

**Research Report**  
**Model United Nations**  
**Development Programme**  
**XXV. Annual Session**

**UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR  
DISARMAMENT AFFAIRS (UNODA)**

**COUNTERING SMUGGLING OF ILLICIT  
ARMS THROUGH SOMALIA**

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## Basic Overview of the Issue

Illicit arms dealing involves the smuggling of weapons through Somalia and this has become regionally complicated and continues to be a major problem to international security and peace. There are socio-economic considerations that need to be paid attention to when looking at the history and politics of Somalia, a country that is faced with an eroded state authority and decades of unarmed and political conflict.

Somalia's geographical location as a border between the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa allow it to act as a maritime commercial link between armed international illegal trades that come from the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. Because small arms and light weapons are tariff free for illegal

commerce, they are used to instigate violent conflict, assist terrorist organizations, and further eliminate order in entire regions while countering international policies of organized criminal warfare.

The start of the problem that engulfed Somalia on a national level followed after the region's government collapse inwards and went into state failure in 1991, this marked the starting point for a protracted irregular internecine violence for the country's warlord, militia, and clan culture to flourish. Prior to this, a civilization that dominated the region's power structure underwent collapse, and subsequently all means started transitioning to arms trading for survival.

The long coast of more than 3000 kilometers in Somalia and its open inland borders are perfect for secret trafficking of weapons and arms. Moreover, the lack of strong border

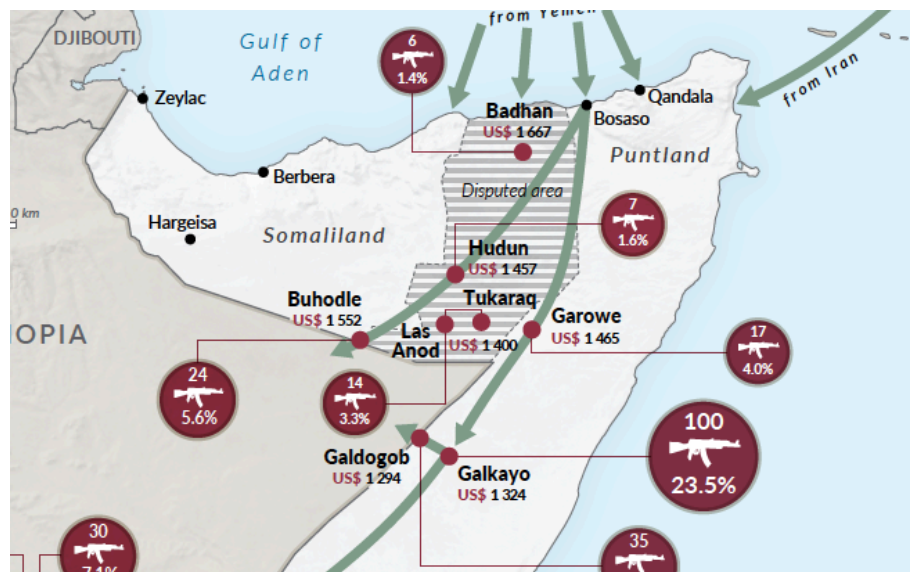


Figure 1: A map of illicit arms trafficking operations across Somalia



fences and infrastructure together with the little control that the state has over much of the country facilitates the operation of other smuggling networks without any worry of getting caught. There are many different and complex ways through which illegal arms are brought into Somalia.

Many of such weapons are obtained from areas where there are conflicts. Such weapons together with stockpiles poured into the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Africa are systematically uncontrolled due to liberal unregulated informal trade. The continuing conflicts in Libya and Yemen are contributing to the increase in the arms available in the region, some of which do find their way into Somalia. The nautical routes of smuggling, especially from the Gulf of Aden, are crucial in the arms trade. Ships that aren't registered bring in the weapons from neighboring countries and frequently dock on the coast of Somalia which is uncontested. The smuggling of arms via land is very high together with the weapons that are smuggled into Somalia from the Ethiopia and Kenya borders often done by organized crime groups having vast connections.

