



small
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survey

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Research Notes

ARMED
VIOLENCE

Reducing Illicit Arms Flows and the New Development Agenda

The year 2015 will be decisive for shaping the international development agenda which is set to succeed the Millennium Development Goals. The results of considerable debate on what form the new agenda should take are now on the negotiating table, as a proposal containing 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their accompanying targets (UNGA, 2014). Of the SDGs, Goal 16 focuses on peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice, and accountable institutions (UNDESA, 2014). In the suggested targets comprising Goal 16, target 16.4 proposes, among other issues, that steps be taken to ‘significantly reduce illicit ... arms flows by 2030’ (UNDESA, 2014).

Goal 16 represents a significant step towards recognizing how key preventing and reducing violence and crime are to making development possible. The proposed inclusion of such a target in the new development agenda also reflects the widespread acceptance of the importance of arms control in promoting sustainable development.

The development of clear targets and indicators, which is core to the SDG negotiations, will make it possible to determine over time whether and to what extent states are fulfilling their commitments. Measurability will be a crucial and guiding factor.

This Research Note outlines challenges inherent to measuring the aspects of ‘illicit arms flows’, as mentioned in SDG target 16.4, and offers a range of indicators that could help counter these challenges. It offers a variety of means with which states—independently or collectively—can monitor their progress in achieving the target.

Why it matters

Armed violence and insecurity bear heavily on states, societies, and on the quality of people’s lives, with profound and long-term negative consequences. For example, according to the 2015 edition of the *Global Burden of Armed Violence* (GBAV) report, between 2007 and 2012 an estimated 2.5 million people died violently, mostly in situations that do not count as armed conflict (Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2015). Many more, having been injured,

may suffer life-long physical and psychological effects. Beyond the loss of lives, the impact of wide-scale violence and armed conflict is devastating to the public institutions, national economy, infrastructure, and social cohesion of a country (Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2008, p. 31; World Bank, 2011).

The role that weapons play in this picture is pivotal. For example, the 2015 GBAV report findings estimate that around 44 per cent of all violent deaths are caused by firearms and report an increased use of these firearms in armed conflict (Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2015, p. 4). Being robust in nature, firearms can contaminate a region over decades. In the hands of determined actors, even small quantities of arms can serve to destabilize a situation and contribute to undermining a nation’s socioeconomic progress (UNODC, 2010).

‘Illicit small arms and light weapons are defined as weapons that are produced, transferred, held, or used in violation of national or international law’ (Schroeder, 2013, p. 284).

Arms are circulated worldwide in ways that are of concern to the global debate on security and development. For example, in the 2001 UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA), UN member states undertook to implement a range of measures designed to enhance control over small arms and light weapons at various points in their life cycle—in essence, to minimize the risk of legal weapons becoming illicit (UNGA, 2001a). This focus stems from the conviction that illicit arms are a driver of modern armed violence and, accordingly, that they erode security, development, and justice (UNODC, 2010). More recently, a connection between weapons transfers and the potential consequences thereof has gained significant recognition in the 2013 Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). The ATT commits states to certain criteria and processes regarding the regulation of international arms transfers (Parker, 2015; UNGA, 2013).

Measuring illicit firearms flows: the challenge of incomplete data

One of the obstacles to defining indicators—indicators that will enable one to assess whether ‘illicit arms flows’ have or have not been ‘significantly reduced’—is the very limited information available on the quantities, types, and value of illicit arms that circulate worldwide (Schroeder, 2013; 2014). Greater investment is needed globally in building the capacity for collecting more systematic and comprehensive data with which one could measure the value and volume of illicit arms flows. Nonetheless, in the absence of such data development, this Research Note presents several ways to tackle this issue.

Reducing the risk of weapons entering the illicit market

The vast majority of illicit weapons begin their lives as legal weapons (Aditi, 2011). Thus, for policy to be relevant, it must incorporate means to prevent the diversion of legal arms into the illicit market. Such an approach would help to build up an understanding of how the fight against the illicit arms trade evolves. To some extent, this approach would call for measures that prevent the manufacture of illicit arms, for example by unlicensed craft producers, or prevent the conversion of replica arms—including blank-firing firearms—and flare pistols into working firearms. Converted firearms can fuel the proliferation of small arms in situations in which controls on ‘real’ (unconverted) handguns are relatively stringent (King, 2015, p. 9).

