

GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP ON SMALL ARMS

Blog post



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Somalia and the challenge of illicit arms flows

The Small Arms Survey recently released the first of four Issue Briefs exploring the dynamics of illicit weapons flows. This study—on the situation in South Central Somalia—discusses possible methods to reduce illicit arms flows and points to some of the metrics that can be used to measure progress towards this end.

To put it mildly, the proliferation of illicit weapons in Somalia is a major problem that goes beyond the steady flow of illicit weapons entering through the country's airstrips and seaports. Last month, on 11 October, a Reuters news story ran the headline, 'Exclusive: UN-approved Weapons Imports Resold in Somalia'—and this wasn't the first time that weapons had been reported surreptitiously disappearing from government supplies, either. Reuters ran a story [two years earlier](#) with nearly the same headline when it reported on Somali government weapons being transferred to allied clan-militias in violation of the UN arms embargo. In the latter case, some of these weapons were retransferred to al-Shabaab fighters; defending government troops against their own weapons is certainly not an arrangement that the Federal Government of Somalia would like to see continue.

There is a long way to go in Somalia to stop illicit arms trafficking, on the one hand, and leakage from government weapons supplies, on the other. It is reasonable to assume that reducing government leakage (or at least monitoring the government's loss of its own weapons) is easier to do than preventing illicit transfers between non-state actors—particularly when most of these transfers happen in areas outside government control. But even so, the marking and record keeping of government weapons—a fundamental prerequisite to enable their tracing when they are lost (or deliberately leaked)—remains incomplete and, hence, inadequate. So with this as a backdrop, the improvement of government accountability measures and the strengthening of its weapons security procedures will be likely topics during the upcoming UN Security Council's review of its 2013 arms embargo exemptions for Somalia. These exemptions—which were met [with some resistance](#) from other states when the Security Council first considered them—allow weapons to be exported to the Somali government in an effort to bolster its capacity to fight against a resilient and maleficent al-Shabaab. It stands to reason, therefore, that the government will need to demonstrate how it intends to increase its efforts to strengthen its weapons and ammunition management procedures beyond their current state.

Due to the work of the [Somalia and Eritrea Monitoring Group](#)—the UN-mandated mechanism to oversee and report on the implementation of the Somalia arms embargo provisions—a great deal is known about both how illicit weapons are trafficked into Somalia and the points where state-held arms supplies are diverted. But ultimately, as the Survey's recently released Issue Brief emphasizes, more systematic collection of data on illicit weapons types and quantities is needed to better understand the factors behind their proliferation. If the Somali government is to

navigate its way to a more peaceful future (or at least one where stronger measures are in place to combat illicit weapons), [accurate data on illicit arms flows](#) is needed, including types and firearms' individual markings. Obtaining this kind of data requires a commitment from the Federal Government of Somalia to tighten its control over its own weapons supplies and domestic transfer procedures. Doing so will have the added benefit of contributing to efforts to monitor and reduce illicit arms flows, in line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 16.4.

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The Global Partnership on Small Arms was a platform where stakeholders engaged in reducing or preventing illicit arms trafficking were able to interact; exchange information, experience, and knowledge; and give feedback to further their shared goals.

The Global Partnership was intended to build on the mutually reinforcing implementation of existing international instruments dealing with countering illicit arms trafficking (for example, the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons), promoting the regulation of the legal trade through the Arms Trade Treaty, and advancing gender equality through the Women, Peace, and Security agenda.