The development of light arms and weapons has had a horrendous impact on the politics and society of Somalia. The existence of these arms has intensified inter-clan rivalries, extended the civil war, and strengthened the Al-Shabaab terrorism group. Not only do these factional groups utilize banned weapons for violent territorial battles, but also or to assert political supremacy over the state and undermine humanitarian operations. Al-Shabaab is in particular dependent upon illegal arms trading for the expansion of its operations and for carrying out attacks in Somalia and other neighboring nations like Kenya and Ethiopia. The continuation of the group's strong supply of arms poses an immeasurable danger to the stability of the region as the group always intends to disturb border areas and clash with international peacekeeping forces.

The smuggling of illegal arms through Somalia has dire consequences that are not limited to the country itself but extend across the Horn of Africa. Arms trafficking has had destabilizing effects on Kenya, extends on to Ethiopia and even Djibouti. Where there are borders, the exchange of illegal arms has heightened local confrontations, crime, and violent activities from one country to the other.



In addition, the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden, which are important regions for international marine trade, have suffered immensely due to the combination of piracy and arms trafficking. This proves to be a two-way street as Somali pirate factions make use of the money earned from hijacking merchant vessels to purchase weapons, this activity becomes a series of crimes that results in immeasurable violence and insecurity. This level of violence indeed intimidates global supply chains and puts international shipping at risk. Nonetheless, some corrective actions like International law efforts have yielded some positive results.

The United Nations (UN) has relentlessly worked on arms restrictions and put an embargo in place on Somalia around the early nineties, these actions were put in place to limit illegal firearms from being traded in the region. These tactics worked efficiently in stopping major arms transports, however, they were not enough to obstruct the smaller shipments that fuel the wars of the region and monopolize the power into the hands of witnesses. There have been constant reports on embargo violation, thanks to the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea (now the Somalia Panel of Experts); having this control in unregulated borders can be challenging indeed. The effectiveness of any international Arms control legislation is undermined by the capacity of arms traffickers to shift their tactics and relocation.

## **Explanation of Important Terms**

### *Arms Embargo*

A ban, usually imposed by international agencies such as the UN, preventing arms exportation or transfer to a particular region, in this case, Somalia, in order to minimize violence and instability (UNODC, 2023).

### *Transnational Organized Crime*

Individual criminal activities or groups operating in several countries involve arms trafficking, human trafficking, and narcotics smuggling (BBC, 2024).

### *Al-Shabaab*



Militant Islamist group based in Somalia, having links with al-Qaeda; the group carries out insurgency attacks and terrorizes parts of the land using violence and threats (BBC, 2024).

### *Exclusive Economic Zone*

A sea zone prescribed by UNCLOS in which a state has special rights over marine resources, often exploited in Somali waters by foreign vessels (UNCLOS, 2023).

### *Fuel Smuggling*

The illegal trade in fuel oil, often linked with organized crime networks and widespread in Somali and neighboring waters (Al Jazeera, 2024).

### *Ransom Payments*

Money demanded by pirates or kidnappers in return for the release of hijacked ships or hostages-a driving element in Somali piracy (Al Jazeera, 2024).

## **Detailed Background of the Issue**

### **History of Somali Arms Trade**

For many years, Somalia has been a hot spot of arms trafficking due to its long civil unrest and lack of a central government. The collapse of the Somali government in 1991 created a space that basically allowed weapons to flow freely within and across its borders. That's why it is mainly driven by a combination of local demand for protection, the needs of extremist groups like al-Shabaab, and the global black market. Supplies and armament ranging from small arms to assault rifles, and even heavier artillery, have reached as far as Somalia, often originating from conflict zones or surplus stockpiles in other regions. Maritime routes from Iran to Yemen are the common route for the same purpose, as weapons eventually get into local markets or insurgent groups.

