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# False Signals, Real Weapons? Mis- and Disinformation about Conventional Arms

SARAH GRAND-CLÉMENT



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Cover image: Image representing the information overload deriving from digital media. Credit: Thippaphone / Adobe. AI generated image.

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# Acronyms and abbreviations

|                |                                              |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------|
| <b>AI</b>      | Artificial intelligence                      |
| <b>ATT</b>     | Arms Trade Treaty                            |
| <b>GenAI</b>   | Generative artificial intelligence           |
| <b>LLM</b>     | Large language model                         |
| <b>MANPADS</b> | Man-portable air-defence systems             |
| <b>NGO</b>     | Non-governmental organization                |
| <b>SALW</b>    | Small arms and light weapons                 |
| <b>UNROCA</b>  | United Nations Register of Conventional Arms |
| <b>WEOG</b>    | Western European and Other Group             |

# Glossary

|                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Arms and ammunition flows</b>       | The legitimate or illicit movement of weapons across borders                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Arms and ammunition build-up</b>    | The accumulation of arms and ammunition by an actor as a result of national production                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Arms and ammunition acquisition</b> | The act of planning, ordering and obtaining legitimate or illicit arms and ammunition                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Arms trafficking</b>                | The illegal cross-border movement of weapons                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Data poisoning</b>                  | The intentional tampering with the training data set of an AI model; can also occur when a model is updated or can be applied to the data sources from which an AI system retrieves information                                                         |
| <b>Disinformation</b>                  | Intentionally false information spread with the intention to cause harm                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Diversion</b>                       | The rerouting of conventional arms from the legal to the illicit realm                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Information disorders</b>           | An umbrella term encompassing disinformation, misinformation and malinformation; used in this report to refer to the phenomenon of inaccurate and false information across the many and varied forms and intentionalities that it can take <sup>1</sup> |
| <b>Information integrity</b>           | “An information ecosystem in which reliable and accurate information is available to all, enabling people to engage meaningfully in public life, make informed decisions and exercise their rights” <sup>2</sup>                                        |
| <b>Malinformation</b>                  | True information spread with the intention to cause harm (e.g., at a specific point in time when tensions are already high)                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Misinformation</b>                  | Unintentionally false information spread without the intent to cause harm (e.g., by individuals who believe it to be true)                                                                                                                              |

1 Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan, *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2017), <https://edoc.coe.int/en/media/7495-information-disorder-toward-an-interdisciplinary-framework-for-research-and-policy-making.html>.

2 Department of Global Communications, *From Principles for Practice: Strengthening Information Integrity*, Issue Brief 1 (New York: United Nations, September 2025), <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un-information-integrity-issue-brief-01.pdf>.

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# Executive summary

Information disorders – disinformation, misinformation and malinformation – affecting the integrity of information on conventional arms are an underexamined but consequential challenge for arms control, conflict prevention and international security. False or misleading claims about arms and ammunition flows, acquisitions and build-ups could distort perceptions of military capabilities, undermine confidence between States, affect decisions on arms transfers, intensify existing tensions and result in an arms build-up. Although such information disorders are not new, digital platforms have increased the speed, scale and reach through which they can circulate. At the same time, limited transparency, the complexity of arms supply chains, low public knowledge of weapons and delays in authoritative reporting create information gaps that false or sensational claims by State or non-State actors can readily exploit.

This report examines the nature and implications of technology-enabled information disorders concerning flows, acquisition and build-up of conventional arms and ammunition. Drawing on a database of 146 incidents between 2015 and 2025, this report demonstrates that there are, indeed, information disorders regarding conventional arms. Key findings include:

- ▶ Most identified incidents occurred between 2020 and 2025, with a peak of 45 cases in 2023.
- ▶ Three quarters of the incidents concerned arms flows, while 14 per cent related to acquisition and 11 per cent to arms build-up.
- ▶ Some incidents occurred outside formally defined conflicts, including cases involving alleged deployments or build-ups near borders that could potentially indicate or intensify emerging unrest.
- ▶ The most common form of information disorder was the misrepresentation of weapons sales between countries, accounting for 40 of the 146 incidents.
- ▶ Other prominent incident categories include false accusations of illegal weapons supply to non-State armed groups and misrepresentations of weapons ownership.
- ▶ In cases where weapons were specified, small arms and light weapons, ammunition and missile systems appeared most frequently.
- ▶ The incidents referenced 42 countries as source or destination, although the geographic distribution was uneven. States and other entities in the Western European and Other Group (WEOG) and the Eastern European Group are most frequently identified as the source of weapons or ammunition, while States in the African Group and Eastern European Group appeared most often as destinations.

Digital technology acts as a force multiplier in the creation and dissemination of incidents. However, the technologies behind the incidents analyzed were generally not high-end, often relying on pre-existing visual media taken out of context and leveraging social media platforms. Generative artificial intelligence (AI) was rarely evident in the incidents examined, but its future impact should not be understated; its use may reduce the cost and expertise required to generate false yet persuasive text, images, audio and video. Other emerging technological risks include AI agents, chatbot hallucinations and the deliberate poisoning of online information sources.

Implications of information disorders about conventional arms flows, acquisitions and build-up emerge across three interconnected areas:

- ▶ For arms control and disarmament, information disorders may make claims harder to detect amid growing informational “noise”, may distort perceptions of treaty compliance, may affect arms-transfer risk assessments and may potentially weaken confidence in reporting and transparency instruments.
- ▶ For peace and security, incidents may justify arms build-ups, contribute to violence, destabilize cease-fires and peace processes, undermine peacekeeping and humanitarian operations, and impair civilian decision-making.
- ▶ At the multilateral and geopolitical level, the phenomenon may strain diplomatic relationships and alliances, erode multilateral cooperation and undermine confidence in the United Nations.

Addressing the information disorders and their implications requires complementary prevention, protection and mitigation measures:

- ▶ Prevention includes reducing information vacuums through more timely, accessible and credible communication on conventional arms and by addressing underlying root causes that lead to information disorders in the first place.
- ▶ Protection requires strengthened verification capacity, early warning based on recurring incident patterns and better preparation of policymakers and other audiences for foreseeable narratives.
- ▶ Mitigation should provide channels for rapidly clarifying disputed claims, discussing information disorders within arms-control processes and protecting the trust that underpins multilateral mechanisms. Consideration should also be given by Member States to common standards or norms for information concerning arms flows, acquisition and build-up.

Ultimately, greater transparency, verification and confidence-building are essential. Existing 20th Century reporting and transparency tools should be assessed against the speed and complexity of today’s information environment.



Globe overlaid with technological and data networks. Credit: KanawatTH / Adobe.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Understanding the links between information disorders, conflict and weapons

In 2023, a video clip taken from a segment of a Mexican news report began circulating on social media. In this video clip, the news anchor reports that the Gulf Cartel, a Mexican drug cartel, has illegally acquired a Javelin man-portable guided anti-tank weapon that had originally been sent to Ukraine in the context of the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.<sup>3</sup> This clip and its allegations were further amplified when it was retweeted by Vivek Ramaswamy, a candidate in the Republican Party primaries ahead of the 2024 presidential elections in the United States. However, the video clip contained multiple misleading, if not entirely false, elements. First, it was mistranslated. In the original version, the news anchor does not claim that the weapon had been smuggled from Ukraine. Second, the weapon is misidentified: the featured weapon is, in fact, an AT4 man-portable unguided rocket launcher. Javelins and AT4s differ significantly in their capabilities, with the clip falsely enhancing the sophistication of weaponry that the cartel allegedly possessed.<sup>4</sup> Overall, this clip seeks to portray military aid to Ukraine in a negative light, by raising fears around diversion and subsequent possession of high-end military weapons by illicit users.

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3 While Javelins originate from the United States, the clip does not specify which country or countries originally provided these weapons to Ukraine.

4 Sophia Khatsenkova, "Are weapons sent to Ukraine ending up in the hands of drug cartels?", Euronews, 18 July 2023, <https://www.euronews.com/2023/07/18/are-weapons-sent-to-ukraine-ending-up-in-the-hands-of-drug-cartels>; Karena Phan, "Mistranslated news report sparks baseless claim about Mexican cartel getting weapon from Ukraine", AP News, 3 June 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/fact-check-mexico-cartel-weapons-ukraine-us-668968778777>.

This example, which showcases inaccurate and fabricated facts concerning conventional arms flows, acquisition or build-up, is not unique. While this incident has since been fact-checked and debunked, it nonetheless demonstrates the potential reach of such incidents and the impact that they can have. In this case, the post was shared across social media platforms, including Reddit, Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) – while also cutting across geographical boundaries and playing on political and security challenges across countries and regions.

The term “information disorders” is used in this report to refer to the spectrum of issues that affect and undermine information integrity, as exemplified by the incident above. Information disorders are not new; they have been used to affect public opinion and decision-making since Ancient Rome: in a now famous example, Octavian spread false information about Marc Anthony via engraved coins.<sup>5</sup> Over time, society has benefited from advances in communications technology, from the printing press to the Internet and the democratization of digital technologies. These advances have also affected the scope and scale of information disorders, so much so that mis- and disinformation have been mentioned consistently since 2023 as a key risk in the World Economic Forum’s Global Risks Reports,<sup>6</sup> as well as in the two most recent editions of the United Nations’ Global Risk Report.<sup>7</sup>

The implications of information disorders extend to peace and conflict. The 2022 report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression highlights that there is “growing evidence that information is being manipulated to trigger, aggravate and sustain violence over prolonged periods, increasing the fog of war with contradictory and false news and fostering a climate of distrust”.<sup>8</sup> This same report also notes the role that digital technologies have played in amplifying information disorders. Moreover, information disorders have been shown to have negative effects on civilians,<sup>9</sup> humanitarian organizations<sup>10</sup> and peacekeeping missions<sup>11</sup> prior to, during and

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5 Julie Posetti and Alice Matthews, “A short guide to the history of “fake news” and disinformation”, International Center for Journalism (ICFJ), July 2018, [https://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/2018-07/A\\_Short\\_Guide\\_to\\_History\\_of\\_Fake\\_News\\_and\\_Disinformation\\_ICFJ\\_Final.pdf](https://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/2018-07/A_Short_Guide_to_History_of_Fake_News_and_Disinformation_ICFJ_Final.pdf).

6 World Economic Forum (WEF), “Global Risks Report”, <https://www.weforum.org/publications/series/global-risks-report/>. Notably, the perception of mis- and disinformation as a risk significantly increased between the 2023 and 2024 reports.

7 United Nations, *Global Risk Report 2024* (New York: United Nations, 2024), <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/global-risk-report-2024.pdf>; United Nations, *Global Risk Report 2026* (New York: United Nations, 2026). [https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un\\_2026\\_global\\_risk\\_report.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_2026_global_risk_report.pdf). Mis- and disinformation were ranked as the third and second most important risk overall in the 2024 and 2026 reports respectively, although both reports also highlight differences in perception about this risk based on respondents’ location.

8 General Assembly, “Disinformation and freedom of opinion and expression during armed conflicts”, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection, A/77/288, 12 August 2022, <https://docs.un.org/A/77/288>, paragraph 17.

