and Katherine Prizeman, *Revisiting Consensus in Multilateral Disarmament Negotiations: Trends, Challenges and the Way Forward*, Office for Disarmament Affairs Occasional Papers no. 47 (New York: United Nations, February 2026), <https://media-publications.unoda.org/public/2026-02/OP47-web.pdf>, 12–15.

12 See, for example, Hedley Bull, *The Control of the Arms Race: Disarmament and Arms Control in the Missile Age* (London: Praeger, 1961), 75.



Transparency and confidence-building measures (CBMs) defuse tensions, promote cooperation, and enhance dialogue and confidence. Military CBMs, for example, can be unilateral, bilateral or multilateral measures that include communication (e.g., on weapon systems), coordination, observation (e.g., of manoeuvres), verification, constraints or cooperation, or measures that integrate any of these.¹³ Some transparency measures and CBMs are applicable throughout the conflict phases and the prevention cycle; others are applicable in specific conflict phases (e.g., see ceasefires below).



Through-life weapons and ammunition management (WAM) is the exercise of oversight, accountability and governance over conventional arms and ammunition throughout their life cycle to prevent diversion, illicit proliferation, trafficking, misuse and explosive risks.¹⁴ This includes monitoring flows of arms and ammunition and controls over their transfer, stockpiling, end uses and end users, and disposal. WAM focuses on the supply side and has also been used to address the demand side. It is applicable throughout conflict phases and the prevention cycle.



Small arms and light weapons (SALW) control includes all measures for the control of the lifecycle of these weapons to prevent their diversion, illicit proliferation, trafficking and misuse. It includes measures to address the supply and demand for SALW. Similar in its purpose to through-life WAM, SALW control is underpinned by a more stringent multilateral (control) norm, applicable to SALW and their ammunition. It is applicable throughout conflict phases and the prevention cycle.



Ceasefires are structured arrangements that temporarily reshape how conflict parties fight, posture and negotiate. They intend to halt or reduce armed violence and create space for political negotiations or humanitarian activities that are impossible during full-scale hostilities. Ceasefires integrate political commitments, military (or other) orders and technical arrangements, including (conventional) arms control, into a single framework.¹⁵ They come into play between the conflict and post-conflict phases and address both the supply and the demand for conventional weapons.



Interim security arrangements are transitional security-related measures and mechanisms that are established during political transitions. Their scope varies depending on how the parties agree to define them. They often include security-focused confidence-building measures (e.g., no-fly zones, a cessation of specific practices or types of attacks, the disengagement of heavy weapons or other material, a cessation of mine laying, or mine action).¹⁶ They come into play between the conflict and post-conflict phases and address both the supply and demand sides.



Security sector reform (SSR) describes a nationally owned process to develop effective and accountable security institutions that protect the state and its people without discrimination and with full respect for human rights and the rule of law.¹⁷ This includes governance over arms and ammunition (e.g., acquisition, military spending, transfers, public or democratic oversight, and civilian possession).¹⁸ SSR can be a supply- or a demand-side measure. An SSR process can be preventive and, alongside other tools, is applied during the post-conflict phase.



Disarmament, as part of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process, includes the collection, documentation, control and disposal of arms and ammunition belonging to combatants, persons associated with armed forces and groups, and sometimes civilians.¹⁹ It is a supply-side measure that seeks to reduce or remove illicit conventional arms in circulation. Such processes can be preventative and, alongside other tools, apply in post-conflict situations.²⁰



Transitional weapons and ammunition management (T-WAM) refers to interim measures aimed at reducing the capacity of individuals or groups to engage in armed violence and conflict. Often applied in remote areas or at the community level, T-WAM aims to protect lives by addressing the immediate risks of the possession and use of SALW, ammunition and explosives by individuals.²¹ It is a demand-side measure applicable throughout the conflict phases and the prevention cycle.



Community violence reduction (CVR) seeks to prevent, reduce and mitigate violence at the local level by addressing drivers of armed violence and supporting at-risk individuals and communities. This includes ex-combatants, gang members or members of at-risk communities, especially youth. CVR may or may not address various arms-related risks in communities (see, for example, also T-WAM above). CVR is a demand-side measure and is applicable throughout conflict phases, the prevention cycle and post-conflict at the local level.²²



United Nations arms embargoes – a type of measure that forms part of broader United Nations sanctions – prohibit or restrict the direct or indirect supply, sale or transfer of arms, ammunition and related materiel to designated entities or states.²³ United Nations arms embargoes are supply-side (conventional) arms control measures. The implementation, monitoring and review of United Nations arms embargoes include a range of increasingly detailed arms control measures. United Nations sanctions, including arms embargoes, can be a preventative measure and apply in situations of crisis, conflict and post-conflict.



Mine action identifies and reduces the threats of landmines and other explosive hazards (i.e., unexploded ordnance, improvised explosive devices) to a level where people can live safely and in an environment in which development can occur free from the constraints imposed by explosive ordnance contamination.²⁴ It is underpinned by a strong multilateral (prohibition) norm and includes stockpile destruction, clearance, risk education, victim assistance and advocacy. It is applicable throughout the conflict phases, the prevention cycle and post-conflict. It has, in certain contexts, built confidence in ceasefire situations.



Countering improvised explosive devices (IED) addresses threats posed by IEDs and the proliferation of their components that are acquired for the manufacture and use of IEDs by non-state armed groups, including those designated as criminals or terrorists. Addressing threats posed by IEDs includes preventive, preparedness, mitigation and response measures (i.e., supply and demand-side measures).²⁵ It applies throughout conflict phases and the prevention cycle.