### **Piracy in Somalia**

Somali piracy became a critical issue in the 2000s, peaking between 2009 and 2011, when hundreds of incidents were recorded within a year. Commercial vessels



in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean were their usual targets; the pirates kidnapped ships and crews in return for huge ransom. In addition, these acts have been driven by economic desperation, lack of employment opportunities, and the desire to combat illegal fishing by foreign vessels in Somali waters. This indeed made piracy greatly decrease by the mid-2010s because of an international response of naval patrols and private security on ships. Yet, piracy does not completely vanish: in November 2024, pirates hijacked a Chinese-owned fishing vessel and demanded a \$10 million ransom for its release. Incidents of this type continue to show that maritime security in the region has continued to be an area of concern in recent years despite global efforts to stabilize the area.

### **Recent Major Smuggling Operations**

A very complex web of arms, drugs, and even fuel smuggling persists in Somalia and beyond. Perhaps one of the most notable was in September 2024 when Guinea-Bissau seized many tonnes of cocaine aboard a private aircraft that originated from Venezuela, demonstrating just how global these networks really are with regards to trafficking drugs. Just until recently, in December 2024, even a billion-dollar fuel-smuggling network benefitted Iran and its proxies. The operation exploited policies in Iraq and used the smuggling routes that catered to fuel oil supplies to the Asian markets. These have exhibited the involvement of the great nations and international bodies in illegal trafficking while using defective governance and worldwide trading networks to their advantage. Somalia, while strategically positioned but suffering from political unsteadiness, further remains an attractive player in the illicit networks of Somalia. These are interconnected problems of arms trade, piracy, and smuggling, which, besides being associated with the instability of Somalia, have created wide security concerns at the regional and global levels. The path to international cooperation, strong enforcement mechanisms, and addressing basic root causes—such as poverty and political instability—forms the base on which true progress may be achieved. (Maritime Analysis and Operations Center, 2024)

### **The State of Arms Smuggling in Somalia**

The illegal arms trade in Somalia has long been associated with the country's



socio-political situation and its geographical positioning. The issue has remained critical through decades of external assistance. Because of the country's unmonitored borders, long coastline and proximity to trouble spots like Yemen, Somalia continues to be a hub for arms trafficking (UNODC, 2021). The ongoing disputes in the Middle East and North Africa have led to an excessive amount of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) in circulation, which spills over into Somalia, further worsening the situation (International Crisis Group, 2020). Arms demand continues to be high in Somalia due to civil strife that exists between clan militias, warlords, and extremists groups such as Al-Shabaab. The inability of the government to monitor or enforce laws across the territory only makes matters worse. The harsh enforcement of international mechanisms, such as the UN arms embargo, has been inefficient in blocking the arms trade due to lack of coordination amongst regional players, ineffective enforcement, and the flexibility of smuggling networks.

### **Economic Dimension**

The economic dimension plays an important role in the extermination of regions for arms trade business. The trade of arms is greatly profitable to local players, to international criminal syndicates, and to crooked politicians with a hand in the smuggling business. In Somalia, where there exists a vast pool of poor and unemployed individuals, the trade of arms is a source of income to many (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2020). For syndicates dealing in organized crime, the lack of regulation in the Somali markets makes the unmonitored trade of arms highly profitable, often propitiated through bribery and the absence of a well-functioning judiciary. The poor governance in Somalia is both a driver and a result of arms smuggling. The central government is weak and does not have a foothold in many parts of the country, especially in rural and coastal regions. Local governments and clan-based systems of rule often function autonomously creating a fragmented system with overlapping jurisdictions and weak enforcement mechanisms. In addition, political factions and armed non-state groups, most prominently Al-Shabaab, benefit from the steady supply of weapons to retain power and dominance over their regions. With nearly 3,000 kilometers of coastline, our country possesses some of the longest borders in Africa, although most of them remain unchecked and are open to abuse by arms smugglers. Maritime tools of warfare are preferred due to the ease at which they can pass through parts of the world where there is little to no naval enforcement.



## International Response

### Neighboring States

There are certain factors that guide the response towards arms smuggling within Somalia. Regions adjacent to Somalia like Kenya and Ethiopia have undertaken measures to stem the tide of illegal arms trafficking owing to the spillover effect it has on their own socio-political stability. These measures are, however, driven more by national security interests than well coordinated regional initiatives. For example, Kenya increased its patrols on the border and undertook military operations against Al-Shabaab. While these activities may have had some positive results, they also disrupted trade and caused the dislocation of civilians. Ethiopia's intelligence activities and border patrols are limited by the country's own political turmoil. It does, however, have a vested interest in Somali politics and thus undertakes some action.