9 Chris Brew and Lauren Spink, “Disinformation harms civilians in conflict in more ways than you thought”, Center for Civilians in Conflict, 20 August 2022, <https://civiliansinconflict.org/blog/disinformation-harms-civilians-in-conflict-in-more-ways-than-you-thought/>; Julia Wiessmann, “Facebook and the Rohingya: A case of digital complicity”, Center for the Study of Organized Hate, 20 August 2024, <https://www.csohate.org/2024/08/20/facebook-and-rohingya-a-case-of-digital-complicity/>.

10 International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Addressing Harmful Information In Conflict Settings: A Response Framework For Humanitarian Organizations* (Geneva: ICRC, January 2025), <https://www.icrc.org/en/publication/addressing-harmful-information-conflict-settings-response-framework-humanitarian>.

11 Department of Peace Operations, “Information integrity and harmful information”, 31 July 2026, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/information-integrity-and-harmful-information>.

after conflict. The United Nations' Pact for the Future notably recognizes the need to address this issue in order to build and sustain peace, and directly references it in Action 18(g).<sup>12</sup>

When it comes to weapons specifically, the nexus between information disorders and weapons of mass destruction has already been explored.<sup>13</sup> For example, a tracker has been developed on the impact in multilateral disarmament debates of disinformation about chemical and biological weapons.<sup>14</sup> However, there is no similar, publicly available initiative on information disorders and arms within the conventional domain.

Yet, due to the secrecy of the trade in conventional arms as well as the inherent complexity of the supply chains, mapping legitimate flows of conventional arms and identifying illicit proliferation are ongoing challenges. Nonetheless, the international community has been seeking to improve transparency and confidence about flows, acquisition and build-up of conventional arms and ammunition, such as through the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA),<sup>15</sup> and the Information Exchange on Conventional Arms Transfer of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), as well as through national level initiatives.<sup>16</sup> There are also non-governmental initiatives that seek to improve understanding of arms flows, such as the Arms Transfers Database of Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), which gathers data on all international transfers of major conventional arms.<sup>17</sup>

The success of such initiatives that seek to collect and make available evidence-based and objective data in a dynamic, bottom-up information age can be questioned. Several factors converge in this space:

- ▶ The faster pace at which information disorders can spread online compared to the slower speed of reaction and response with factual information
- ▶ The poorer performance of fact-based information across online platforms compared to sensational content

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12 General Assembly, "The Pact for the Future", resolution 79/1, 22 September 2024, <https://docs.un.org/A/RES/79/1>, paragraph 39(g).

13 See, for example, Joseph Rodgers, *Information Pollution and What It Means for Arms Control* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 2024), [https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2024-01/240125\\_Rodgers\\_Information\\_Pollution.pdf](https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2024-01/240125_Rodgers_Information_Pollution.pdf); Kate Zander et al., "Building information resilience to reinforce arms control", *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 21 August 2023, <https://thebulletin.org/2023/08/building-information-resilience-to-reinforce-arms-control/>; Countering WMD Disinformation Initiative, "Countering WMD disinformation", <https://gpwmdcounterdisinfo.com/>.

14 Countering WMD Disinformation Initiative, "CB disinformation tracker", <https://gpwmdcounterdisinfo.com/cbrn-tracker/>.

15 Transparency is not uniform across all Member States. Moreover, there has been backsliding on transparency by States that have regularly participated in UNROCA in recent years, with several also restricting access to ATT annual reports. For further analysis on this topic see, for example, Lara Maria Guedes Gonçalves Costa and Paul Holtom, *Arms Trade Treaty Reporting on Small Arms Transfers: What Have We Learned?* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2026), <https://unidir.org/publication/arms-trade-treaty-reporting-on-small-arms-transfers-what-have-we-learned/>.

16 Two caveats should be noted. The first is that national reporting can at times bring in further confusion and have a negative impact on information integrity (e.g., when reports overinflate the estimated value of arms exports). The second is that the quality of the reporting can vary, with analysis of reporting showing omissions and data inaccuracies. See, for example, Pieter D. Wezeman and Siemon T. Wezeman, "International transparency in arms procurement and military expenditure as confidence-building measures", *SIPRI Yearbook 2022: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/SIPRIYB23c10sIV.pdf>.

17 SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers/>.

- ▶ A rise in awareness on arms exports and military issues, prompted by recent conflicts, combined with low public knowledge about arms flows, enabled by the overarching secrecy that is common in the arms trade<sup>18</sup>

This provides an enabling environment in which information disorders can thrive, especially in the light of current trends. Not only is the number of armed conflicts increasing globally,<sup>19</sup> but there is also a sustained growth in military spending,<sup>20</sup> declining trust between States, and increased risk of misperception and miscalculation – all of which contribute to the decline of international security.

## 1.2 Purpose and scope of the study

To better understand and examine the issue of information disorders within the conventional arms domain, the report examines whether and to what extent information disorders affect flows, acquisition and build-up of conventional arms and ammunition. The focus is specifically on technology-enabled and digital information disorders, examining incidents occurring in (online) news media and social media. The report also examines the role and impact that technology plays – and could play in the future – within information disorders.

While inaccurate, misleading, false or manipulated information concerning flows, acquisitions and build-up of conventional arms are within the scope of this report, it does not encompass States' compliance with or failures to report to international instruments. Although non-digital technological disorders also have an important impact on information integrity, they are not examined here, nor are information disorders regarding the use of conventional arms. Moreover, the findings presented in this report do not aim to attribute information disorders to a specific actor.

This report examines information disorders directed at the general public and aims to increase understanding as to how the phenomenon manifests itself. This is particularly relevant given that the wider population – from the general public and civil society actors to policy- and decision-makers – are increasingly exposed not only to information disorders, but also to direct and indirect impacts of the conflicts and conventional arms use that result from arms flows, acquisition and build-up. The intended audience of this report, beyond disarmament and arms control diplomats, thus includes United Nations personnel, civil society representatives, technology actors, journalists and the general public.

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18 Anna Stavrianakis, "Introducing the special section on 'arms export controls during war and armed conflict'", *Global Policy*, vol. 14, no. 1 (February 2023): 107–111, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.13194>; Rudolph, Lukas and Paul W. Thurner, "Are ideological and partisan affinities determining voters' support of arms deliveries? Insights from a large-scale survey experiment in France and Germany", *European Political Science Review*, vol. 17, no. 1 (February 2024): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773924000109>.

19 Shawn Davies, Therése Pettersson and Magnus Öberg, "Organized violence 1989–2025, and violent political protests", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 63, no. 4 (2026): 705–723, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopres/xjag046>.

20 Xiao Liang et al. "Trends in world military expenditure, 2025", SIPRI Fact Sheet, April 2026, <https://doi.org/10.55163/ZLHQ1057>.

## 1.3 Methodology

This paper is based on findings drawn from four main activities:

- ▶ The identification and compilation of information disorder incidents, which led to the creation of an incidents database (see Box 1 for an in-depth overview of the data-collection approach)
- ▶ A review of academic and grey literature, focusing on information disorders related to conventional arms flows, acquisition and build-up and their implications, as well as current and future uses of technology enabling or enhancing information disorders
- ▶ Interviews with 20 experts spanning arms control, open-source intelligence (OSINT), fact-checking, mis- and disinformation and related technologies, held between July 2025 and July 2026 (see Appendix A for a full list of interviewees)
- ▶ Three informal consultations held in August 2026 with New York-based and Geneva-based representatives from Permanent Missions to the United Nations, as well as non-Member State representatives drawn from the research and practitioner communities spanning the fields of arms control, peace-keeping, humanitarian, mediation, and mis- and disinformation

## 1.4 Report structure

Following this introduction, this report is comprised of three main sections. Section 2 presents the analysis of the data gathered in the incidents database. Section 3 discusses the role played by technology. Section 4 explores the implications of conventional arms-related information disorders. Finally, Section 5 concludes the report, offering reflections on actions to prevent, protect against and mitigate conventional arms-related information disorders.

## Approach used for the collection of data on incidents

Given the lack of concrete data, beyond anecdotal evidence, on information disorders pertaining to flows, acquisition and build-up of conventional arms, a database was created to compile and analyze incidents. The term “incidents” refer to articles or posts published or shared on digital platforms, including news outlets and social media posts. The identification of information disorders relied on incidents that had already been debunked or fact-checked by trusted sources and fact checkers (e.g., those signatory to the International Fact-Checkers Network Code of Principles).<sup>21</sup> Additional incidents shared during interviews were also added to the database, as long as these incidents could also be referenced back to articles providing fact-checked information.

The scope of incidents included any that demonstrate an information disorder about the flow, acquisition or build-up of any type of conventional arm or ammunition. The geographical focus was worldwide, and the incident was to have occurred between 1 January 2014 and 31 December 2025.

Based on these criteria, the total number of incidents compiled was 224, with data collection occurring between February 2025 and July 2026. Of these, 78 were found to be out of scope or duplicates or the debunking deemed of insufficient quality. The remaining 146 were found to be within scope and were analyzed. While incidents in languages other than English were compiled, there was still a significant bias towards English-language sources. The subsequent analysis should thus not be extrapolated beyond this data set and considering the methodological limitations highlighted below.

Data recorded on incidents includes the year in which the information disorder first emerged and the types of weapon or ammunition mentioned. Further, each incident was categorized based on the type of issue the information disorder was about, to better understand the nature of the information disorders about conventional weapons. Data extracted about each incident also included the source and destination region or regions of weapons and ammunition flows and acquisition (based on the United Nations regional groups of Member States), as well as the technologies mentioned to be involved in the creation or dissemination of the incident. Each incident was also attributed a label based on whether or not it related to an ongoing conflict and the type of conflict.

Several limitations should be noted, especially as this database is not meant to exhaustively compile all incidents that may have occurred on the topic in the given timeframe. First, the data-gathering process relied on other entities uncovering information disorders. This may contribute to a certain bias in the incidents analyzed, specifically towards incidents occurring in areas in conflict or with pre-existing tensions, where the available information may already be subject to increased scrutiny. Despite verifying all incidents and sources and seeking to use trusted sources, there is also potential for bias with the fact-checking or debunking sources used. Second, language barriers will probably also have played a role in limiting the identification of incidents. As noted above, while incidents were sought across a range of languages, English remained the primary language used.

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21 See “IFCN Code of Principles”, <https://ifcncodeofprinciples.poynter.org/signatories>.

## 2. Exploring the nature of information disorders about conventional arms

The incidents identified and compiled in the database, alongside the interviews with experts, demonstrate that there are, indeed, information disorders regarding conventional arms flows, acquisition and build-up. This section presents an analysis of the recorded incidents, noting the methodological limitations presented in Subsection 1.3.

