

GAI: Disarmament

*Addressing the unchecked
distribution and sale of conventional
arms in Central and East Africa*

TUĞRA ALP TERZİ



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Issue: Addressing the unchecked distribution and sale of conventional arms in Central and East Africa

Student Officer: Tuğra Alp Terzi - Co-Chair

Introduction

In Central and East Africa, constant wars, human rights violations, and deaths have been aggravated by the distribution and sale of conventional arms in the region. The ongoing conflicts and violence in South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the fairly recent armed attacks in Cabo Delgado, in Mozambique, are examples of this displeasing situation. In South Sudan, the availability of arms contributed to the eruption of the civil war in 2013 which lasted for more than six years and still is the root of some unresolved conflicts. Similarly, the availability of illegal arms allowed non-state actors such as Al-Shabaab to take advantage of the environment and initiate terrorist attacks and create a chaotic atmosphere. Poverty, insufficient border controls, inadequate governance, corruption, and loose legal systems have all exacerbated the situation. The multifaceted threat of weapons proliferation requires a fast and comprehensive international response, as the illicit trades continue to thrive and become a great threat if they are not terminated. The international response shall include firstly addressing the situation, followed by attempts of strengthening existing arms control measures, establishing new ones if needed, empowering regional cooperation, and more.

Definition of Key Terms

Conventional arms: Conventional arms are weapons other than weapons of mass destruction. They are the most commonly known and widely used weapons in conflict and crime settings and encompass a wide range of equipment, including battle tanks, armored combat vehicles, large-caliber artillery systems, combat aircraft and unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAV), small arms, and light weapons and ammunition.

Corruption: Corruption is a complex social, political, and economic phenomenon that affects all countries. It undermines democratic institutions, slows economic development, and contributes to governmental instability. Corruption undermines the foundation of democratic institutions by distorting electoral processes, perverting the rule of law, and creating bureaucratic dilemmas whose only reason for existing is the soliciting of bribes.

Arms embargo: An arms embargo is a restriction or a set of sanctions that apply either solely to weaponry or also to "dual-use technology." An arms embargo may serve one or more purposes:

to signal disapproval of the behavior of a certain actor. to maintain neutrality in an ongoing conflict.

Proxy Conflict: A proxy war occurs when a major power instigates or plays a major role in supporting and directing a party to a conflict but does only a small portion of the actual fighting itself.

Insurgent: A person fighting against a government or invading force; a rebel or revolutionary.

General Overview

In armed conflicts which were possible due to the unrestricted distribution and sale of conventional weapons, millions of innocent people have been killed in Central and East Africa. One of the major factors that aggravate the situation is the lack of accountability and transparency. This allows many arms traffickers to commit illegal acts without significant consequences.

The wild spread of these armaments in the area began when the Soviet Union and some Western countries sponsored proxy conflicts in the continent of Africa by supplying arms for numerous forces; in the Cold War era. However the most significant issues including poor governance, corruption, and poverty; have occurred and contributed to the spread of illegal arms in the region. These factors have enabled arms dealers to take advantage of the situation and supply firearms to organizations, insurgents, and criminal gangs, causing terror and chaos.

Although illegal, some governments in the area have occasionally helped the spread of weaponry and certain officials took advantage of their positions to make the trades easier. A 2017 UN investigation, for instance, has revealed that certain South Sudanese leaders were enriching themselves from the illegal arms trades they allowed to occur. These acts escalated the increasing severity of violence in the environment.

Another aggravating factor for this situation is the absence of efficient border control units in the area. Arms traffickers are able to easily carry weapons across borders without getting caught since many of the region's borders are lengthy, porous, and challenging to protect. Additionally, since many nations in the area don't have the capacity to deploy effective border control measures, it is difficult to stop the illegal movement of arms. Due to the unwanted amount of accessibility to weaponry, governments find it challenging to maintain the security that is not corrupt. In many cases, attempts by government authorities to abolish armed organizations have been shut down on the grounds that they have violated human rights. In addition to impeding attempts to advance essential -for resolving issues such as poverty, sicknesses, and environmental degradation- regional integration and cooperation, these unrestricted arms are an unavoidable obstacle to such efforts.