### Greater Powers

The USA and the European Union, along with other global powers, have chipped in with funds and equipment to curb arms smuggling in Somalia. These tools include increased maritime security, funding for the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) and disarmament programs. However, these interests and 'benefits' on arms control as well as counter terrorism, economic superiority and political rivalry in the Horn of Africa, enables these superpowers to pursue policies that serve their own interests first (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020). Such policies are highly detrimental to the overall efforts of stabilizing the region.

### Global Actions

The United Nations (UN) has been at the forefront of addressing the issue of arms smuggling with the help of its monitoring mechanisms such as the Somalia Panel of Experts. These bodies are responsible for investigating the violation of embargoes, identifying trafficking routes, and making recommendations meant for strengthening enforcement. Moreover, the UN has also implemented capacity-building measures that are supposed to enhance Somalia's border management and law enforcement. It is, however, important to note that these recommendations are often underfunded and lack the necessary political goodwill and engagement with local actors. Some actions of international and regional stakeholders have made the





situation worse. For instance, aid arms that were meant for counter-terrorism activities in the neighboring states have sometimes been misappropriated into Somalia via bungs or corruption. Furthermore, the reliance on military approaches has often overshadowed the socio-economics of the issue and hence the root causes of arms smuggling have not been adequately addressed. Illicit arms smuggling through Somalia is a complex issue influenced by a myriad of political, social, and economic factors. Though the international and regional players have put a lot of effort into containing the issue, there still remain substantial gaps in enforcement, coordination, and building the necessary capacity.

### Political, Social or Economic Reasons

Long standing political instability in Somalia, starting with the fall of the government in 1991, helped the rise of warlords, militias, and extremist groups promoting arms trafficking, piracy, and smuggling. In the absence of effective law enforcement and with very weak judicial systems, the crime networks acted with great effectiveness, while international efforts at stabilization have always faced resistance from the various local and foreign interests. On the social level, high levels of poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to education have forced many people again, for the most part, young men into a variety of criminal activities or enlistment into organizations where piracy and smuggling promise a quick financial relief. Furthermore, the erosion of traditional structures and a sense of unfairness about foreign exploitation, such as illegal fishing in Somali waters, have served to frame such activities as acts of justice or resistance. Economically, Somalia is weakened, informal, reliant on others, and along the strategic international routes of trade, so, with regard to illicit activities, the arms trade and its smuggling in the country are rather popular. This goes hand in hand with entanglements with a variety of broader illegal economies that include the traffic in persons and counterfeit products. International sanctions and embargoes have their part in holding Somalia bonded to informal or illegal trade systems to make sure instability and exploitation increase there. Instability in Somalia has far-reaching implications for the Horn of Africa and beyond. Weapons proliferation, plus extremist activities in neighboring countries like Kenya and Ethiopia, are spillovers from Somalia. Piracy interferes with international shipping routes, raising costs to global trade, while regional economies dependent on maritime commerce



suffer. These networks also reach as far as the Middle East, South Asia, and even Europe, forming transnational security issues. The situation commonly creates diplomatic tensions among the neighbors who try to seal off their borders and fight these issues even by military means.

## Major Parties Involved

### *Somalia*

The central party to this conflict, which has to deal with its internal instability, piracy, and smuggling, includes the very well-known group Al-Shabaab. Its dependence on international assistance for governance and security still remains very high. The Somali government has been inadequate in achieving a definite solution to the illicit trafficking of arms across their country. The insufficiency of the Somali government to supervise the country and implement definitive actions because of their financial despair has resulted in this issue prevailing.