MONUSCO mixed patrol mission to camp of internally displaced persons. Credit: UN Photo/Kevin Jordan, 2025

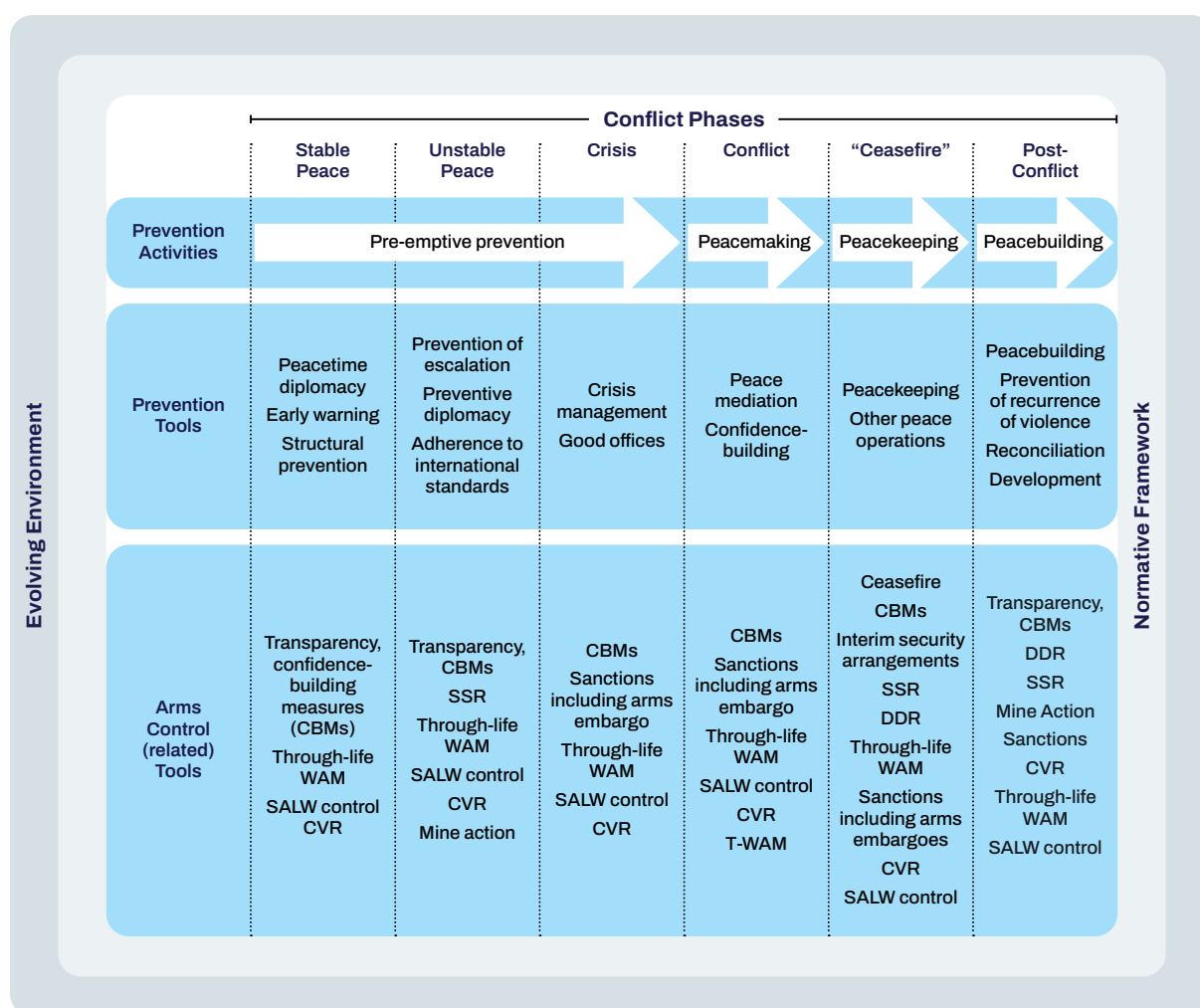
- 13 United Nations, Office for Disarmament Affairs, “Military Confidence Building Measures”, n.d., <https://disarmament.unoda.org/en/our-work/cross-cutting-issues/military-confidence-building-measures>.
- 14 The term and concept of WAM was first introduced and used by the Council in the early 2010s.
- 15 See United Nations, Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, *Guidance on the Mediation of Ceasefires* (New York: United Nations, September 2022), <https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/default/files/document/files/2022/11/ceasefire-guidance-2022-0.pdf>, in particular 41.
- 16 United Nations, *Guidance on the Mediation of Ceasefires*, 19.
- 17 United Nations, General Assembly and Security Council “Securing Peace and Development: The Role of the United Nations in Supporting Security Sector Reform”, Report of the Secretary-General, A/62/659-S/2008/39, 23 January 2008, <https://docs.un.org/A/62/659>.
- 18 United Nations, Security Council, resolution 2151 (2014), 28 April 2014, [https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2151\(2014\)](https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2151(2014)).
- 19 Alternative terms sometimes employed by the Security Council include “lay down arms,” “put weapons beyond use” and “weapons control” for armed groups.
- 20 United Nations, General Assembly, “Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration”, Report of the Secretary-General, A/77/610, 29 November 2022, <https://docs.un.org/A/77/610>, para. 29.
- 21 United Nations, Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS), “Transitional Weapons and Ammunition Management”, Module 4.11, 16 June 2020, https://www.unddr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/IDDRS-4.11-Transitional-Weapons-and-Ammunition-Manatement_16-Jun-2020.pdf.
- 22 United Nations, Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS), “Community Violence Reduction”, Module 2.30, 19 November 2019, https://www.unddr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/IDDRS-2.30-Community-Violence-Reduction_19-Nov-2019.pdf.
- 23 United Nations, Security Council, “Repertoire, Subsidiary Organs: Sanctions and Other Committees”, n.d., <https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/repertoire/sanctions-and-other-committees>.
- 24 United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), “Glossary of Mine Action Terms, Definitions and Abbreviations”, International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) 04.10, 2nd edn., January 2023, amended October 2024, https://www.mineactionstandards.org/fileadmin/uploads/imas/Standards/English/IMAS_04.10_Ed.2_Am.12.pdf.
- 25 Bob Seddon and Alfredo Malaret Baldo, *Counter-IED Capability Maturity Model and Self-Assessment Tool* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.37559/CAAP/20/ASC/04>.