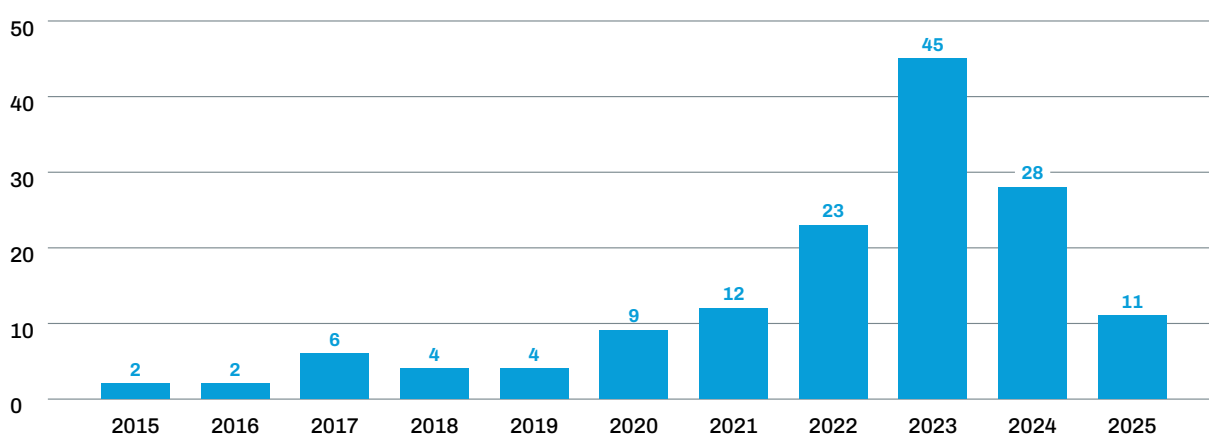
### 2.1 General trends

The analysis presented in this section covers 10 years' worth of information disorders about conventional arms flows, acquisition and build-up. The number of incidents identified varies from year to year (as illustrated in Figure 1).<sup>22</sup>

Most incidents analyzed occurred between 2020 and 2025, with a peak in 2023. This should not, however, be taken to mean that there was an increase of information disorders in 2023 or a decline in 2025. Several reasons may explain this distribution of incidents. The first may be the data-collection method and the methodology used to identify incidents, which relies on third-party entities conducting fact-checking and debunking. There was a rise in the number of providers of fact-checking from 2015, with a particular increase in new fact checkers in 2019 and 2020, with the caveat that these are not evenly

FIGURE 1

#### Information disorder incidents, by year, 2015–2025



Source: UNIDIR analysis.

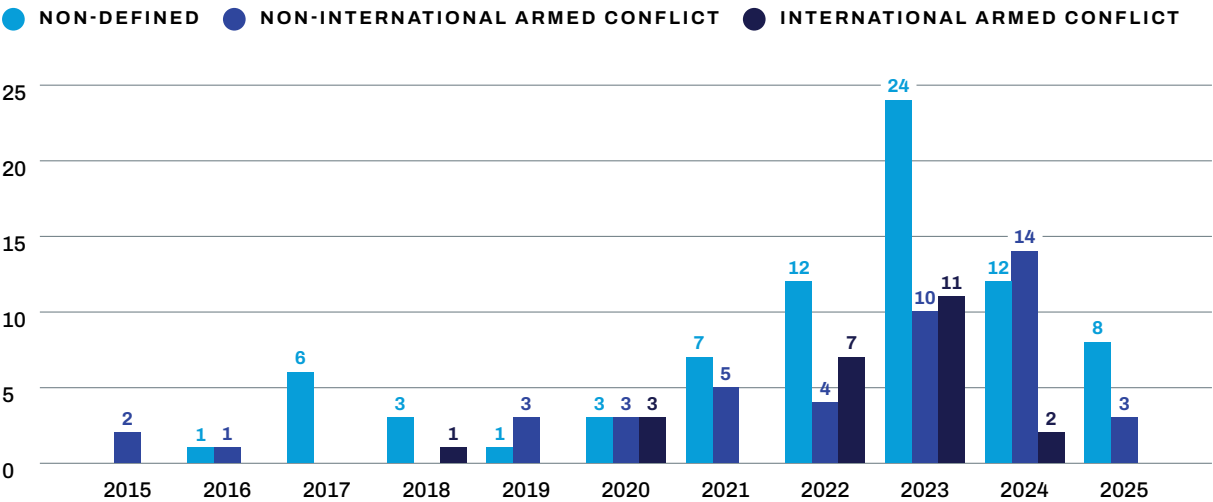
22 Although 2014 was within the analysis timeframe, no incident that adhered to the criteria were found to be in scope that year. The incidents analyzed thus cover 2015–2025.

distributed around the globe.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the number of sources from which to identify incidents has expanded over time. However, recent stocktaking shows a slight decline in the number of active fact checkers.<sup>24</sup> A second reason is that the research focuses on digital information disorders. Here, too, there has been an increase over time in the adoption of digital technology and the growth of online tools and platforms through which incidents can be created and distributed, albeit also unevenly around the globe.<sup>25</sup> A third reason that may also explain the distribution of incidents, especially between 2022 and 2024, may be the increase in the number of armed conflicts, which can in turn lead to more scrutiny around information shared about weapons, including their flows, acquisition and build-up. There has indeed been an upward trajectory in the number of conflicts, especially since 2015, with a particular increase since 2021.<sup>26</sup>

Of the incidents recorded, three-quarters are about arms flows. Incidents featuring acquisitions and build-up were less frequent (14 per cent and 11 per cent, respectively). When examining the conflict status with which each incident was labelled (see Figure 2), the data does indeed show slightly more

FIGURE 2

### Information disorder incident, by conflict type and year, 2015–2025



Notes: Conflict types include international (if between two or more States), non-international (where one of the parties is non-State) and non-defined (if in a context of armed violence, in a state of unpeace that does not meet the threshold for conflict, unrelated to an armed conflict or there is insufficient contextual information).

Source: UNIDIR analysis.

23 Mark Stencel and Erica Ryan, “Misinformation spreads, but fact-checking has leveled off”, Duke Reporters’ Lab, 21 June 2023, <https://reporterslab.org/2023/06/21/misinformation-spreads-but-fact-checking-has-leveled-off/>.

24 Erika Ryan, “2026 census: Fact-checking losses continue amid funding pressure, but most projects persist”, Duke Reporters’ Lab, 12 June 2026, <https://reporterslab.org/2026/06/12/2026-census-fact-checking-losses-continue-amid-funding-pressure-but-most-projects-persist/>.

25 Simon Kemp, “Digital 2026 global overview report”, DataReportal, 15 October 2025, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2026-global-overview-report>. For example, DataReportal reports that, in 2014, there were just under 3 billion Internet users, compared to 6 billion in 2025, with an equally important growth in social media use over time.

26 Siri Aas Rustad, *Conflict Trends: A Global Overview, 1946–2025* (Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo, 2026), <https://www.prio.org/publications/14802>, 13, 16; General Assembly and Security Council, “Review on the future of all forms of United Nations peace operations”, Report of the Secretary-General, A/80/798-S/2026/600, 22 July 2026, <https://docs.un.org/A/80/798>.

incidents occurring in both non-international armed conflicts and international armed conflicts in 2022–2024. Notably, many of the incidents identified as “non-defined” seek to undermine public trust and deteriorate public support for arms flows or acquisitions. In other instances, information disorders act as a signal for deteriorating relationships, increased geopolitical tensions and upcoming unrest. For example, several incidents were identified as occurring prior to the start of a conflict, perhaps featuring supposed arms build-up at the border of one of the conflict parties.

## 2.2 Categories of information disorder

To better understand the nature of the information disorders about conventional arms flows, acquisition and build-up, incidents were assigned one of nine “incident categories” (see Box 2). These categories

### BOX 2

#### Categories of information disorder incident explained

- A. Accusation of (illicit) arms flows assistance:** Incidents where an actor (generally a State) is falsely accused of assisting with arms flows, such as enabling weapons to transit. This can include both illicit and legitimate assistance.
- B. Accusation of diversion:** Incidents where an entity (generally a State) is falsely accused of diverting, or taking part in the diversion of, weapons towards illicit end users. Many of these end users are cited as being organized crime groups.
- C. Accusation of illegal arms purchase:** Incidents where an actor (State, non-State or even individuals) has been falsely accused of purchasing weapons illegally.
- D. Accusation of weapons supply to a non-State armed group:** Incidents where an entity (generally a State) is falsely accused of supplying or selling weapons to a non-State armed group (primarily terrorist groups).
- E. Accusation of weapons trafficking:** Incidents where an actor (either a State or, frequently, an individual or a group of individuals) is accused of trafficking weapons, without a focus on arms flows assistance, diversion or illicit purchasing.
- F. Denial of a weapons-related claim:** Incidents that refer to an actor (generally a State) denying that a weapons acquisition or transfer (or a refusal thereof) has taken place.
- G. Misrepresentation of legal weapon sales to another country:** Incidents where a State is falsely identified as giving or selling weapons to another country. These incidents generally focus on the supplier State, but in some instances the focus is (also) on the receiving State.
- H. Misrepresentation of ownership:** Incidents where the ownership of weapons by a certain actor (State or non-State) has been misrepresented. In some cases, this can include false information on the apparent source of the weapons or how they were acquired.
- I. Misrepresentation of weapons:** Incidents where there is inaccurate reporting about either the number of weapons, their capabilities or their intended uses when reporting on weapons flows or acquisitions. This includes either downplaying or enhancing the weapons-related claims, depending on the incident.

were identified bottom-up (i.e., based on the incidents themselves), as opposed to the categories being pre-determined in a top-down manner. In instances where an incident could belong to two or more categories, the project team assigned it to the most pertinent category.

Anonymized examples of incidents falling under the three most recurrent incident categories (as shown in Figure 3) include:

► **Misrepresentation of legal weapon sales to another country**

- A document made to look like an official government document from State A was posted on a messaging app. This document stated that State A was selling surplus weapons to various countries. The probable intention behind this incident was to undermine State A, which had been the recipient of military aid from other countries, by aiming to demonstrate profit and corruption in relation to the aid received.
- Social media claims circulated suggesting that a very large arms shipment was delivered by State B to State C at a time when State C was experiencing tensions with neighbouring State D. The images used to support these social media claims were taken out of context: they were images from a delivery of weapons two years earlier from State B to State E. The probable intention behind this incident was to undermine trust at a time of increased tensions with State D.
- Amid peace negotiations between State I and State J, a news report alleged that State I was in the process of acquiring a substantial number of weapons from State K. Both State I and State K denied these claims; but State J warned that this could lead to a possible military retaliation by State J against State I, accusing the report of being fake news intended to damage its improving relations with State I.

► **Accusation of illegal weapons supply to non-State armed groups**

- News media relayed a speech by a government spokesperson from State L, which falsely claimed that weapons from State M were being trafficked to terrorist groups and criminal groups in various regions of the world. The president of State N, located in one of these regions, further amplified this false information in a public speech.
- A claim stating that State O had intercepted a weapons delivery by State P to a terrorist group emerged on a social media platform. This claim was then picked up by blogs and other websites. The claim was false and the image accompanying the claim had been taken out of context. This image had originally been taken during a joint training operation between troops from State O and State Q.