### *Egypt*

The country of Egypt plays a significant role in the matters surrounding arms trade across Somalia. Because of its geopolitical location the country fosters large amounts of international trade practices all over the Middle East and in the African continent. The Suez Canal is an important location for trade, and any interruption, including illegal arms shipments, can have significant regional and global consequences. Because of Somalia's long coastline and Egypt's control over a major maritime route, Egypt is concerned with ensuring the flow of goods and preventing arms smuggling that may impact regional stability.

### *United States of America (USA)*

The US has been engaged in counterterrorism operations, mainly drone strikes on Al-Shabaab targets and one of the major contributors-both financially and militarily-regional stabilization and in securing international sea routes. The US is also one of the key actors in the international trade of weapons and firearms. The country, considering that it is a great power in the international stage, has interests in the weaponry development of the world, hence making it closely relevant to the case.

### *United Kingdom (UK)*

The UK is a key actor in anti-piracy operations through EU missions and a funder of



governance, humanitarian assistance, and security reform in Somalia. Beyond maritime security, the UK has contributed very critical financial and logistical aid to Somalia, focusing on governance reforms, development projects, and humanitarian relief. The UK government works closely with Somali authorities to strengthen institutions.

### *Ethiopia*

A regional actor with military operations and military forces deployed as part of the AU Mission in Somalia, AMISOM, against Al-Shabaab and to stabilize the border areas. Ethiopia's strategic interest in Somalia goes beyond security. As a landlocked country, Ethiopia relies on access to ports in Somalia for trade and economic development.

### *Kenya*

Kenya suffers direct threats from Al-Shabaab, which has carried out attacks in its territory. Therefore, Kenyan operations are hugely directed toward counterterrorism and the securing of border areas as it is also one of the main contributors to AMISOM. The country is also a host to a large number of Somali refugees, adding another dimension to its involvement.

### *People's Republic of China (PRC)*

China's involvement in Somalia is part of its broader strategy to expand its influence in Africa and secure vital maritime trade routes. While not being a nation that has a huge authority in Somali affairs, China has steadily increased its engagement in the region over the past two decades, focusing on economic investments and relative diplomatic ties.

### *Syrian Arab Republic*

The Syrian Arab Republic has been a major hub for weapons production in the Middle East. The Syrian Civil War has been a major factor that affected the trade of illicit firearms across the Middle Eastern region. Since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, Syria has seen a proliferation of weapons within its borders, both from domestic production and foreign suppliers.

### *Islamic Republic of Iran*

Due to its location in the Middle East, the state of Iran is a relevant party to the issue of illicit arms trafficking. It has been a long supporter of some armed groups across the region including the Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in the region of Palestine and the Houthis in Yemen.



## *Russian Federation*

The Russian Federation is a major actor in the international political stage, making it involved in arms trafficking operations across the globe. It has been increasing its power over the region of Africa, specifically the Horn of Africa where Somalia is located, making it increasingly involved in trade of arms across Africa and the Middle East.

## *Yemen*

The Houthi movement in Yemen has contributed to regional instability ever since the civil war began in 2011. Reports suggest that Iran has been supplying the Houthis with both weapons and proper military training. Some of these weapons have been smuggled through the specific routes into Somalia and have aided the civil-war being fought in the region. The Houthis have managed to capture specific areas of coastline in Yemen which has allowed them to set up multiple smuggling lines into the Horn of Africa. The ability of the Houthis to smuggle arms is aided by the lack of a cohesive government in Yemen, and the regions they control are severely under-governed. Instead of utilizing the weapons provided by Iran solely for Yemen, the Houthis have been accused of smuggling these arms into other civil war zones such as Somalia. The maritime routes from Yemen into Somalia are crucial for arms smuggling with the gulf of Aden being a key point. This flow of weaponry into Somalia has further worsened the violence in the region, especially in the hands of the Al-Shabaab.