3.2 Using the Toolbox for Conflict Prevention

Figure 3.1 depicts elements of a conventional arms control toolbox and how such tools can be applied to help prevent, manage and resolve conflicts and other forms of armed violence. The aims of these tools depend on the stages of the conflict cycle, the nature of a conflict (e.g., inter- or intrastate, involving non-state armed actors), as well as the type of armed violence. For example, tools that can be employed during an ongoing armed conflict aim to avoid unintended escalation or mitigate the impact on civilians, third parties or the environment (i.e., crisis management). Others might aim at facilitating or strengthening the implementation of a ceasefire. Yet other tools might help maintain a situation in which the probability of renewed use of arms and force is at least not increasing (e.g., post-conflict).²⁶

FIGURE 3.1

The Conventional Arms Control Toolbox and Conflict-Prevention Cycle²⁷



26 Wolfgang Zellner, "Conventional Arms Control during Wartime, in Ceasefire and Post-Conflict Situations", Analyse, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, February 2025, https://www.ifsh.de/file/publication/Kurzanalysen/FES_Publikation_Wolfgang_Zellner_Conventional_arms_control_during_wartime_21864-20250218.pdf.

27 Adapted from Yazgi et al., *Addressing Conventional Arms Risks and Impacts to Prevent Conflict and Build Peace*, 6.

A further distinction for most of these tools is whether they are part of a supply-side or demand-side approach. A supply-side approach focuses on regulation and accountability over production, transfers, and end uses and end users. A demand-side approach focuses on reducing the quantity and use of arms that are already present in a given context.²⁸ While conventional arms control may not be the primary purpose of all the elements shown in Figure 3.1, it plays a role in all of them and, for some, it is necessary to achieve their broader objectives.

In practice, in any given situation that poses a threat to international peace and security and falls within the Security Council's purview, some of these conventional arms control tools will overlap. It is then up to the Council's members to consider their applicability, utility, and need for development or adaptation, and the likelihood that they will achieve the intended results. In this regard, the Council has often been innovative. Some of these tools have been combined, differently sequenced, selectively integrated in a targeted manner, leveraged, or further developed by the Council or its organs. For example, in four of the five Council resolutions dedicated to SALW, the Council combined approaches to controlling SALW with other "tools" or items of the international peace and security agenda.²⁹

In addition, these tools are underpinned by norms of conventional arms control and humanitarian disarmament codified in international instruments that are politically binding on all United Nations Member States or other instruments that are legally binding on their states parties.³⁰ They aim, among other things, to monitor, regulate, reduce or prevent arms flows; some prohibit certain weapon types. Regional instruments of politically or legally binding nature complement these international norms.³¹

3.3 Tools Must Adapt to Systemic Change

Importantly, the toolbox has evolved, including through its application by the Council. Conventional arms control tools do not operate in isolation, and the toolbox does not remain static in scope. To remain relevant, it must adapt to changes in the security environment, including current and emerging threats to peace and security as well as changes brought on by the rapid development of technology.

28 Security Council Report, "The Security Council's Role in Disarmament and Arms Control: Conventional Weapons and Small Arms", Cross-Cutting Report no. 2009/3, 24 September 2009, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7b65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7d/XCutting%20Small%20Arms%2024%20September%2009.pdf>.

29 For example, Security Council resolution 2616 (2021) on peace operations, combatting illicit transfers and diversion of arms, and arms embargoes, under the agenda item SALW, maintenance of international peace and security; Security Council resolution 2457 (2019), 27 February 2019, [https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2457\(2019\)](https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2457(2019)), on ending conflict in Africa by 2020, under the agenda item Africa, regional security, cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations in maintaining international peace and security; Security Council resolution 2370 (2017), 2 August 2017, [https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2370\(2017\)](https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2370(2017)), on counter-terrorism; Security Council resolution 2220 (2015), 22 May 2015, [https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2220\(2015\)](https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2220(2015)), a dedicated SALW thematic resolution; Security Council resolution 1467 (2003), [https://docs.un.org/S/RES/1467\(2003\)](https://docs.un.org/S/RES/1467(2003)), 18 March 2003, on African regional security, SALW and mercenary activities.

30 These include the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (PoA); the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW Convention); the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT); the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA); the International Tracing Instrument (ITI); the Anti-Personnel Mine (APM) Ban Convention; the United Nations Firearms Protocol; and the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM).

31 These include the Inter-American Convention Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials (CIFTA); the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Convention on SALW; and the African Union's programme on "Silencing the Guns".



Participants of a pilot project on disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR) for ex-combatants in the Central African Republic. Credit: UN Photo/Herve Sereffio

For example, from the late 1990s, “smart sanctions processes”³² have shifted from overly broad, comprehensive United Nations sanctions (including arms embargoes, with negative humanitarian and economic impacts) to more targeted ones. These have included arms embargoes targeted at specific actors, as well as more specific definitions of the scope of prohibited or restricted items, monitoring mechanisms, reporting requirements, review provisions, and termination conditions. However, since the 2014–2015 High-Level Review of United Nations Sanctions including arms embargo measures, there has not yet been a review of the impact of its recommendations or an assessment of any changes in Council practices.

More recently, since 2018, the Council has increasingly mandated the United Nations to conduct assessments of its arms embargoes and provide options for benchmarks for their review, modification, suspension, strengthening or lifting. Such benchmarking processes have taken place within the sanctions regimes concerning the Central African Republic (CAR), Haiti, South Sudan, Sudan and

32 These processes included the so-called Interlaken Process (Switzerland), 1998–2001 (targeted financial sanctions); the so-called Bonn–Berlin Process (arms embargoes, travel/aviation sanctions); the Stockholm Process (Sweden), 2001–2003 (practical feasibility of and monitoring of targeted sanctions); the Greece Process, early 2000s; and the High-Level Review of United Nations Sanctions, 2014–2015. See United Nations, Security Council, “Work of the Sanctions Committees”, Note by the President, S/1999/92, 29 January 1999, <https://docs.un.org/en/S/1999/92>; Michael Brzoska (ed.), *Design and Implementation of Arms Embargoes and Travel and Aviation Related Sanctions: Results of the “Bonn–Berlin Process”* (Bonn: BICC, 2001), https://www.bicc.de/Publikationen/booklet_sanctions.pdf; United Nations, General Assembly and Security Council, Letter from the Permanent Representatives of Australia, Finland, Germany, Greece and Sweden, A/69/941-S/2015/432, 12 June 2015, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/69/941>.