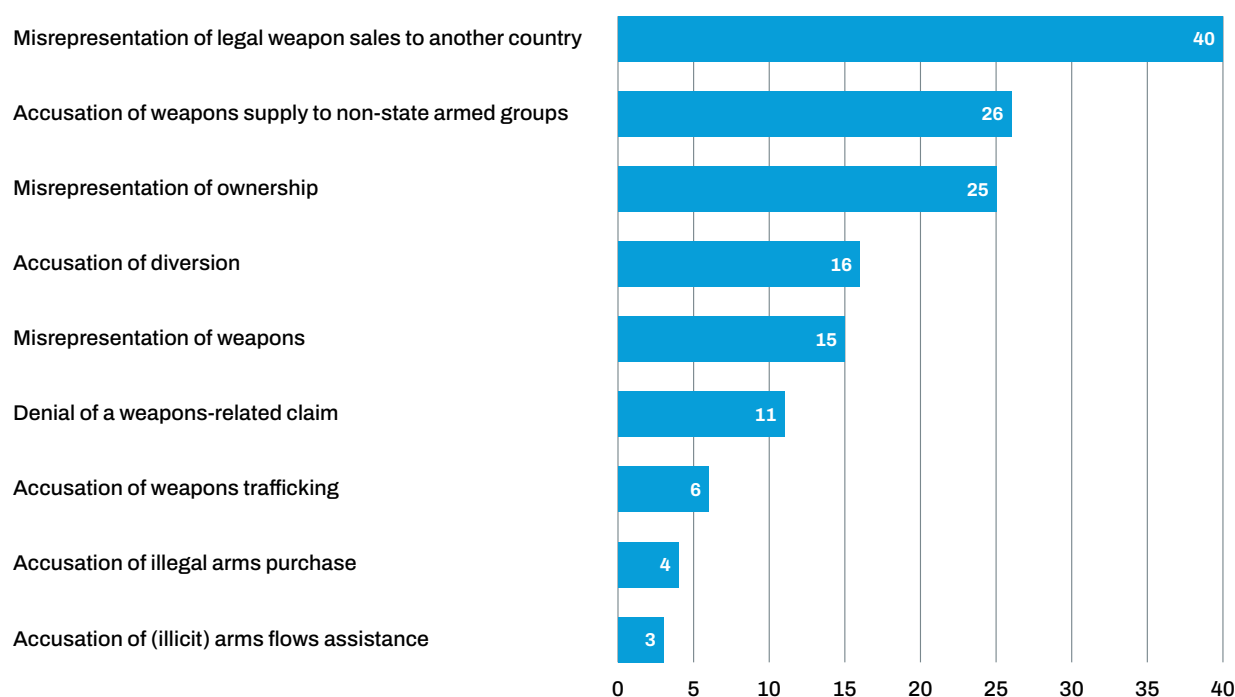
► **Misrepresentation of ownership**

- Amid a non-international armed conflict, images shared on social media claimed that one of the conflict parties (a non-State armed group) owned weapons originating from State R, and that these were capabilities that the other conflict party, the government of State S, did not own. However this claim was false, and the images manipulated. These images were originally taken from a military exercise that was run in State R.

Incidents classified as “Misrepresentation of legal weapon sales to another country” were particularly frequent in the years 2022–2024 (31 of the 40 incidents in this category), whereas incidents identified as “Accusation of illegal weapons supply to a non-State armed group” were particularly prominent in 2023 (9 of the 26 incidents in this category).

FIGURE 3

## Information disorder incidents, by category, 2015–2025



Source: UNIDIR analysis.

## 2.3 Weapon systems in information disorders

Incidents feature a range of weapon systems (as shown in Figure 4). However, the incidents analyzed also commonly did not specify the weapons. In such instances, the references are left vague, simply mentioning “weapons” or “military equipment”. In such incidents, the focus is often less on the type of weapon and more on the action regarding it (e.g., trafficking, diversion or the arming of a certain actor).

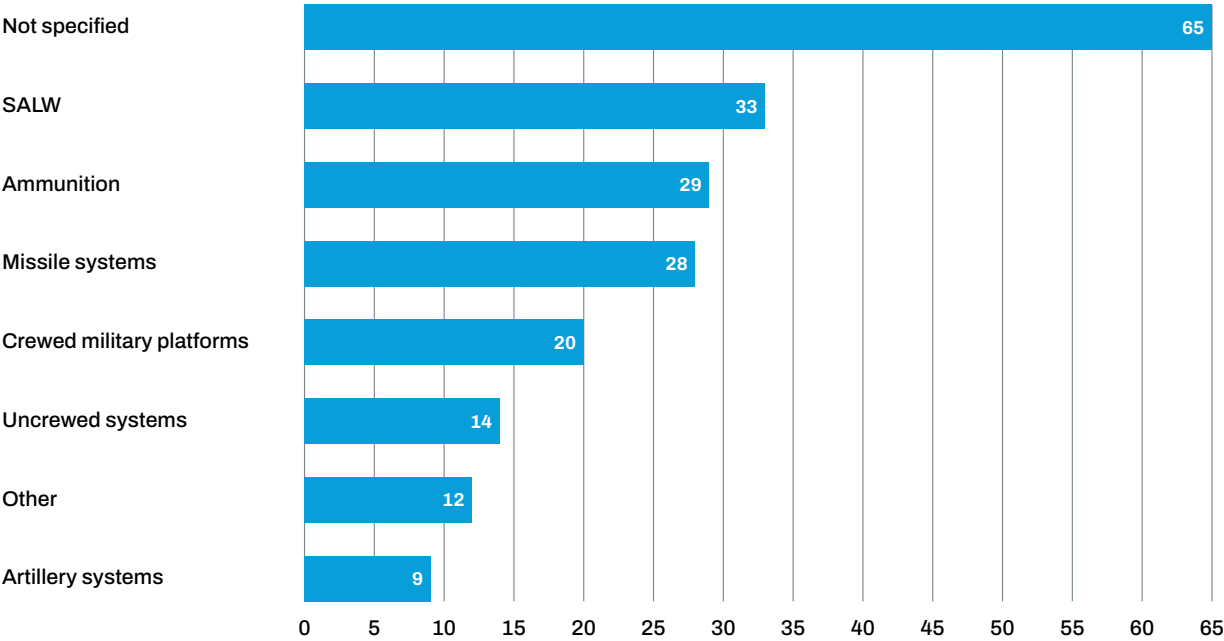
Apart from cases with non-specified weapons, the most frequently mentioned types are small arms and light weapons (SALW), ammunition and missile systems.

SALW is the most frequently used weapon type in both armed conflict and armed violence settings, as well as for criminal and terrorist purposes. Additionally, and especially compared to other weapon types, SALW transfers are harder to track and are also at an increased risk of diversion. Given these characteristics, information disorders featuring SALW may have a higher likelihood of perceived credibility. Many of the incidents featuring SALW do not provide specific information on the weapons, beyond stating whether they are rifles or pistols, for example. In a few rare instances, a model is specified. Examples of models mentioned include the M240 machine gun and the AK-47. The latter is mentioned in several incidents; widespread awareness of this weapon type, including by non-specialist audiences, may play a role in the references made to this model. Moreover, production and use of such Kalashnikov-type rifles have been widespread across a number of countries, which can also increase the probability of misidentification. The references to ammunition map quite closely to those made of SALW. Indeed, most information disorders that include a reference to ammunition also reference a weapon system.

The missile systems category includes anti-tank missiles, man-portable air-defence systems (MANPADS) and air-to-air missiles, among others. In these instances, the missile type is often mentioned. Specific models mentioned include the Javelin anti-tank missile and the FIM-92 Stinger MANPADS. In these incidents, the focus is placed more firmly on the capabilities of these weapons. Missile systems have greater impact in terms of military effect than SALW, and many of the incidents seek to capitalize on this due to the possible effects of and damage caused by such weapons.

FIGURE 4

Weapons and ammunition featured in information disorder incidents



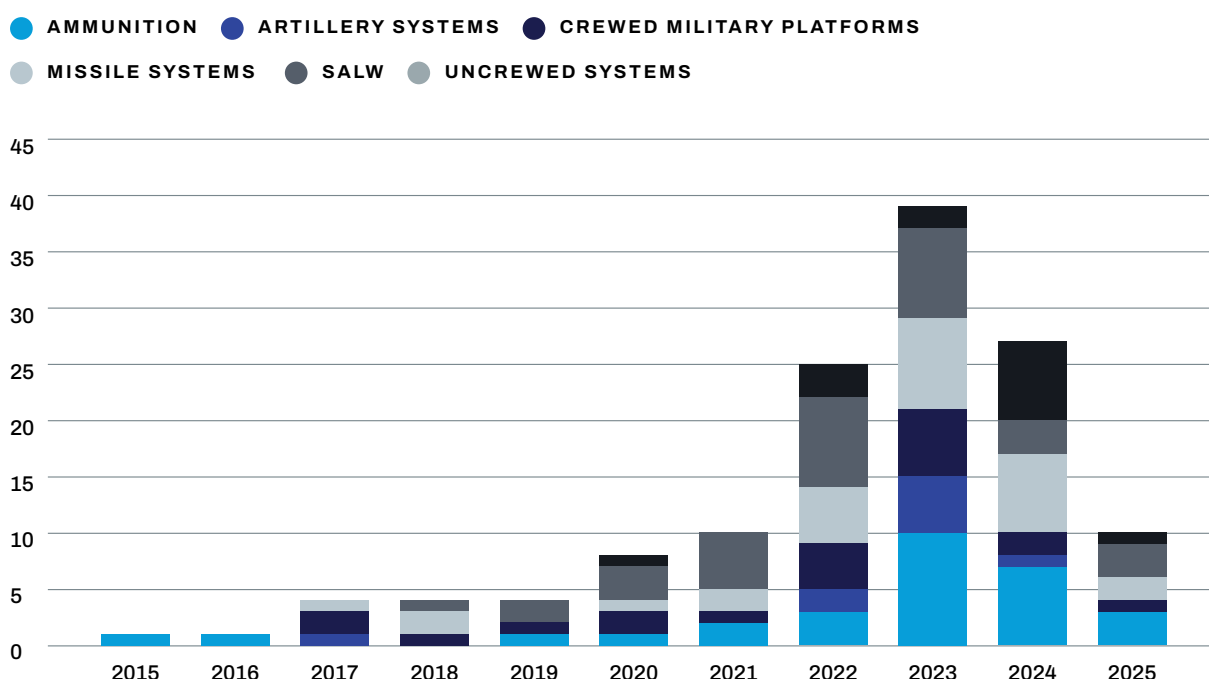
Notes: Some incidents include references to multiple weapon types, hence the total amount of weapons is greater than the total number of incidents. The categories are defined as follows: “Ammunition” refers to bullets and other conventional munitions and projectiles used in conventional weapons; “Artillery systems” refer to guns or howitzers as defined by the Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA), <https://www.unroca.org/categories>; “Crewed military platforms” refer to tanks, combat vehicles, aircraft, helicopters and vessels that are crewed; “Missile systems” refer to all missile systems, including missile defence systems, anti-tank missiles, man-portable air-defence systems (MANPADs) and air-to-air missiles; “Small arms and light weapons” (SALW) refer to weapons that can be used by one, two or three individuals working together (for the full definition, see General Assembly, Report of the open-ended working group to negotiate an international instrument to enable states to identify and trace, in a timely and reliable manner, illicit small arms and light weapons, A/60/88, 27 June 2005, <https://undocs.org/A/60/88>, paragraph 4); “Uncrewed systems” refer to uncrewed aerial, maritime and ground systems; and “Other” encompasses items that do not fall in any of the aforementioned categories.

Source: UNIDIR analysis.

Crewed military platforms do not feature so prominently in incidents but, when they do, they form a significant part of the incidents featuring acquisitions and build-up. Uncrewed systems are not mentioned frequently either, only occurring in around 7 per cent of the incidents recorded. Interestingly (as illustrated in Figure 5), references to uncrewed systems started to appear in 2020 and feature most prominently in 2024. This mirrors the growth in interest in and use of this weapon type in recent conflicts, revealing how information disorders also reflect trends in development and use of specific weapon systems.