Several global projects have been initiated and funded to address and resolve the issue. The United Nations (UN) has imposed a number of arms embargoes on nations in the area such as Somalia, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic. The ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty was also an effort in resolving such an issue. Yet, arms traffickers have managed to disregard these embargoes by finding various ways of working undercover.

Despite the challenges, some efforts to reduce the spread of weapons in the region have been successful. The African Union, for example, established the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism in 2014 with the goal of improving African governments' ability to detect and combat terrorism. The center has played a critical role in empowering African states by putting policies in place to prevent the spread of weapons in the region.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

African Union (AU): The AU has been working to address the issue of conventional arms proliferation in Africa, and has taken several steps to that end, such as establishing a Convention on the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons and encouraging member states to work together to address the issue. The African Union thinks that decreasing the availability of conventional weapons is critical to achieving peace, security, and prosperity on the continent.

South Sudan: In December 2013, because of a political conflict between Kiir and Machar about Kiir accusing Machar and others of attempting a coup d'état, which ended with Machar being removed as the vice president; violence erupted between Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition(SPLM-IO). Although the cause is political, the conflict wouldn't end with enormous amounts of armed conflict if there weren't a vast availability of arms, which is due to the illicit trade of conventional arms. There has been proof of violations of the UN arms embargoes, thus the situation regarding illegal arms was significantly worse. The civil war lasted for 6 years, 2 months, 1 week, and 1 day; yet the situation in South Sudan is still not completely settled. South Sudan currently remains in a critical humanitarian crisis, which means an atmosphere of chaos still runs in the country even after the war has ended.

Somalia: The illegal distribution and sale of conventional arms have also made Somalia unstable and chaotic. Multiple armed groups such as Al-Shabaab have been established completely illegally, and their power is fueled by the illicit arms trade. Reports such as the United Nations Security Council's report of the Panel of Experts on Somalia indicate that weapons have been smuggled to the country through weak borders, especially the coastline, and are then distributed and sold to the aforementioned armed groups. Although the government has called for solving the issue and terminating illegal arms trade multiple times, the chaos and ongoing violence in the country prohibit them from controlling the situation, thus the flow of illicit arms into the country thrives. The reports have also shown that these illegal sales have continued also against international will, as the smugglers have been reported to violate the UN arms embargo

repeatedly. The sources of these weapons are identified to be countries including Yemen, Eritrea, and the United Arab Emirates(UAE). As the flow of illicit arms continues, the situation in Somalia becomes more and more volatile, due to armed attacks including but not limited to Al-Shabaab. To settle this issue and provide a stable environment for Somalia, the UN needs to address the lack of security, especially in the coastline borders, and enforce far secure regulations and border controls. The UN also needs to come up with solutions that enable the Somali government to interfere with their own issues, by decreasing the power other groups like Al-Shabaab have.

Civil society and advocacy groups: These organizations are concerned about the human rights implications of conventional armaments proliferation, notably the impact on people caught in the crossfire of wars. They push for tougher limits on the trade and sale of conventional weapons, as well as increased industry transparency and responsibility.

International organizations: International bodies such as the United Nations and the European Union have been actively involved in attempts to reduce conventional weaponry proliferation, both via policy and on-the-ground operations. The United Nations has developed an Arms Trade Treaty to regulate conventional arms trade and prevent their potential for use in human rights abuses, while the European Union has formed its own common policy on arms export control.

Timeline of Events

2000	<i>The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopts Resolution 1291, which establishes a Panel of Experts to investigate the illegal exploitation of natural resources, including arms, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).</i>
2004	<i>The Nairobi Protocol on Small Arms and Light Weapons is adopted by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), a regional organization that includes Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda. The protocol is aimed at curbing the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the region.</i>
2006	<i>The Great Lakes Pact is signed by 11 countries in the Great Lakes region of Africa, including Burundi, the Central African Republic, DRC, Kenya, the Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Angola. The pact is aimed at addressing the root causes of conflicts in the region, including the illicit trade of small arms and light</i>