Somalia (Al-Shabaab). In the most recent United Nations sanctions regime related to Haiti, which includes an arms embargo, the Council has included such benchmarks since its start.³³

In cases where conditions for a formal DDR process were not met (e.g., with the absence of a peace agreement), the Security Council has turned to a flexible CVR approach.³⁴ While the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) was the first mission mandated with CVR in 2006,³⁵ this tool has since been progressively included and used in several United Nations peace operations and missions, including the Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in CAR (MINUSCA) in 2014, the Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) in 2017, and the Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) in 2019.³⁶ In the same vein, in contexts where formal DDR processes and therefore disarmament may not be possible, the Council has increasingly considered T-WAM as an interim measure, for example, in the context of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS).

In another example, the Council has tasked – and continues to mandate – peace operations with mine action including clearance for decades. Considering the emerging threat posed by landmines of an improvised nature and, more broadly, IEDs, the Council started to reflect this threat in the mandates of peace operations, beginning in 2014 in Mali and increasingly in other contexts, such as for MONUSCO.³⁷

Looking ahead, the changing nature of conflicts, evolving threats to international peace and security, and conflict-related technological developments will be constantly in flux, which in turn can affect the utility of the conventional arms control toolbox and its individual tools. This means that individual tools and the toolbox as a whole should be regularly reviewed and adapted. Members of the Security Council should therefore remain agile and innovative in their use of such tools. The concluding section of this report provides some ideas on how they can do so.

33 United Nations, Security Council, resolution 2653 (2022), 21 October 2022, [https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2653\(2022\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2653(2022)).

34 United Nations, Department of Peace Operations, *Community Violence Reduction: Creating a Space for Peace* (New York: United Nations, 2018), <https://www.unpeacemission.org/sites/default/files/ddr-and-cvr-creating-space-for-peace.pdf>.

35 United Nations, Security Council, resolution 1702 (2006), 15 August 2006, [https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1702\(2006\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1702(2006)).

36 Damian Lilly and Bárbara Morais Figueiredo, *Enhancing the Protection of Civilians through Conventional Arms Control: Challenges and Opportunities for United Nations Peace Operations* (Geneva: UNIDIR and International Peace Institute, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.37559/CAAP/22/PACAV/01>.

37 For example, Security Council resolution 2164 (2014) for MINUSMA; or resolution 2409 (2018) for MONUSCO.



4. Challenges

While many of the conventional arms control tools are supported in principle by United Nations Member States, the Security Council nevertheless can face a number of difficulties that constrain its ability to integrate such tools into its broader efforts to prevent conflict and other forms of armed violence. These constraints include:

- ▶ The role of geopolitics
- ▶ Concerns and sensitivities over sovereignty, self-defence and security
- ▶ The role of other relevant bodies and mechanisms
- ▶ Technical and capacity challenges facing the entities mandated to implement the Council's decisions

In many cases, it may be a combination of these factors that limits consideration of conventional arms control tools.

4.1 Role of Geopolitics

As with other aspects of the United Nations' work, including within the Security Council, geopolitics has a bearing on Council members' perspectives on the value and use of conventional arms control tools for preventing and mitigating conflict and other forms of armed violence. As geopolitical competition and high-intensity conflict increasingly characterize global dynamics, these developments affect how the Council deliberates and acts on its mandates regarding international peace and security.

One example of this dynamic can be discerned in the discussions surrounding resolution 2659 (2022), which extended the mandate of MINUSCA. The resolution condemned “cross-border criminal activities by all parties . . . such as arms trafficking . . . as well as the illicit transfer, destabilising accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons, that threaten the peace and stability of the CAR” and mandated a range of tasks, including disarmament of armed groups.³⁸ However, while the resolution passed, it did so with three abstentions (China, Gabon and the Russia Federation) and with several reservations expressed by its supporters.

The Russian representative criticized the author of the resolution, France, for not including Russia's proposed wording on investigating the source of the explosive devices that led to the death of three Bangladeshi peacekeepers in CAR and said it was unacceptable that the resolution text “equates all the parties to the conflict and the armed groups with one another”.³⁹ The representative of the United Kingdom, while supporting the resolution, expressed concern that it did not include language on the host country's “responsibility to protect” its citizens.

And while the United States also supported the resolution, its representative noted that, “Although the mandate condemns the crimes of armed groups, it does not specifically name the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group”, which, in supporting the Government of CAR, “has consistently obstructed MINUSCA's ability to fulfil its mandate”⁴⁰ and is accused of egregious human rights abuses. As the Kenyan representative stated, “On the overall conduct of the negotiations, we regret the manifest geopolitical considerations that dictated the positions of certain delegations. The attendant polarization, as it has come to characterize discussions on matters concerning the Central African Republic, destroyed any hope of consensus.”

Based on the interviews conducted for this report, geopolitical considerations also help to explain why many Council members are opposed to including conventional arms control tools as a means to prevent and resolve conflicts. Reasons may include close political and security relationships shared between Council members and countries affected by such measures. One United Nations official expressed strong doubts whether, in the current geopolitical atmosphere, it will be possible to generate a consistent and purposeful consensus within the Security Council to promote conventional arms control tools for the prevention of conflict and armed violence.

38 United Nations, Security Council, resolution 2659 (2022), 14 November 2022, [https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2659\(2022\)](https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2659(2022)).

39 United Nations, Security Council, Official Record, PV.9190, 14 November 2022, <https://docs.un.org/S/PV.9190>.

40 United Nations, PV.9190.

4.2 Sovereignty, Self-defence and Security Concerns

Concerns over sovereignty, self-defence and national security form a second important constraint that can limit or prevent the Security Council from using conventional arms control tools. Research informing this report suggests that this is especially the case regarding the Council's consideration and adoption of sanctions including arms embargoes, an often controversial and much-contested aspect of the Council's work.

Some United Nations Member States subject to United Nations sanctions, including arms embargoes, often argue that such strictures violate their national sovereignty and their right to self-defence. Moreover, it is argued that limiting or preventing access to arms imports undermines the ability of governments to maintain security, for example by fuelling black markets for weapons or creating opportunities for the illicit diversion of government weapon stocks.⁴¹

Such concerns about arms embargoes have been consistently raised in Security Council deliberations. For example, since 2018, the Council has voted consistently to impose an embargo on the provision of “arms and related materiel of all types” as well as on “technical assistance, training, financial and other assistance related to military activities” to the territory of South Sudan.⁴² However, the voting on these resolutions has not been unanimous, has featured numerous abstentions, and has been marked by increasing criticism from South Sudanese authorities, the African Union, and Council members.