Indicators for assessing the reduction of risk

A range of measurable indicators can be employed to assess the reduction of the risk of weapons entering the illicit market. Suggested indicators refer to measures drawn from

existing international instruments, such as the PoA, ATT, UN Firearms Protocol (UNGA, 2001b), and International Tracing Instrument (ITI) (UNGA, 2005), including the regulation of small arms manufacture, international transfers, the marking and tracing of weapons, and the secure storage of state-held weapons (government stockpiles). Given how little is known about the size of illicit arms flows, the proposed indicators would focus mostly on progress in developing and implementing measures to lower the risk of weapons entering the illicit market. Clearly, no single indicator would cater for the fully required measurability, but a combination of several such ‘progress made’ indicators (UNDP, 2009, p. 68) can be useful for monitoring results at the national level (see Table 1). At the same time, the suggested indicators regarding seizures and transparency are of particular relevance for monitoring target 16.4 in the SDG framework.

Manufacturing controls

Manufacturing controls would include aspects such as regulating the small arms manufacturing that occurs within national jurisdictions; ensuring that all manufacturers comply with international marking standards, in particular those listed in the ITI; and regulating firearms conversion (see Table 1).

International transfer controls

The UN PoA, the ATT, and certain other instruments outline various steps—such as the regulation of brokers, and end-use and end-user certification processes—that states should take to regulate the transfer of weapons and thereby reduce the risk of their diversion.

The imposition of arms embargoes, via UN Security Council decisions, acts as a fundamental UN tool with which to control the flow of weapons into violent conflict settings. By definition, any arms transferred in violation of mandatory Security Council arms embargoes are illicit.

Both the PoA (Article II.15) and the ATT (Article 6.1) cite the importance of UN arms embargoes in relation to illicit trade (UNGA, 2001a; 2013). For this reason, state behaviour regarding UN arms embargoes can provide an indicator of progress made in tackling illicit arms flows (see Table 1).

Stockpile management and security

This indicator would consider the extent to which states have strengthened the physical security and management of arms and ammunition stockpiles. Such efforts can reduce the likelihood of state-held weapons being diverted (see Table 1).

Weapons seizures

Collecting and monitoring data on weapons seizures can provide important qualitative information on the evolution of illicit arms markets. Although there are limitations on the usefulness of raw data on seizures, such information—if disaggregated by weapon types and the circumstances in which the firearms were seized (UN, 2012)—can be used to determine whether unusual or new types of equipment are entering illicit markets, to identify the geographic transfer patterns of specific models, and also potentially to reveal new flows of illicit materiel (see Table 1). A compilation of such data would begin to provide a global picture of the illicit arms flows and would be a useful tool with which to monitor target 16.4.

Transparency

Transparency in the arms trade improves our understanding of the dimensions of global trade. Furthermore, it can serve to provide an early-warning or confidence-building mechanism. Importantly, transparency can also enable relevant parties (such as citizens, parliamentarians, NGOs, and governments) to determine whether states are abiding by relevant international agreements and guidelines, as well as by their own