FIGURE 5

## Information disorder incidents, by year and weapon system, 2015–2025



Note: Categories “not specified” and “other” have been omitted from this visual.

Source: UNIDIR analysis.

## 2.4 Geographic spread of information disorders

In total, 42 States are mentioned across the incidents as a source or a destination of conventional weapons,<sup>27</sup> in addition to non-State (armed) groups operating in certain States and (disputed) territories.

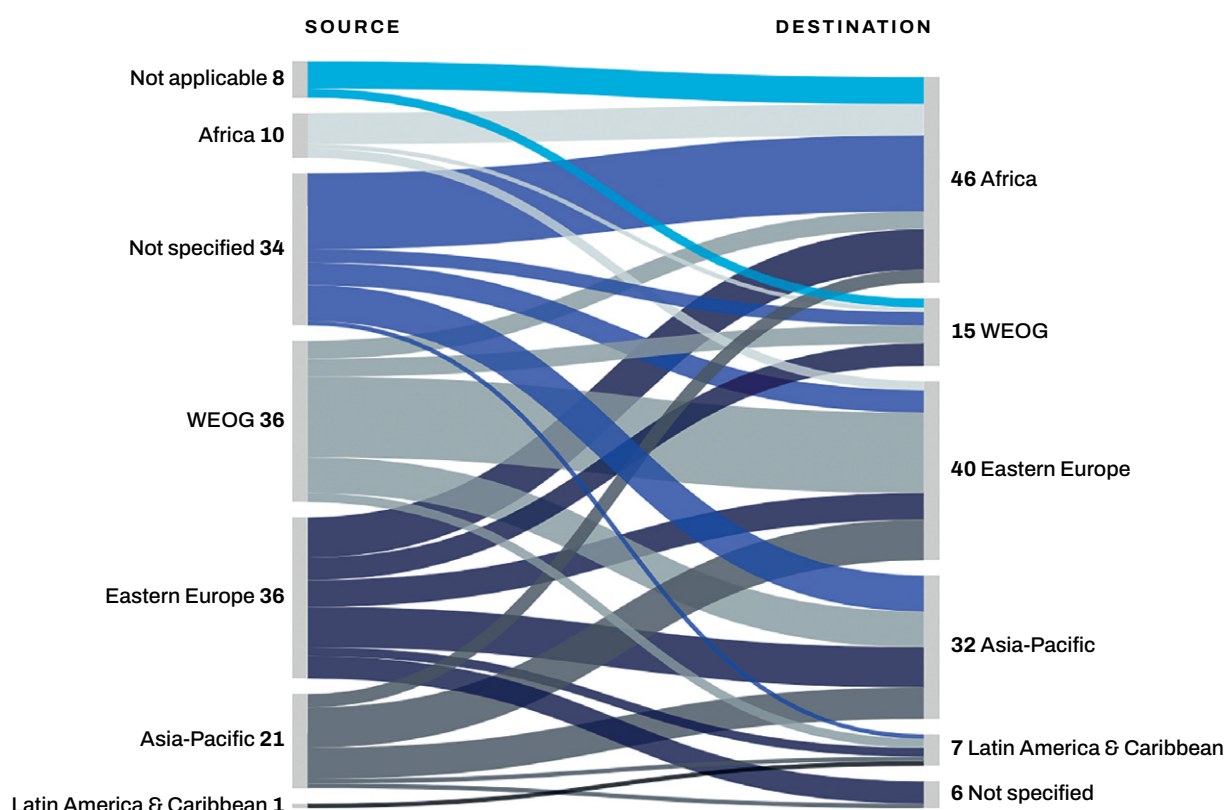
Examining these instances at the level of regional groups shows that States and other entities within Western Europe and Others and Eastern Europe are most frequently identified as the source of weapons or ammunition (see Figure 6). In 23 per cent of incidents, the source of the weapons or ammunition is not specified. These incidents focus on the recipient, either in terms of their augmented capabilities or their role in the receipt of weapons obtained via illegal means. Incidents where the source has been defined as “not applicable” primarily feature the United Nations as the alleged source of illicit weapon flows.

The most frequently mentioned destinations of weapons or ammunition are Africa and Eastern Europe. Very few incidents feature Latin America and the Caribbean, as either a source or a destination. While this may be due in part to there being fewer incidents featuring States from the region, the methodological limitations described in Box 1 – specifically, linguistic abilities to identify the data – may also explain the limited number of incidents featuring this particular region.

27 This includes 14 African States, 11 Asia-Pacific States, 9 Western European and other States, 7 Eastern European States, and 1 Latin American and Caribbean State. The States are categorized within each regional group according to United Nations, “Regional groups of Member States”, <https://www.un.org/dgacm/en/content/regional-groups>.

FIGURE 6

## Regions of source and destination of arms flows as referenced in information disorder incidents, by number of incidents



Source: UNIDIR analysis

## 2.5 Intentionality and intended audience of the information disorders

Most of the incidents analyzed feature intentionally created information disorder. In contrast, the dissemination of the incidents includes both intentional and unintentional actions. The dissemination element also demonstrates how intentionality can vary over the lifetime of an incident. An information disorder can initially be intentional but may then be shared in good faith by people who believe the information to be true; or it can be true information but distorted in a way that becomes harmful.

Based on the analysis of the incidents and on debunking work by the fact-checking entities, the target audience appears to vary between incidents. Depending on the incident, an information disorder can be aimed at either international or domestic audiences (e.g., to either seek out attention or to deflect attention away from other domestic preoccupations); either the general public or specific target groups (e.g., the diplomatic community); and either adversaries (e.g., for intimidation, generating concern) or allies (e.g., for support). Intentions behind information disorders can therefore vary depending on the intended audience, from covering up weapons mismanagement that facilitates diversion, to seeking to influence political or geopolitical decisions by obfuscating military capabilities.

While each incident was not examined individually for reactions to the false information, a minority of fact-checking or debunking reports do mention a government response. It appears that isolated incidents do not necessarily provoke a response from authorities. In cases where a State's reputation is seriously harmed, the State may respond if the incident is particularly destabilizing or disruptive. In instances where there has been an official response, this has included a State's armed forces warning the general public of the information disorder, a denial of the claims in the information disorder by a government entity or spokesperson or in a governmental press release to the media. Conversely, incidents have also been used as an opportunity for a government representative (e.g., a head of State, a government entity, an embassy or a spokesperson) to assert that an incident is true or to further amplify it. The reinforcement of one claim thus often features the same types of representative as an attempt to counter another claim, which can make it harder for audiences to determine the validity of claims, to the detriment of overall information integrity.



Person scrolling online using a smartphone. Credit: Mihail / Adobe.

### 3. The evolving role of technology

Technology, and in particular digital technologies, has played a critical role in increasing the reach and pace of information disorders, effectively acting as a force multiplier. This includes the broader ecosystem surrounding digital technologies, including the availability and increased adoption of hardware such as smartphones or computers, the Internet and access to the online space, as well as advances in artificial intelligence (AI). The aspects of creation, dissemination and amplification of information disorders are examined in turn in the subsections below.

While digital technologies, including AI, introduce additional risk factors and challenges to information integrity and the ability to respond to information disorders, it is important not to focus solely on technological means.<sup>28</sup> Box 3 outlines a non-exhaustive list of factors, beyond digital technologies, that can play a role in or exacerbate the challenges posed by digital technologies.

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28 Interviews with Joel Skadiang, Nicholas Fang, Jagatheswari Naidu and Rebekah Lim, 28 July 2025.

## Factors exacerbated by technology

Factors beyond digital technologies can play a role in the dissemination and amplification of information disorders, and also in their potential impact and effect. These include:

- ▶ **The broader journalistic culture and environment:** Audiences in areas with lower press freedom (including shrinking press freedom, few or no independent media or fact-checking entities, and poor journalistic standards) are more vulnerable to information disorders.<sup>29</sup>
- ▶ **Information vacuums:** An information vacuum is likely to be filled with the fastest information or with a narrative that resonates with the audience.<sup>30</sup> This is particularly relevant when considering challenges facing journalists who need to verify and investigate claims, which can be particularly challenging if they do not have the necessary access to sources of information and need to rely on third parties. Content meant to spread information disorders does not require rigor and is easier to create than verified information. Accurate and credible claims need to compete with the volume of noise easily created by information disorders.
- ▶ **Societal resilience:** Certain societies or communities are more vulnerable to information disorders, including if there are already divisions or tensions to exploit and a related lack of trust and polarization.<sup>31</sup> This includes societies caught up in conflict, which may also be exposed to more information through social media than traditional media.<sup>32</sup>
- ▶ **Growth in access to digital spaces:** Access to smartphones is an important trend, but so is access to the Internet. For example, satellite services such as Starlink can increase the connectivity of previously unconnected communities, providing a gateway to increased exposure to digital information disorders.<sup>33</sup>

## 3.1 Creation of information disorders

The incidents included within the database do not demonstrate high-end technology use in the creation of the information disorders. Many incidents were accompanied by images or videos, often used as evidence for a particular statement or claim or to “reinforce” a written incident, which itself was inaccurate.

29 Jieun Shin, “AI in the age of fake (imagined) content”, Stimson Center, 23 February 2026, , <https://www.stimson.org/2026/ai-in-the-age-of-fake-imagined-content/>; Andrea Tomassi, Andrea Falegnami and Elpidio Romano “Disinformation in the digital age: Climate change, media dynamics, and strategies for resilience”, *Publications*, vol. 13, no. 2 (2025): 24, <https://doi.org/10.3390/publications13020024>; Interviews with Olga Belogolova, 24 July 2026, and Anonymous expert, 4 August 2025.

30 Interview with Belogolova.

31 Katerina Sedova et al., *AI and the Future of Disinformation Campaigns*, Part 2, A Threat Model (Washington, DC: Center for Security and Emerging Technology, December 2021), <https://cset.georgetown.edu/publication/ai-and-the-future-of-disinformation-campaigns-2/>; Interviews with Skadiang, Fang, Naidu, Lim, Anonymous expert, 4 August 2025, and Belogolova.

32 Interview with Dani Madrid-Morales, 22 July 2026.

33 Interview with Madrid-Morales.

In instances where content, particularly images or videos, was manipulated, this was assessed to have been achieved using tools such as Adobe Photoshop. In many instances, images and videos accompanying text-based claims and used to support those claims were taken out of context. These visual accompaniments were often unrelated to the claim but were assigned a misleading caption or description.

Looking at technological evolution more broadly, generative AI (GenAI) – where an AI model can generate or alter text, images, audio or video outputs following prompts from a user – has increased in prevalence since the early 2020s. The availability of these tools for use by anyone, without requiring a specific skill set, along with the improvement in the quality of the outputs over a short period of time has raised concerns over the use of GenAI to create information disorders.<sup>34</sup> While the sample of information disorders examined for this research shows very limited use of GenAI, the potential future impact that these tools may have should not be underestimated. They are noted as being a cheaper method to create content for information disorders.<sup>35</sup> Some analysts argue that their use can lead to faster production of content due to the automation of content generation.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, tools such as Google’s recently withdrawn AI tool that allowed for GenAI images to be overlaid onto satellite imagery<sup>37</sup> can provide easily accessible avenues through which to make information disorders appear more genuine.