	<i>weapons.</i>
2013	<i>The United Nations adopts the Arms Trade Treaty, which aims to regulate the international trade of conventional arms and reduce their potential for use in human rights abuses. As of 2023, 110 countries have ratified the treaty, but some major arms exporters, including the United States, Russia, and China, have not ratified it.</i>
2014	<i>The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) launches the "Firearms Protocol," which aims to prevent, detect, and investigate the illicit trade of firearms by strengthening national legislation and international cooperation.</i>
2015	<i>The European Union (EU) adopts a common position on arms export control, which establishes criteria for the export of conventional arms and calls for greater transparency and cooperation among EU member states.</i>
2018	<i>The United Nations Security Council adopts Resolution 2427, which calls for greater efforts to prevent the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons in conflict zones, particularly in Africa.</i>
2021	<i>The United Nations calls for a global arms embargo on South Sudan, citing the country's ongoing civil war and human rights violations. The embargo is imposed in May of that year, with the support of the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development.</i>

Treaties and Events

United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (PoA): Governments agreed to strengthen stockpile management, ensure that weapons are properly and reliably marked, improve cooperation in weapons tracing, and engage in regional and international cooperation and assistance. Overall improving small-arms regulations.

Arms Trade Treaty (ATT): The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) is a multilateral agreement that governs international trade in conventional weapons. It went into effect on December 24, 2014. The treaty has been ratified by 113 states, and another 28 have signed but not ratified it. The ATT is an attempt to regulate the international trade in conventional weapons in order to contribute to international and regional peace, alleviate human suffering, and promote cooperation, transparency, and responsible behavior by and among states.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004) on the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction: States are prohibited from providing any form of assistance to non-state actors who attempt to develop, acquire, manufacture, possess, transport, transfer, or use nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons or their delivery systems.

States are also required, in accordance with their national procedures, to adopt and enforce appropriate effective laws prohibiting any non-State actor from manufacturing, acquiring, possessing, developing, transporting, transferring, or using nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons and their delivery systems, particularly for terrorist purposes, as well as attempting to engage in any of the aforementioned activities, participating in them as an accomplice, assisting, or financing them.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

There have been various efforts to address the issue of unchecked distribution and sale of conventional arms in Central and East Africa. These include all the treaties and programs already mentioned in the report. What all these treaties do in common is that they offer multiple ways of terminating arms trades by means of punishing them and making them illegal. However, reports demonstrate how most of the measures aren't singlehandedly dealing with the situation successfully, as violations continue and illicit arms trades are nowhere near settled. Therefore, it must be taken into consideration that different ways of dealing with the solution must be included in resolutions in order to not fail like most of the previous attempts. Delegates are advised to be creative, yet realistic as always.

Possible Solutions

The issue of the unrestricted sale and distribution of conventional weapons is complicated and calls for a persistent and well-coordinated response. To properly solve the issue, a comprehensive strategy including the collaboration of regional governments, the global community, and the arms industry is required. This should entail a number of actions, such as the introduction of arms embargoes, stepping up border security, and setting up efficient systems to control the trade in weapons.

One of the most important ways delegates may enhance the ability of African countries ability to have control over all the trades and currently unchecked smugglings that occur inside

and near their borders is to enhance border security. This should ideally be a thorough process with possible introductions of new, advanced, and realistic protocols, or the upgrade of current ones. Either could be applied to different scenarios for different countries' situations. In many instances, corrupt officials account for the unauthorized entry of conventional arms which could easily be avoided if there was a more trustworthy control unit. Supervision of the UN could be a factor to consider in order to ensure the integrity of border controls. In other cases, the situation isn't even related to corruption, but the reach of border control. Through the dead spots, smugglers currently can easily dismiss the control units and stay undetected whilst distributing illicit arms. Better, more advanced technology can be used to enhance the ability of the border control units to detect and interfere with unauthorized, illegal entrances. However, it must be taken into consideration that not all African countries are economically stable enough to afford such systems and distribute them to the remote spots in their borders; or to supply enough personnel/soldiers to protect the areas. To solve this issue which also plays a crucial role currently, delegates may resort to funds and other financial supporting activities organized by the UN. If delegates offer realistic and optimal ideas regarding the security of borders, the issue of illegal arms smuggling could be significantly reduced to its roots.

Delegates may approach the situation in various manners, some of which are enforcing laws in a more strict way and making sure all criminals are properly punished. Either new laws could be suggested or the enforcement of the current laws could be better done. Also, suggestions regarding support to local police forces could be beneficial.

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