In passing resolution 2781 (2025) to extend the arms embargo and other sanctions on South Sudan for another year, nine members of the Council voted in favour and six abstained (Algeria, China, Russia, Pakistan, Somalia and Sierra Leone).⁴³ Among those abstaining, objections included: the absence of proposals to lift the arms embargo on the security forces of South Sudan's transitional government; the dismissal of recommendations from the African Union to lift the arms embargo; and the view that the arms embargo undermines the preparation and deployment of effective national armed forces, weakens South Sudan's ability to protect its people and national sovereignty, and slows the achievement of peace.⁴⁴ Speaking before the Council at the time of the vote, a representative of South Sudan expressed her country's “deep disappointment” with the decision and added that “the lifting of sanctions and the arms embargo is not only a matter of national security or sovereignty, but also a matter of economic opportunity and dignity”.⁴⁵

Such concerns related to sovereignty, self-defence and national security infuse the Security Council's deliberations and decisions on conventional arms control tools such as arms embargoes and affect

41 For example, see the arguments in Judith Vorrath, *UN Arms Embargoes under Scrutiny: Obstacles and Options for an Effective Contribution to Conflict Resolution*, SWP Research Paper 12 (Berlin: German Institute for International and Security Affairs, September 2024), https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/research_papers/2024RP12_UNArmsEmbargoes_Web.pdf.

42 United Nations, Security Council, resolution 2428 (2018), 13 July 2018, [https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2428\(2018\)](https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2428(2018)).

43 United Nations, Security Council, resolution 2781 (2025), 30 May 2025, [https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2781\(2025\)](https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2781(2025)).

44 United Nations, Security Council, Official Record, S/PV.9928, 30 May 2025, <https://docs.un.org/S/PV.9928>, 3–6.

45 United Nations, S/PV.9928, 6–7.

the conflict and peace dynamics in such countries as CAR, the DRC, Haiti, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen, among others.

4.3 Role of Other Relevant Bodies and Instruments

Another challenge concerns the suitability of the Security Council to deliberate conventional arms control tools as part of its mandate to maintain international peace and security. In Council discussions, members regularly express concerns that the body is not the right venue to address issues related to conventional arms control and point to other bodies – both inside and outside the United Nations – as more appropriate settings.

Council members and other Member States also often refer to existing instruments to address the potential risks posed by arms flows and call for their universalization and effective implementation. A review of Council proceedings finds such references to:

- ▶ The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)
- ▶ The 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 (Firearms Protocol)
- ▶ The International Tracing Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons (ITI)
- ▶ The United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA)

A good example of this perspective is the statement by the Russian representative during a Security Council open debate on small arms and light weapons in 2021:

The fight against the illicit transfer of SALW must remain the focus of the attention of all States. Accordingly, such work should take place first and foremost at the General Assembly, where every country has the right to a vote and the opportunity to participate in the adoption of relevant decisions.

...

[T]he Security Council should clearly not duplicate the functions of the General Assembly, especially on such a universal issue as countering the illicit transfer of small arms and light weapons.⁴⁶

That said, it is also true that many permanent and elected members of the Security Council see the Council as a relevant forum to consider conventional arms control tools as part of its mandate to prevent and mitigate conflict. This view is consistent with the Secretary-General's recommendation, noted in Section 1, that the United Nations should mainstream arms control across the organization's conflict-prevention work, including within the Security Council.

46 United Nations, Security Council, Official Record, S/PV.8909, 22 November 2021, <https://docs.un.org/S/PV.8909>, 16–17.



UNMISS Peacekeepers Day Ceremony, 2016. Credit: UN Photo/JC McIlwaine

4.4 Technical and Capacity Challenges

Based on interviews as well as on a reading of relevant Council debates, it can be concluded that, while Security Council members often speak favourably about conventional arms control tools, they also note that they are not fully or effectively implemented. This is often due to the technical and capacity challenges that face the entities mandated to implement the Council's decisions. It may also be the case that individual Council members lack sufficient awareness or know-how to effectively deliberate on and decide the role of conventional arms control tools in preventing conflict.

In a good example of concerns over technical and resource constraints facing entities mandated to implement Security Council decisions, India (along with China and Russia) abstained from voting on Security Council resolution 2616 (2021). This resolution allows the Council to consider and mandate how United Nations peace operations could support national authorities in monitoring arms embargoes and combatting illicit arms transfers in areas where they are operating. India cited the following reasons for its abstention:

1. Asking peace operations to monitor and trace arms is a major addition to the existing mandate given to United Nations peacekeepers and will have wider implications for the very nature of peace-keeping operations.

2. Potential changes in the movement of peacekeepers to border and other areas and other conflict zones could spread them too thinly, exposing them to a much higher risk of direct attacks from armed smugglers.
3. The implementation of arms embargoes entails a gamut of interrelated and complex issues that are best dealt with by specialized United Nations agencies with the necessary mandates, skill sets, expertise and resources.
4. Peacekeeping missions would be adversely affected if they are given an additional assignment, over and above the principal mandate, without the necessary resources and capabilities.⁴⁷

In a more recent example, Security Council resolution 2743 (2024) – which, among other things, seeks to strengthen the arms embargo against non-state actors such as violent gangs in Haiti – voices the Council's disquiet about the lack of adequate technical and resource capacity to enforce the arms embargo. The resolution, which passed unanimously, notes in part the Council's concern:

[T]he 2653 Sanctions Committee Panel of Experts repeated reports that despite the imposition of the territorial arms embargo in October 2023 pursuant to resolutions 2699 (2023) and 2700 (2023), gangs and other non-state actors continue to procure arms and ammunition unlawfully, in part due to a lack of awareness of the provisions of the arms embargo among those institutions meant to enforce the embargo.⁴⁸

In the course of the interviews conducted for this report in 2024, 2025 and 2026, it became clear that technical and capacity constraints such as these are an important reason why many Security Council members are hesitant to include conventional arms control tools as a means to prevent and mitigate conflict and other forms of armed violence.