The potential impact of GenAI on information disorders should not mean that other low-end or low-tech ways in which information can be manipulated should be overlooked; these will continue to have a substantial effect. For example, a recent trend shows a move away from seeking to create information disorders that appear genuine, and towards creating content aiming to strike an emotional response.<sup>38</sup> This could, for example, explain the number of identified incidents that only referred to weapons in a broad way, without further specifying a type.

## 3.2 Dissemination of information disorders

The incidents identified demonstrate a wide variety of ways in which digital-based information disorders can be disseminated. Platforms identified include news websites, conspiracy and fringe media, blogs, and messaging apps (e.g., Telegram, WhatsApp). Social media platforms (e.g., X, Facebook, YouTube) are also a popular way through which incidents were disseminated or amplified. Social media platforms play a particularly important role in the dissemination of information, including information disorders. Their set-up enables the rapid reaction to, and sharing of, information. These platforms also enable amplified reach due to business models that seek to retain users on their platforms and algorithms that

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34 Shin, “AI in the age of fake (imagined) content”; Sam Stockwell, Ardi Janjeva and Broderick McDonald, *Adding Fuel to the Fire: AI Information Threats and Crisis Events* (London: Alan Turing Institute, Centre for Emerging Technology and Security, February 2026), <https://cetas.turing.ac.uk/publications/adding-fuel-to-fire>; Alexander Romanishyn, Olena Malyska and Vitaliy Goncharuk, “AI-driven disinformation: Policy recommendations for democratic resilience”, *Frontiers in Artificial Intelligence*, vol 31, no. 8 (July 2025): 1,569,115, <https://doi.org/10.3389/frai.2025.1569115>; Seyeon Park and Xiaoli Nan, “Generative AI and misinformation: A scoping review of the role of generative AI in the generation, detection, mitigation, and impact of misinformation”, *AI & Society*, vol. 41 (2026): 1501–1515, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-025-02620-3>.

35 Interview with Anonymous expert, 24 July 2026.

36 Sedova et al., *AI and the Future of Disinformation Campaigns*.

37 Merlyn Thomas and Paul Brown, “Google withdraws new Earth AI tool after warnings over misinformation risks”, BBC, 31 July 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c9349yx2ydvo>.

38 Interview with Madrid-Morales.

reward content that drives high engagement – but may not always contain accurate information.<sup>39</sup> Conversely, it has been noted that fact-checking or debunking of false information shared on these platforms does not spread as quickly as the information disorders themselves.<sup>40</sup>

Less frequent in the database, although still notable, is the use of established legitimacy to disseminate information disorders by impersonation of legitimate news providers or well-known entities conducting open-source intelligence.<sup>41</sup> Often, the incidents were disseminated through multiple platforms, thus enhancing the likelihood of their eventual uptake. For example, in one incident, a clip containing the information disorder and replicating a well-known broadcaster's logo was shared across both Facebook and X. This approach can be used to reinforce messages and information disorders more generally. This makes it harder to understand where a piece of information originates from, and to determine whether it is true or part of an information disorder.<sup>42</sup>

There are also technological tools that can reinforce information disorders on social media as well as online spaces more generally. Bots (including AI bots) are automated programmes that can perform a task given the necessary instructions, including spreading information disorders.<sup>43</sup> The roll-out of AI agents, which can autonomously undertake tasks and actions until the goal set out for them is achieved, forms a next step in the trajectory of bots that post or repost information online.<sup>44</sup> A potential future threat is that of AI agent swarms, which could act collaboratively to disseminate information disorders across languages, platforms and contexts.<sup>45</sup>

Actors behind intentional information disorders may exploit these tools and platforms to disseminate information disorders. This includes leveraging platforms' AI-enabled recommendation systems towards more targeted or personalised content, capitalizing on a user's preferences and related information disorders.<sup>46</sup> Other digital platforms that can or could play a role in the dissemination of information disorders include AI-powered news aggregators, which may focus more on the interaction potential of content, and less on its accuracy.<sup>47</sup>

Another more novel dissemination tactic, albeit not one identified in the database, is via the use of chatbots powered by a large language models (LLM), also known as GenAI chatbots. On the one hand, there

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39 Shin, "AI in the age of fake (imagined) content"; Eleonore Fournier-Tombs, Rebecca Brubaker and Eduardo Albrecht, *Artificial Intelligence-Powered Disinformation and Conflict*, United Nations University, Centre for Policy Research, 8 September 2023, <https://unu.edu/cpr/brief/artificial-intelligence-powered-disinformation-and-conflict>; Sedova et al., *AI and the Future of Disinformation Campaigns*.

40 Interview with Anonymous expert, 17 September 2025.

41 Interview with Belogolova; Thomas Colley and Huw Dylan, "The war on open-source intelligence", *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 48, no. 3 (2025): 147–162, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2025.2554477>.

42 Interview with Michael Picard, 15 May 2026.

43 Dominika Kosárová, Josef Melichar and Peter Dobias, "Weaponizing civilians: Disrupting strategic mobility and logistics", *Connections: The Quarterly Journal*, vol. 23, no. 3 (2024): 123–144, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.23.3.07>; Stockwell et al., *Adding Fuel to the Fire*; Romanishyn et al., "AI-driven disinformation".

44 Stockwell et al., *Adding Fuel to the Fire*.

45 Daniel Thilo Schroeder et al., "How malicious AI swarms can threaten democracy", *Science*, vol. 391 (2026): 354–357, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.adz1697>.

46 Sedova et al., *AI and the Future of Disinformation Campaigns*.

47 Stockwell et al., *Adding Fuel to the Fire*.

can be unintentional dissemination of information disorders when a GenAI chatbot generates false facts through LLM hallucinations.<sup>48</sup> On the other, there can be intentional data poisoning. In this scenario, a digital repository of false information on a certain topic is created so as to lead GenAI chatbots, when generating outputs, to use this false information and thus spread the false information.<sup>49</sup> While the effectiveness of such a tactic should be approached with caution and the potential effects of deliberate poisoning should not be overestimated, it is nonetheless important to consider the human–machine interaction element.

In parallel to the growth in use of and access to GenAI chatbots, researchers have noted that “users often perceive AI outputs as objective and credible”.<sup>50</sup> Thus, greater access to and use of GenAI chatbots, along with the anthropomorphization of AI (in which GenAI chatbots may gradually be seen as having human qualities), compound the risk posed by uptake of false information generated by these tools, whether intentionally or not.<sup>51</sup> Overall, the risks posed by GenAI chatbots can be hard to identify and thus mitigate, in a similar manner to information disorders shared via messaging apps due to a lack of visibility on what information is being shared or generated.<sup>52</sup> It is also important to consider the “domino effect” in the dissemination of false information that can be used to feed into content farms and bot networks, which can in turn mass produce information in online spaces referencing these information disorders.<sup>53</sup> This issue is also important to consider in respect to high- versus low-resource languages; that is, how much data is available in specific languages on which to train and run GenAI chatbots. Research on this issue shows that lower-resource languages may see lower quality answers or no answer when using GenAI chatbots, which may then affect the user’s interpretation and use of the answer.<sup>54</sup>

### 3.3 Amplification of information disorders

While the scope of the research extended only to digital information disorders, it is important to recognize that information disorders do not stay in just one sphere. Indeed, the incidents analyzed demonstrate the porous nature of the information flow between the online and offline spaces. Information shared online can be used to reinforce or legitimize information subsequently shared offline (e.g., in public spaces, between neighbours, colleagues, etc.); equally, online incidents could also originate from offline information-sharing. Some examples of these crossovers include:

- ▶ Statements by government officials mentioning or drawing upon information disorders spread through digital means
- ▶ Use of online and offline news media by actors, including government officials, to spread and sustain over time a certain narrative about an arms flow, acquisition or build-up

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48 Park and Nan “Generative AI and misinformation”; Bentzen, Naja. 2025. *Information manipulation in the age of generative artificial intelligence*. European Parliamentary Research Service, December. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2025/779259/EPRS\\_BRI\(2025\)779259\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2025/779259/EPRS_BRI(2025)779259_EN.pdf).

49 Bentzen (2025); Shin, “AI in the age of fake (imagined) content”; Interview with Madrid-Morales.

50 Park and Nan, “Generative AI and misinformation”.

51 Stockwell et al., *Adding Fuel to the Fire*.

52 Stockwell et al., *Adding Fuel to the Fire*.

53 Shin, “AI in the age of fake (imagined) content”.

54 Elizaveta Kuznetsova et al., “In generative AI we trust: Can chatbots effectively verify political information?”, *Journal of Computational Social Science*, vol. 8 (2025): 15, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42001-024-00338-8>.

While this movement across offline and online spaces is not necessarily new, offline spaces offer less visibility over the dissemination of information disorders and subsequently the amplification potential of false information. Indeed, there are two technology-adjacent elements that emerge across the incidents analyzed. The first is the role of “superspreaders”: individuals or entities with a prominent platform (e.g., politicians or other personalities) who can amplify an information disorder, bringing it further into mainstream discourse.<sup>55</sup> The second is the uptake of information disorders by governmental officials and civil servants in official communication such as media statements, press releases or speeches at the United Nations.

Beyond the above-mentioned technologies, such as bots, personalized algorithms or GenAI chatbots, which can amplify as well as disseminate information disorders, another interesting trend is a shift towards video-based platforms (e.g., TikTok) to spread and amplify information disorders. This content format may be harder to monitor and counter.<sup>56</sup> Another aspect worth noting is the lifespan of digital information disorders. Online elements can be retained and continuously emerge, even years after the original incident was created.

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55 Interview with Madrid-Morales.

56 Interview with Madrid-Morales.



Beit Hanoun. A little boy takes a picture with his smartphone in the middle of rubble of war. Credit: Yousif Al-Mashharawi / ICRC

## 4. Implications of weapon-related information disorders

Current trends suggest that technology-enabled and digital information disorders about conventional arms flows, acquisitions and build-up will persist, with a continued deterioration of information integrity in online spaces. What may be the implications of this? These implications might be intended or unintended consequences of information disorders, both direct and indirect consequences, in the short, medium and long terms. It is worth noting that the more extensive a build-up of information disorders, the more likely any implications may become, compared to less coordinated or more infrequent incidents on the issue of arms flows, acquisitions and build-up.

The overarching consequences of information disorders are not unknown. Notably, information disorders lead to an erosion of trust – trust in institutions or trust between partners – have an impact on decision-making and exacerbate tensions. Indeed, many of the implications, and the incidents that led to them, play into what is called the liar's dividend, whereby growing untrustworthiness in the information ecosystem undermines confidence in reliable information, which in turn contributes to certain actors' plausible deniability.<sup>57</sup> Yet, what is missing is a more targeted understanding of what this means for conventional

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57 Robert Chesney and Danielle K. Citron, "Deep fakes: A looming challenge for privacy, democracy, and national security", *California Law Review*, vol. 107 (2019): 1753, <https://doi.org/10.15779/Z38RV0D15J>; Ardi Janjeva et al., *The Rapid Rise of Generative AI: Assessing Risks to Safety and Security* (London: Alan Turing Institute, Centre for Emerging Technology and Security, December 2023), <https://cetas.turing.ac.uk/publications/rapid-rise-generative-ai>.

arms control and disarmament specifically, at the multilateral, national, societal or individual levels. To remedy this, a range of implications are identified below. The evidence for these is an examination of recurrent issues emerging from the incidents analyzed and elements shared by interviewees, which were then refined and assessed during informal consultations.