Table 1 Suggested indicators for assessing the reduction of risk

Topic	Suggested indicators	Source of data
Manufacturing controls	Number of states that establish and implement legislative and administrative measures in order to exercise effective control over arms production occurring under national jurisdiction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ National reports on PoA implementation ■ Independent research to determine the existence of the relevant regulatory frameworks and assess their implementation
	Number of states that establish and implement legislative and administrative measures to ensure that all small arms manufacturers comply with ITI marking requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ National reports on ITI and PoA implementation ■ Independent research to determine the existence of the relevant regulatory frameworks and assess their implementation
International transfer controls	Number of states that take measures, including end-user certification, to assess the risk of diversion when authorizing international arms transfers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ National reports on PoA implementation ■ National ATT reports (transfer control systems) ■ Independent research to determine the existence of the relevant regulatory frameworks and assess their implementation
	Number of states that establish and implement legislative and administrative measures to regulate arms brokering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ National reports on PoA implementation ■ National ATT reports (transfer control systems) ■ Independent research to determine the existence of the relevant regulatory frameworks and assess their implementation
	Number of breaches of UN arms embargoes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Reports of UN Panels of Experts on compliance with UN Security Council arms embargoes ■ Independent researchers ■ Journalists
Stockpile management and security	Number of states that establish and implement standards and effective procedures for the management and security of arms stockpiles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ National reports on PoA implementation ■ Independent research to determine the existence of the relevant regulatory frameworks and assess their implementation
Weapons seizures	Changes in the types of seized weapons	■ Regular data from police and customs seizures
	Number of countries that provide data on seizures, including on circumstances of the seizure or collection of weapons	■ Police and customs data
Transparency	Number of countries that ratify the ATT	■ UN, ATT Secretariat
	Number of countries that report authorized or actual exports and imports of conventional arms under the ATT	■ National ATT reports
	Number of countries that provide reports to the PoA and ITI, and the extent of the reporting	■ National PoA and ITI reports
	Number of countries that provide information on measures taken that have been proved effective in addressing the diversion of transferred conventional arms covered by the ATT	■ National ATT reports
	Average national score in the Small Arms Trade Transparency Barometer (covering major small arms exporters)	■ Small Arms Trade Transparency Barometer (SAS, n.d.)
Prices of firearms in illicit markets	Prices for a representative selection of arms and ammunition sold at illicit markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Police informants ■ Academic research ■ Media
	Types of arms and ammunition sold at illicit markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Police informants ■ Academic research ■ Media

Table 2 Examples of survey questions used to estimate access to firearms

Indicator	Question	Survey population
Access to firearms	'Do you or does anyone in your household have a gun?'	Household
	'How easy do you think it is to acquire a firearm around here?'	Household
Presence of illicit arms	'In your opinion, do illicit small arms represent a great problem, somewhat of a problem, a small problem, or no problem?'	Law enforcement officials
	'In your experience, how frequently are certain modes of transportation being used to transport illicit arms and ammunition (specify the mode or modes)?'	Law enforcement officials

laws and regulations, which may include rules relating to corruption. Adherence to the reporting requirements of the ATT by states parties will provide an important signal of their commitment to reducing the risk of weapons' diversion into illicit markets (see Table 1).

Firearms prices in illicit markets

Monitoring the price and type of arms and ammunition sold illicitly can shed light on the evolution of illicit firearms markets. For instance, it has been shown that price—especially that of ammunition—tends to spike during spells of plummeting insecurity (Florquin, 2013, p. 274). Rising prices may therefore reflect not so much a decrease in supply as a rapid surge in demand, fuelled by the anxiety that buyers feel regarding local security. In order to represent illicit firearm flows, price data must be analysed hand-in-hand with local demand (see Table 1).

Surveys

Surveys are useful data collection instruments for gathering information in otherwise data-poor settings and when the type of information sought can be sensitive. Furthermore, surveys may offer a glimpse into the experiences, attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of local communities, whose voices might otherwise remain unheard (Small Arms Survey, 2012, p. 6). Survey data can also serve as an additional source of information to complement and validate government administrative data. Table 2 provides examples of possible survey questions that could be used to assess access to firearms (both licit and illicit). Each of them is complemented by a follow-up question that explores the topic of the question, in more detail.

Conclusion

This paper proposes that the inclusion of language in SDG target 16.4—to 'significantly reduce illicit ... arms flows' (UNDESA, 2014)—is a crucial element to promoting the

achievement of Goal 16. It seeks to demonstrate that, despite limitations in our knowledge of the size and nature of the illicit arms trade, a range of indicators with which to measure reductions in the risk of weapons entering the illicit market can be used at national and global levels to assess progress in tackling the illicit arms trade. ■

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About the Small Arms Survey

The Small Arms Survey serves as the principal international source of public information on all aspects of small arms and armed violence, and as a resource centre for governments, policy-makers, researchers, and civil society. The Small Arms Survey, a project of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, hosts the Geneva Declaration Secretariat. For more information, please visit: www.smallarmssurvey.org

About the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development

This Research Note is published in support of the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development. More than 110 states have adhered to this high-level diplomatic initiative, designed to support states and civil society to achieve measurable reductions in the global burden of armed violence by 2015 and beyond. For more information, please visit: www.genevadeclaration.org

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