47 United Nations Security Council, Official Record, S/PV.8942, 22 December 2021, <https://docs.un.org/S/PV.8942>, 3–4.

48 United Nations, Security Council, resolution 2743 (2024), 12 July 2024, [https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2743\(2024\)](https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2743(2024)), 4. See also United Nations, Security Council, Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Haiti Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2700 (2023), S/2024/704, 30 September 2024, <https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2024/704>.



A schoolboy watches as a vehicle of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) negotiates a muddy road in the town of Pinga, North Kivu. Credit: UN Photo/Sylvain Liechti

5. Addressing Challenges, Leveraging Opportunities

Despite the challenges noted above, several promising avenues are available to generate greater understanding of, and support for, practical arms control tools that can advance United Nations efforts in conflict prevention, management and resolution. These opportunities lie in such areas as:

- ▶ Strengthening linkages between widely agreed-upon security issues of concern and the role of conventional arms control tools in addressing those issues
- ▶ Recognizing and engaging proactive United Nations Member States as champions of such measures
- ▶ Deepening understanding and technical capacity among United Nations Member States and entities in relation to conventional arms control tools and their role in preventing conflict and other armed violence

These avenues are not mutually exclusive and can be pursued in parallel as circumstances and opportunities allow.

5.1 Strengthening Linkages

A careful review of the 264 Security Council resolutions adopted over the five-year period 2020–2024 reveals the predominance of certain key issues, suggesting that there are areas of common ground and shared resonance among Council members, including the five veto-wielding permanent members. Of those 264 resolutions, 193 (or 71 per cent) were adopted unanimously. The predominant issues addressed by the unanimously adopted resolutions involved protecting women and children in conflict zones; advancing the women and peace and security (WPS) agenda; protecting United Nations peacekeepers; delivering humanitarian aid and assistance; and renewing and sustaining mandates for United Nations peace operations, arms embargoes and sanctions. Broadening the lens to examine all 264 adopted resolutions shows that these same themes and issues remain predominant. This suggests that these concerns are widely shared among Council members, even when resolutions face opposition or abstentions.

The effective introduction of practical conventional arms control tools could have a positive impact on advancing progress across these widely agreed-upon concerns: protecting civilians in conflict situations (especially women and children), protecting United Nations peace operations, providing humanitarian aid and limiting destabilizing arms flows. However, owing largely to the challenges noted in Section 4, Security Council resolutions rarely draw an affirmative link between, on the one hand, the implementation of conventional arms control tools and, on the other, the advancement of peace and security.

That said, the case of Security Council resolutions in relation to Haiti may be an illustrative case with lessons for the future. In 2022, the Council unanimously authorized a sanctions regime – the first it had passed in five years – to address the deteriorating security situation in Haiti.⁴⁹ It appears that this decision, including the imposition of an arms embargo, was strongly motivated by the severity of the security situation in Haiti. The resolution expressed particular concern regarding sexual and gender-based violence, the impediments to humanitarian assistance, the worsening conditions for the rule of law and human rights, and “the need to prohibit the transfer of small arms, light weapons, and ammunition to non-state actors engaged in or supporting gang violence, criminal activities, or human rights abuses in Haiti”.⁵⁰

The reaction of China was characteristic of many others on the Council. Its representative acknowledged the severity of the situation in stating that, while China had always been cautious in all circumstances regarding the imposition of sanctions, the urgency of the situation in Haiti prompted it to be the first on the Council to call for targeted sanctions against armed gangs in the country.⁵¹ As the security situation in Haiti continued to deteriorate in 2023, he expressed strong support for the arms embargo, saying

Curbing the rise in gang violence and creating a security environment that ensures the most basic level of safety and security are vital prerequisites for alleviating the humanitarian situation and advancing the political process. The sanctions regime established in accordance with resolution

49 United Nations, Security Council, resolution 2653 (2022).

50 United Nations, Security Council, resolution 2653 (2022), 1–2.

51 United Nations, Security Council, Official Record, S/PV.9159, 21 October 2022, <https://docs.un.org/S/PV.9159>.

2653 (2022) . . . provides an important tool for fighting gang violence and should therefore be fully implemented.

He added,

Given the current circumstances, the Security Council should prioritize taking further measures based on the arms embargo. If large quantities of weapons continue to flow unchecked into the hands of Haitian gangs, the international community's efforts to further support the Haitian police will be futile.⁵²

However, as the Council has continued to deliberate on the situation in Haiti since 2022, some of the original strong consensus on key issues has broken down. For example, while resolution 2794 (2025) to extend sanctions until October 2026 was unanimously approved, Council members such as France, Denmark and Slovenia expressed regret that the issue of "sexual and gender-based violence" was not specifically mentioned in the document.⁵³

Also, in an earlier vote approving resolution 2793 to transition the United Nations Multinational Security Support Mission (MSS) in Haiti to the Gang Suppression Force (GSF), three Council members (China, Pakistan and Russia) abstained. That resolution includes, among other mandates, authorization for the GSF to:

provide support to the [Haitian National Police (HNP)] and the Haitian armed forces to combat illicit trafficking and diversion of arms and related materiel, including to seize and collect, record and dispose of illicit arms, ammunition, and other materiel in coordination with the HNP and the Haitian armed forces . . . and to enhance Haiti's management and control of its land, maritime and air borders and ports.⁵⁴

As these and other examples indicate, even as Security Council members reach consensus on the urgent need to address certain serious threats to peace and security, differences can arise over exactly how to do so, including with regard to recognizing and acting on the linkage between those issues and the application of conventional arms control tools to address them. As the representative of Costa Rica made clear in a 2021 Security Council open debate on preventive diplomacy:

There is a strong consensus on the need for the full and effective participation of women in conflict prevention and in all decision-making processes. That consensus recognizes that women and girls are affected differently and disproportionately by armed conflict. However, when we debate the impact of small arms and light weapons on gender-based and sexual violence, that consensus collapses. In a world where gender identity and sexual orientation continue to be a reason to be killed, mutilated, trafficked, sexually abused, exploited and rejected, closing the gap between the silos of the Organization can and should save lives.⁵⁵

52 United Nations, Security Council, Official Record, S/PV.9368, 6 July 2023, <https://docs.un.org/S/PV.9368>.

53 United Nations, Security Council, resolution 2794 (2025), 17 October 2025, [https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2794\(2025\)](https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2794(2025)); United Nations, "Security Council Renews Sanctions Regime on Haiti, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2794 (2025)", UN Meetings Coverage, SC/16195, 17 October 2025, <https://press.un.org/en/2025/sc16195.doc.htm>.