Several elements that guided the analysis should be noted. First, the analysis looks at implications more generally; it does not look at the impact of information disorders which, in the context of this report, is defined as specific to an incident, a context, a timeframe and the audience affected. Second, not all types of information disorder will necessarily have the same implications. For example, false information included in a news report (whether intentionally or not) may have different implications depending on what the inaccurate information pertains to, the extent to which tensions or conflict are already prevalent, the audience that consumes the information, and the extent to which the information is picked up or further distorted (i.e., the reach and uptake of an information disorder). Third, the relevance of the various implications and their eventual effects can grow or diminish, depending on context. The prevalence and extent of these implications will also vary, depending on the country or region. The implications identified are therefore not exhaustive of all potential consequences that may emerge from information disorders, although they do cover the most frequently cited consequences.

The implications identified are attributed to the following themes:

- ▶ Arms control and disarmament
- ▶ Peace and conflict, which includes issues of civilian safety and security
- ▶ Multilateral and geopolitical relations

Some of the implications belong in more than one theme. For readability, however, each implication is referenced under one theme only, although this does not diminish their cross-cutting nature.

## 4.1 Implications for arms control and disarmament

The incidents analyzed have not yet had demonstrated effects on arms control and disarmament. Nonetheless, several plausible and prospective risks should be considered, especially given how implications emerging from information disorders can be exacerbated by other factors such as the decline in trust in multilateral confidence-building measures and between States. Likely implications thus include the following:

- ▶ **(False) claims regarding arms flows, acquisitions and build-up are increasingly hard to monitor, verify and challenge:** A polluted information environment can make it harder to assess arms flows, acquisitions and build-up. Information disorders can also be used as a deliberate tactic to obfuscate, in plain sight, actual illegitimate weapons flows. In this way, information disorders increase the “noise level” to the point where it becomes very difficult to detect signals. When adding the digital element (which involves more data as well as the issue of AI), data curation becomes more complex and time consuming.<sup>58</sup> This could affect other elements of the peace and security architecture, beyond

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58 Interviews with Fermin Selva and Andrei Serbin Pont, 25 July 2025, Manon Blancafort, 4 September 2025, and anonymous expert, 17 September 2025.

those exposed below, such as the work undertaken by the Panels of Experts that monitor implementation and potential violations of sanctions.<sup>59</sup> It could make it harder to identify and question illicit proliferation, it could mislead countries as to the necessary solutions, and it could prevent reform on weapon-related issues (e.g., on reinforcing weapons and ammunition management).

- ▶ **Perceptions of countries' compliance with arms control measures and treaties are undermined:** Information disorders can create misperceptions as to the type and quantity of weapons a State is acquiring for itself or supplying to another State. For example, one incident focused on the transfer of cluster munitions by a State party to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, which prohibits such weapons. The rise in conflicts has increased the visibility to the broader public of weapons, but also issues of arms transfer, acquisition and build-up. Such incidents can therefore undermine trust, both by governments and by populations more broadly, in the effectiveness of arms control measures that aim to prevent problems such as illicit trade and diversion.
- ▶ **The accuracy of decisions regarding arms transfers risk assessments is affected:**<sup>60</sup> Both online and offline information disorders can affect the effectiveness of governance instruments by undermining the assessment of potential risks that may arise from an arms transfer. For example, incidents in the database show that legitimate requests could be denied if there is a perception that the weapons could be used in violation of obligations (whether treaty-based or with respect to compliance with international humanitarian law) or be at risk of diversion.
- ▶ **The legitimacy of international monitoring and reporting instruments (e.g., the ATT or UNROCA) is affected:** This implication could lead to different outcomes, which very much depend on State behaviour. On the one hand, international instruments could increase in importance; they may be seen as an essential element to counter information disorders and reinforce accurate information-sharing and trust between States. On the other hand, the legitimacy of international instruments could be undermined if these are instead used to further promote information disorders or enhance confusion caused by information disorders. This could, in turn, affect States' buy-in to multilateral arms control processes, which may manifest itself through a fall in the number of submissions or in the quality of exchanges in closed-door forums such as the Diversion and Exchange Forum of the ATT, thereby either further enhancing or undermining these transparency and reporting mechanisms.
- ▶ **National-level policies are affected:** At the national level, reforms seeking to improve weapons management could be stalled as a result of opposition fuelled by information disorders or misaligned policy responses.<sup>61</sup> Both policymaker decisions and citizen-led decisions, such as during elections, may also be affected, especially if certain communities, actors or States are targeted by information disorders.

## 4.2 Implications for peace and security

Beyond arms control instruments and at the multilateral, regional and national levels, information disorders regarding conventional arms flows, acquisitions and build-up can also lead to broader peace and security implications. These can emerge from information disorders exacerbating tensions or situations of conflict or undermining conflict-prevention mechanisms – which are closely linked to the

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59 Interview with Guy Lamb, 29 July 2025.

60 Interview with Lamb.

61 Interview with Lamb.

trust and confidence-building elements of arms control instruments examined above. Some of these implications derive from observed effects (and are indicated as such below), whereas others point to a possible direction of travel. Implications for peace and security include the following:

- ▶ **Information disorder incidents are or can be used as a justification for an arms build-up:** Information disorders that suggest an accumulation of capabilities, particularly in contexts featuring deteriorating safety and security, could influence the deliberation of actors and prompt them to justify acquiring weapons as a defensive mechanism.
- ▶ **State of “unpeace” is enhanced:** Information disorders can provoke reactions that threaten peace. One such reaction may lead to an enhanced state of “unpeace”, defined as a state between full-out inter-State conflict and the “tolerable level of peacetime competition”<sup>62</sup> and includes hybrid warfare tactics. Unpeace may emerge as a way to counter information disorders, in particular intentional incidents. Addressing this issue can be challenging. States have agreed a set of Norms of Responsible State Behaviour in Cyberspace, and more recently have established the Global Mechanism on developments in the field of information and communications technologies (ICTs). Yet, despite these norms and the agreement that international law applies in cyberspace, threats creating unpeace remain present.
- ▶ **(Armed) violence rises as a result of information disorders:**<sup>63</sup> Beyond an arms build-up, hybrid warfare tactics or the breakdown of trust between actors, there is the potential rise in (armed) violence in reaction to information disorders regarding conventional arms. This may have further downstream consequences, such as an increased risk of displaced populations, which could in turn lead to further amplification of anti-migrant rhetorics, thereby affecting elections or policies far beyond the locations where violence occurs in the first place.
- ▶ **Information disorder incidents are used as a justification for a military intervention:**<sup>64</sup> In a similar vein to previous implications that lead to an increase in armed violence, information disorders could lead to a military intervention under the guise of containing or responding to a perceived threat.
- ▶ **Public and international support for resolution of conflict or tensions is undermined:**<sup>65</sup> In a context where there are information disorders regarding weapons, trust in peace mechanisms may break down further. This may also affect public willingness, or the ability of international audiences, to resolve a conflict especially if there is a perception that the other side is accumulating weapons or may pose a (greater) threat to security. Information disorders regarding weapons may also have an impact on understanding of the severity of armed violence or armed conflict and the actual capabilities of the actors involved, which could affect decisions on whether and how to seek conflict resolution.
- ▶ **Peace processes and ceasefire agreements are undermined or destabilized:** Identified incidents demonstrate that information disorders can have a negative impact on pathways towards achieving sustainable peace. In one incident in particular, a false claim nearly prompted a military retaliation when both conflict parties were taking part in peace negotiations. Undermining trust between conflict

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62 Lucas Kello, *The Virtual Weapon and International Order* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 78.

63 Interviews with Sarah Hartley, 24 June 2026, and Lamb.

64 Zander et al., “Building information resilience to reinforce arms control”.

65 Interviews with Anonymous expert, 4 August 2025, Anonymous expert, 13 August 2025, and Nikhil Acharya, 29 September 2025.

parties through claims of arms transfer or build-up can thus affect efforts to prevent conflict and the success of peace processes.

- ▶ **United Nations peacekeeping missions are undermined:** Some incidents identified in the database demonstrate how trust in the United Nations and its role in peacekeeping efforts can be undermined by falsely accusing the United Nations of supplying weapons to non-State armed groups. Loss of trust in the United Nations and its peacekeeping missions can affect buy-in, and in turn lead to worse security outcomes for local populations.
- ▶ **The ability for non-governmental organizations (NGOs), aid organizations or the United Nations to provide direct support to civilians, including in areas of conflict, is diminished:** Some of the incidents recorded demonstrate how stakeholders such as NGOs, aid organizations or the United Nations can be affected by information disorders, including through being accused of facilitating (illicit) arms flows. Consequences can include entities deciding not to provide in-country support if information disorders have an impact on their decision-making or heighten potential risks that personnel may face. This can also affect how entities are perceived by local populations and also whether a State approves of their presence on its territory. This could thus undermine aid provision to civilians.
- ▶ **Civilian safety-related decision-making is affected:** Governments, and also people themselves, make choices regarding civilian safety and security based on available information. With information disorders affecting information integrity in addition to a deteriorating security environment, decision-making can be impaired, especially in times of crisis, due to reliance on incomplete or incorrect data. This could introduce greater confusion and fear and may place civilians at even further risk, with different demographics (gender, age, ethnic background, etc.) likely to be affected more than others.<sup>66</sup> This could also place greater strain on services meant to safeguard and inform civilians. Equally, information disorders could also lead to civilians acquiring weapons to protect themselves from perceived increased insecurity, leading to further issues around proliferation of improvised or illicit weapons.

## 4.3 Implications for multilateral and geopolitical relations

Information disorders also have an impact on the international environment, leading to greater mistrust. Equally, there is a time imbalance between the action and the reaction. On the one hand, information disorders can spread rapidly and can be hard to control, with reactions being immediate. On the other, the response may be slower; more time may be needed to fact-check and release accurate data. Even if reactions are not immediate, the accumulation of information disorders can foster negative longer-term implications. The non-exhaustive implications below all derive from observed effects, drawing on the database of incidents:

- ▶ **A country's external reputation is undermined:** A trickle-down effect of the implications listed in Sections 4.1 and 4.2 is the erosion of the perceptions of an affected State by other States and other actors. For example, a recurring type of incident in the database aimed to malign a State's ability to

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66 Interview with Anonymous expert, 17 September 2025; Kosárová et al., "Weaponizing civilians".

manage its weapons by highlighting false diversion incidents. Depending on the context, these incidents aimed to highlight corruption or collusion with terrorist actors, all of which sought to undermine the State's reputation. This can have reverberating consequences beyond reputational damage, such as affecting a country's ability to seek and obtain aid.

- ▶ **Countries' diplomatic relations or alliances are undermined:**<sup>67</sup> Beyond a country's reputation, there may also be negative impacts on its relations with partners or alliances. In several examples, information disorders provoked reactions from a State's leaders in response to the alleged actions by another State. This increased distrust or a deterioration in relations could lead to greater instability globally and could also have an impact on multilateralism and the effectiveness of multilateral action.
- ▶ **The credibility of the United Nations, including as a force for peace, is undermined:** Also linked to other implications, a broader potential consequence is the impact on how the United Nations itself is perceived. This can include its ability to provide objective and fact-based information,<sup>68</sup> its role and ability to build confidence and trust, and its ability to reduce the likelihood and impact of conflict. This implication draws upon the various instances in which the United Nations was alleged to be assisting arms flows to non-State armed groups, for instance.

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67 Interviews with Anonymous expert, 13 August 2025, and Manon Blancafort, 4 September 2025.

68 Interview with Wolf-Christian Paes, 6 August 2025.

## 5. Conclusion

Information disorders, including on flows, acquisitions and build-up of arms, are not new. However, moving beyond anecdotal awareness of the issue can help better understand not only how this issue manifests itself, but also key risk areas that have either already emerged as a consequence or may do so in the future. While the future is inherently uncertain, signals such as the growth in military spending, obstacles to the prevention and sustainable resolution of conflicts, weakening of multilateralism and multilateral structures and mechanisms, and the challenges of regulating digital spaces and platforms point to a future where information disorders are not set to abate. This includes information disorders that focus on flows, acquisitions and build-up of arms. The findings presented in this report can therefore help the arms control community, and other relevant stakeholders seeking to maintain or reinforce international peace and security, to gain a better understanding of actions that may be required to address the implications of these information disorders.

Moreover, the digital aspect demonstrates the need to understand the role and impact of digital tools and platforms and how these may evolve in future. Online spaces are areas where information disorders can be created, disseminated, reinforced and drawn upon to validate a particular narrative, especially in the relative vacuum of objective, transparent, and easily and rapidly accessible information regarding arms flows. Digital tools and platforms have a positive role to play in aiding open-source researchers researching illicit arms flows, as well as exposing information disorders. These same spaces are also where people – regular citizens but also policy- and decision-makers – obtain information and use it to make decisions and take action.

At the same time, the narrative around weapons has expanded beyond the usual multilateral forums. The reach, size and diversity of the audience is enhanced in a digital age which is also coupled with an increased awareness of conflicts and the weapons used to wage them. And while this research examines the specific issue of flows, build-up and acquisition of arms and ammunition, information disorders are occurring on a range of related and unrelated topics. It is therefore important to understand that the incidents analyzed for this research did not occur in an information vacuum, but are also a piece of a larger puzzle, where each element can play a role in triggering tensions and conflicts and affecting sustainable peace.

Taking action therefore requires detecting, preventing or mitigating the information disorders themselves, but also their implications. It also requires considering actions suited to different audiences, from the general public and journalists to subject-matter experts and diplomats. The digital element adds an additional layer of actors to consider: technology and social media companies, which provide the platforms and set-up that exacerbate the issue. This is also linked to the challenge of intentionality of information disorders, whereby consequences of such information disorders may actively be sought out – and can in turn make the issue more difficult to address.

There are already several initiatives with a focus on the digital domain that aim to prevent information disorders, to decrease their effectiveness and to improve information integrity. For example, in 2024 the United Nations published its Global Principles for Information Integrity,<sup>69</sup> which makes calls to action for

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69 United Nations, “Global Principles for Information Integrity: Recommendations for multi-stakeholder action”, <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un-global-principles-for-information-integrity-en.pdf>.

a range of stakeholders, including technology companies, AI actors, news media and States. At the multilateral level, Member States have adopted the Global Digital Compact,<sup>70</sup> which includes commitments to uphold and strengthen information integrity and to address mis- and disinformation. There are also regional efforts, such as the European Union's Code of Conduct on Disinformation,<sup>71</sup> through which signatories from the private sector, fact-checking entities and civil society have committed to combating disinformation.

In addition to initiatives seeking to reduce information disorders in the digital sphere, there is also a need to consider what actions could be taken to improve information integrity specifically regarding conventional weapons, including on their flows, acquisition and build-up. These actions could take the form of prevention, protection and mitigation. While each is explored in its own right, a cross-cutting issue is the need to go beyond ascertaining whether a particular claim is false, and to ensure that relevant actors have the means to establish provenance, verify evidence, assess competing claims and maintain trusted channels of communication in conditions where information integrity is diminished.

- ▶ **Prevention:** A first approach would be to prevent the occurrence of certain information disorders, by stopping either their creation or their dissemination. This also entails addressing root causes that lead to information disorders in the first place. As it is not possible to totally prevent information disorders on conventional arms flows, acquisition and build-up, efforts could focus on identifying the drivers of intentional and systematic information disorders. Preventing information vacuums and gaps that can be exploited is also important: States and other actors could take proactive approaches to releasing legitimate information to reduce the opportunity windows for information disorders to proliferate. Albeit a longer-term endeavour, another element is addressing the underlying causes and problems that can exacerbate uptake of information disorders (e.g., trust, or its lack, in institutions). It can also include working closely with stakeholders who play a role in unintentionally creating or disseminating information disorders. For example, robust and fact-based journalism was noted as an important factor throughout the research. This can be supported by, for example, ensuring that journalists have resources or experts to consult to avoid weapons-related information disorders.
- ▶ **Protection:** Having trusted and impartial entities that can verify claims or statements, or having strategies and methods in place to know what issues to probe on and what complementary information to request, can help prepare interlocutors, especially policymakers, faced with a potential information disorder. This can also involve preparing audiences ahead of expected information disorders. The analysis in this report provides an understanding of how these incidents manifest themselves and what patterns can be identified; this could play a role in helping actors pre-empt certain information disorders and take early action. The protection of audiences could take the form of sharing fact-based yet persuasive information on weapons-related issues, which can include applying successful tactics usually used when disseminating intentional information disorders.
- ▶ **Mitigation:** Given that it is not always possible to prevent information disorders from occurring, and nor is it possible to prepare ahead of potential information disorders, mitigation strategies should also be considered. These can leverage existing expertise in mitigating the impact of information disorders

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70 General Assembly, resolution 79/1, annex I.

71 European Commission, "The Code of Conduct on Disinformation", 13 February 2025, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/code-conduct-disinformation>.

in other areas, including electoral processes. This could include protecting the institutions and associated intangible elements, such as trust and cooperation, that are intrinsic to multilateral mechanisms. Within the arms control context, this could for example take the shape of ensuring that there is the possibility to raise and discuss information disorders. Beyond existing mechanisms, noting their limitations and existing challenges, it is also important to consider what other avenues exist. In this vein, suggestions shared during the informal consultations conducted for this study pointed to the possibility of establishing certain standards or norms on information that is shared regarding flows, acquisition and build-up of conventional arms.<sup>72</sup> Communication between actors to clarify misunderstandings could also help counter impacts of information disorders as well as consider a mitigating strategy. This could be achieved through a dedicated platform or through an agenda item in multilateral settings, as well as being able to raise these issues bilaterally with other actors when needed. More broadly, there may also be a need for a stock-taking on whether tools developed in the late 20th Century, particularly related to transparency and confidence-building, remain adapted for the task in the 21st Century.

Overall, transparency between governments, but also with the public at large, is critical. This topic is a sensitive one, given that it touches upon existing challenges to confidence-building mechanisms in the field of conventional weapons as well as beyond. The importance of this topic was recognized by the General Assembly in 2016,<sup>73</sup> and it continues to be relevant as shown by the 2026–2027 programme of work of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters, which focuses on confidence-building.<sup>74</sup> There is an overall need for greater verification of information, which includes the capacity for decision-makers in multilateral settings to understand what evidence to request when faced with potential information disorders, but also how to identify information disorders. Just as information disorders will continue to exist, albeit evolving in their form, reach and potential implications, so should efforts to enhance information integrity – and relatedly transparency and confidence-building – regarding flows, acquisition and build-up of conventional arms.

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72 Notably, a similar approach to the norms on responsible State behaviour in cyberspace was mentioned during the informal consultations. For an overview of these norms, see General Assembly, Report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security, A/70/174, 2 July 2015, <https://docs.un.org/A/70/174>.

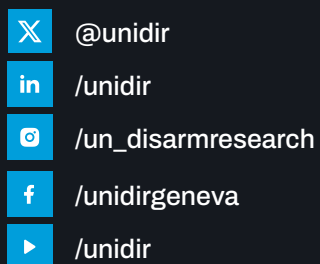
73 General Assembly, “Information on confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms”, resolution 71/35, 5 December 2016, <https://docs.un.org/A/RES/71/35>.

74 General Assembly, “Work of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters”, Report of the Secretary-General, A/81/257, 21 July 2026, <https://docs.un.org/A/81/257>.

# Appendix A. Research participants

The author is grateful to all the experts who took part in the research and for the information and insights that they contributed. This includes exchanges with experts during initial preliminary discussions at the outset of the research, participants in the informal consultations, which were held under the Chatham House Rule, and the study interviewees, who are acknowledged in the table below.

| NAME                       | POSITION AND AFFILIATION<br>(AT TIME OF INTERVIEW)                                                              | DATE              |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Fermin Selva</b>        | Programme Coordinator, Coordinadora Regional de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales (CRIES)                   | 25 July 2025      |
| <b>Andrei Serbin Pont</b>  | President, CRIES                                                                                                | 25 July 2025      |
| <b>Joel Skadiang</b>       | Manager, Black Dot Research                                                                                     | 28 July 2025      |
| <b>Nicholas Fang</b>       | Managing Director, Black Dot Research                                                                           | 28 July 2025      |
| <b>Jagatheswari Naidu</b>  | Researcher, Black Dot Research                                                                                  | 28 July 2025      |
| <b>Rebekah Lim</b>         | Senior Researcher, Black Dot Research                                                                           | 28 July 2025      |
| <b>Guy Lamb</b>            | Associate Professor, Stellenbosch University                                                                    | 29 July 2025      |
| <b>Anonymous expert</b>    | Beam Reports                                                                                                    | 4 August 2025     |
| <b>Wolf-Christian Paes</b> | Senior Fellow, International Institute for Strategic Studies                                                    | 6 August 2025     |
| <b>Anonymous expert</b>    |                                                                                                                 | 13 August 2025    |
| <b>Manon Blancafort</b>    | Project Assistant, Small Arms Survey                                                                            | 4 September 2025  |
| <b>Anonymous expert</b>    |                                                                                                                 | 17 September 2025 |
| <b>Anonymous expert</b>    | Europol                                                                                                         | 24 September 2025 |
| <b>Anonymous expert</b>    |                                                                                                                 | 29 September 2025 |
| <b>Nikhil Acharya</b>      | Fellow, UNIDIR                                                                                                  | 29 September 2025 |
| <b>Michael Picard</b>      | Independent researcher                                                                                          | 15 May 2026       |
| <b>Sarah Hartley</b>       | Independent researcher                                                                                          | 24 June 2026      |
| <b>Dani Madrid-Morales</b> | Lecturer in Journalism and Global Communication, University of Sheffield                                        | 22 July 2026      |
| <b>Olga Belogolova</b>     | Director of the Emerging Technologies Initiative, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) | 24 July 2026      |
| <b>Anonymous expert</b>    | Programme Management Officer, United Nations                                                                    | 24 July 2026      |



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