54 United Nations, Security Council, resolution S/RES/2793 (2025), 2025, [https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2793\(2025\)](https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2793(2025)), para. 1(e).

55 United Nations, Security Council, Official Record, S/PV.8906, 11 November 2021, <https://docs.un.org/S/PV.8906>, 29.

A more concerted effort is needed to strengthen awareness and understanding of how introducing impactful, feasible conventional arms control tools can meaningfully address pressing threats to peace and security. Such an approach is entirely consistent with the Secretary-General's appeal for an improved understanding of how conventional arms control can support conflict prevention and mitigation and with his call on states to integrate this understanding across the conflict-prevention work of the United Nations, including with the Security Council.⁵⁶

5.2 Engaging Proactive Elected Member States

The 10 elected members of the Security Council play key roles in shaping outcomes within the Council and across the United Nations organization. Through their leadership, advocacy, engagement and partnership-building, they reflect diverse international concerns and perspectives and can advance issues on the Council's agenda. They can shape the Council's deliberations and decisions through behind-the-scenes negotiations, by serving as "penholders" and sponsors of resolutions, by making the case for amendments to resolutions, and by presenting formal statements, among other actions. Given their relatively brief, two-year terms on the Council, they are often very proactive and incentivized to have an impact during their time on the Council.

Between January 2020 and December 2026, 40 different countries have served as elected members of the Security Council.⁵⁷ By monitoring the actions of the elected members of the Council, it is possible to identify those United Nations Member States that may be especially supportive of efforts to consider conventional arms control tools.

Given the relative frequency of unanimous votes on Security Council resolutions, a basic vote-tally analysis does not provide sufficient information to identify elected Council members that are particularly strong supporters of conventional arms control tools. Instead, greater insight into their interests and priorities is provided by analysis of penholder roles and formal statements by elected Council members, supplemented, where possible, through direct contact with relevant officials from these Council members. In addition, examining each elected member's terms as Council President can indicate that country's priorities and possible support for the greater use of conventional arms control tools. During its month as Council President, a Security Council member can influence the body's deliberations and decisions in important ways, including through agenda-setting and "signature events" that are part of the Council's programme of work (e.g., high-level briefings, ministerial-level open debates or retreats). This approach helps identify those Council members who prioritise the importance of conventional arms control tools to help address peace and security challenges.

Research finds that numerous elected members of the Security Council over the period 2020–2025 expressed – through votes on resolutions, official statements, signature events, Arria formula meetings,

56 United Nations, *Securing Our Common Future*, especially 40–42. See also United Nations, Security Council, "Small Arms and Light Weapons", Report of the Secretary-General, S/2019/1011, 30 December 2019, <https://docs.un.org/S/2019/1011>, especially Section III.

57 The 40 states are Albania, Algeria, Bahrain, Belgium, Brazil, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Estonia, Gabon, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guyana, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Japan, Kenya, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Mexico, Mozambique, Niger, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, the Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Somalia, South Africa, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Switzerland, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Viet Nam.



Sowing crops in Guatemala. Credit: UN Photo/F. Charton, 1995

or in-person interviews – some level of support for the use of conventional arms control tools to prevent and mitigate conflict and armed violence. A strong example of this kind of support is Mexico’s instrumental role in proposing resolution 2616 (2021), which focuses on arms embargoes, and convening a ministerial-level open debate on SALW in 2021. Another strong example is Sierra Leone, which convened an Arria formula meeting in 2025, co-sponsored by three other Council members at the time (Algeria, Guyana and Somalia), to discuss ways to improve the effectiveness of arms embargoes to counter illicit flows of SALW. More should be done to inform and empower elected Council members who are interested in advocating more strongly for the integration of practical conventional arms control tools to enhance the conflict-prevention and -mitigation processes of the United Nations.

5.3 Deepening Understanding and Capacity

Building on the steps outlined above, there are other concrete steps available to Security Council members – as well as to other United Nations Member States and entities more broadly – for deepening understanding and technical capacity regarding conventional arms control tools and their role in managing conflict and other forms of armed violence. For example, such advice and support is provided by United Nations entities such as the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), the Department of Peace Operations (DPO), the Office for Disarmament Affairs (ODA), the Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), and the Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). A good example is the work of the ODA, which, in cooperation with UNIDIR, has provided an aide-mémoire to Security Council members outlining options for including arms control and ammunition management in relevant Council decisions,

UNIDIR Support for the Use of the Security Council's Conventional Arms Control Toolbox

UNIDIR has contributed in recent years to strengthening understanding and capacity related to conventional arms control in the context of discussions and decisions of the United Nations Security Council.

- ▶ **Support to Security Council members:** Council members regularly solicit UNIDIR for technical expertise, advice and ideas, including evidence-based research, expert briefings and background inputs for Security Council deliberations. UNIDIR has also helped design relevant debates.
- ▶ **Support to the Security Council:** UNIDIR is regularly invited to brief the Council and its subsidiary bodies on pressing peace and security matters.
- ▶ **Support to action Security Council mandates:** UNIDIR assists United Nations, regional and national partners and communities of policy and practice in the implementation of Security Council-mandated tasks. This can include research, advice and tools, for instance through good practices, WAM and counter-IED capability assessments, or integrating arms control into conflict prevention.

along with a related hybrid online tool.⁵⁸ Another example is the preparatory briefings offered to incoming non-permanent members of the Council by United Nations Secretariat entities, including on issues related to conventional arms control.

UNIDIR is regularly invited to brief the Security Council, its subsidiary organs and United Nations Member States on pressing peace and security matters. In recent years, UNIDIR's Conventional Weapons Programme (CWP)⁵⁹ has provided a range of research, knowledge products and tools that have been used by the Council, individual members – permanent and, in particular, non-permanent – of the Council and subsidiary organs to inform thematic or country- or region-specific discussions, negotiations and resolutions (see Box 5.1).

58 United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, *Options for Reflecting Weapons and Ammunition Management in Decisions of the Security Council* (New York: United Nations, 2025), <https://media-publications.unoda.org/documents/aide-memoire-third-edition.pdf>.

59 Previously Conventional Arms and Ammunition Programme (CAAP).

6. Conclusion

This report aims to advance understanding of conventional arms control tools and their role in conflict prevention, examine the Security Council's perspectives and dynamics regarding those tools, and put forward promising pathways for the Council, United Nations Member States, United Nations entities and other partners to consider in developing and applying such tools. However, this report is not exhaustive, and additional research into these issues would reveal new insights and valuable recommendations. Box 6.1 highlights potential areas for further research on the Council's use of the conventional arms control toolbox for conflict prevention.

Looking ahead, the following measures can be proposed for Security Council members and for United Nations entities:

For incoming elected members of the Council:

- ▶ When preparing and setting priorities for the two-year term, give due attention to conventional arms controls. This could include seeking briefings from specialized United Nations and non-United Nations organizations with relevant policy and technical expertise to increase capacity and know-how on the relevance of arms controls for the breadth of the Security Council agenda.

BOX 6.1

Avenues for Further Research

This research for this report identified several avenues for further research that would expand the evidence base and provide a more detailed picture over time of the perspectives and dynamics of the United Nations Security Council related to conventional arms control. Potentially valuable avenues include:

- ▶ An in-depth, longitudinal review of Council debates, literature and databases, complemented by extensive interviews with officials from Member State missions, in capitals and in United Nations entities, on the linkages between conventional arms control and conflict prevention within the United Nations and especially at the Council level
- ▶ An assessment of national-level compliance with Council mandates related to conventional arms control (e.g., arms embargoes) to assess successes and gaps, and their impacts on conflict outcomes
- ▶ An investigation into the benefits and risks of engaging non-state armed groups on conventional arms control matters as part of a comprehensive conflict-prevention strategy
- ▶ A study on developments since the 2014–2015 High-Level Review of United Nations Sanctions, including arms embargo measures to assess the impact of its recommendations on Council practices
- ▶ An analysis of the relationship between conventional arms control and peace operations.

For permanent and elected members of the Council:

- ▶ Convene open debates, Arria formula meetings and other events with conventional arms controls as a stand-alone topic or as a means to address broader peace and security issues. This may also support innovation and adaptation of the Council's arms control toolbox in the face of the evolving peace and security environment, threats, and opportunities. Outcomes from such events could include resolutions, presidential statements, press statements or process-based outcomes such as the establishment of working groups.
- ▶ When holding the pen of relevant geographical files or chairing subsidiary organs, give adequate attention to conventional arms controls and prioritize inviting relevant, diverse experts from different specialized United Nations entities and non-United Nations organizations to brief the Security Council or its relevant subsidiary organs.
- ▶ Combine conventional arms control tools and consider them more systematically in relation to relevant thematic matters on the agenda of the Security Council – such as peacebuilding, peacekeeping, SSR, DDR, protection of civilians, women and peace and security, children in armed conflict, counter-terrorism, transnational organized crime, maritime security, and technologies – to effectively contribute to such responses.
- ▶ Ensure that Security Council mandates provide adequate capacities and resources for United Nations missions and other bodies to carry out mandated arms control tasks.
- ▶ Consult specialized United Nations and non-United Nations organizations to provide a conventional arms control lens on relevant Security Council debates and decisions, such as for mandate renewals of peace operations or arms embargoes.
- ▶ Given the scale of the conflict-prevention challenge, building and sustaining peace needs action at all levels, from the international to the local. More can be done to harness the roles of regional and local organizations and actors, such as communities, in support of locally owned prevention strategies that link arms control with community security, development, trust-building and resilience.
- ▶ In the Pact for the Future, Member States underlined the importance of prevention, while initiating the adaptation of United Nations peace operations to evolving needs. This could mean moving from the prevailing post-conflict application of conventional arms control tools as staples of peace operations to stronger use of such tools for conflict prevention. This can entail monitoring arms-related risks for early warning. Reviewing and adapting United Nations peace operations could also mean a more critical re-examination of the relationship between conventional arms, their control and peace operations.
- ▶ New conflict dynamics and technological advances may require new approaches. There is therefore a general need to consider the impacts on conventional arms control tools of technology and its use by both states and non-state actors. For example, to prevent and manage future conflicts, it is likely to become more pressing to consider the increasing presence of uncrewed aerial systems (UAS) in the arsenals of conflicting parties. Their presence during times of ceasefire negotiations and conflict resolution will affect trust and may require a rethinking of monitoring efforts.
- ▶ In any given situation posing a threat to international peace and security and under the purview of the Council, some conventional arms control tools may overlap. The United Nations Secretary-General has long called for better use of conventional arms control tools to help prevent armed conflict and violence. One way of doing so would be to continue to examine, in greater depth, the



DDR begins in the Ivory Coast. Credit: UN Photo/Basile Zoma, 2007

linkages between conventional arms control tools and their levels of integration as a means of preventing armed conflict and violence.

For United Nations entities, including the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Department of Peace Operations, the Office for Disarmament Affairs, and UNIDIR, among others:

- ▶ Engage elected Council members proactively and in a coordinated manner to sensitize permanent missions and capitals on the relevance of conventional arms control for the Security Council agenda, and explore opportunities for advice and capacity support.
- ▶ Integrate conventional arms control comprehensively and adequately into existing briefing programmes for elected Council members, or design relevant programmes, as a joint effort by relevant United Nations partners.
- ▶ Strengthen the evidence base on the development and use of conventional arms control tools by the Council and provide advice to support their further development and adaptation in the face of the changing conflict dynamics, threats and technologies.
- ▶ Strengthen the capacities of Member States, United Nations entities, and other international, regional and subregional organizations mandated by the Security Council to carry out conventional arms control tasks. They could also document capacity gaps, lessons and good practices in the application of conventional arms control tools to inform evidence-based Council debates and decisions.



@unidir



/unidir



/un_disarmresearch



/unidirgeneva



/unidir



UNIDIR

Palais des Nations
1211 Geneva, Switzerland

© UNIDIR, 2026

WWW.UNIDIR.ORG