## **Chronology of Important Events**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description of Event</b>
<b>January 26, 1991</b>	Collapse of Somali Central Government
<b>January 23, 1992</b>	Adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 733



<b>January 29, 2009</b>	Djibouti Code of Conduct Signed
<b>March 5, 2014</b>	Adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2142
<b>September 25, 2015</b>	The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Adopted
<b>December 3, 2024</b>	Fuel Smuggling Network Uncovered

## Relevant International Documents

- UN Security Council Resolution 733, January 23rd, 1992 (S/RES/733)  
Adopted by the Security Council at its 3039th meeting, 23 January 1992.  
<https://undocs.org/S/RES/733>
- UN Security Council Resolution 1816, June 2nd, 2008 (S/RES/1816)  
Adopted by the Security Council at its 5902nd meeting, 2 June 2008.  
<https://undocs.org/S/RES/1816>
- UN Security Council Resolution 2142, March 5th, 2014 (S/RES/2142)  
Adopted by the Security Council at its 7129th meeting, 5 March 2014.  
<https://undocs.org/S/RES/2142>
- Djibouti Code of Conduct, January 29th, 2009  
Adopted during the IMO's regional meeting in Djibouti, 29 January 2009.  
<https://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/Security/Pages/DCoC.aspx>



- Protocol to the Palermo Convention, November 15th, 2000  
Adopted by the General Assembly at its 55th session, 15 November 2000.  
<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/organized-crime/intro/UNTOC.html>
- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, December 10th, 1982 (UNCLOS)  
Opened for signature at Montego Bay, 10 December 1982.  
[https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention\\_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos\\_e.pdf](https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf)
- Montreux Document, September 17th, 2008  
Adopted by the Swiss government and the ICRC at a conference in Montreux, 17 September 2008.  
[https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/icrc\\_002\\_0996.pdf](https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/icrc_002_0996.pdf)
- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, September 25th, 2015 (A/RES/70/1)  
Adopted by the General Assembly at its 70th session, 25 September 2015.  
<https://undocs.org/A/RES/70/1>

## Past Attempts to Resolve the Issue

In spite of the various efforts aimed towards addressing the illicit arms smuggling via Somalia, the undertaking faces significant challenges as has been the case for many years. The earliest and more prevalent tactic used was the attempt to put forth a UN arms embargo towards Somalia in 1992. Following the violent civil upheaval and the power vacuum to follow, this tactic was utilized with the aim of reducing the subsequent flow of arms that could escalate the conflict. Even though the goal of the embargo was to limit weapons arms to all factions, it was later modified to transfer arms to the Somali government, thus giving support to the security forces that battled incessantly against the insurgents and terrorist groups such as Al Shabaab.

These changes however created further complications in the distinguishing of arms that were legally supplied to the government and those that came in without a permit. This in turn made enforcement of monitoring more difficult. The United Nations attempted to improve their control and monitoring of arms supplied by setting up various monitoring bodies



including the Somali and Eritrea Monitoring Group (SEMG) and later, the Panel of Experts on Somalia. Tracking of trafficking networks, as well as providing recommendations to improve enforcement was also tasked to them, where the groups aimed towards investigating the violations to the arms embargo.

In regard to this matter, certain obstacles have been brought upon due to the availability of necessary finances as well as lack of coordination on a global scale. In conjunction, the arms trade continues to thrive due to the sheer land borders that Somalia possesses alongside its sea borders and the rampant corruption that exists in the region. The enforcement of these laws becomes exceedingly difficult due to the arms traffickers continuously adapting to new strategies, leaving little to no room for detection. In relation to this, it is crucial to note that Djibouti, Ethiopia, and no other countries apart from Kenya have shown signs of being affected by the issues present in Somalia. Given the instability present in the region, proactive measures have and are being taken to prevent smuggling of arms.

The core focus of this measure has shifted towards the borders in order to augment the incoming as well as out coming flow of arms into Somalia. As an example, in Kenya, the government has begun to enhance the security under which the Somali border is placed. This has proven effective as there is increased patrolling and surveillance over the region. In an attempt to block the inflow of arms as well as militants, Ethiopia has focused on boosting their military power at the border of Somalia. Nonetheless, these measures prove to be unilateral attempts at countering a singular threat and do not contribute positively towards the entire arms smuggling issue at hand.

Moreover, the lack of coordinated efforts among the countries within the locality has been detrimental to these national efforts as the traffickers are able to use the jurisdictional gaps and irregular border controls to their advantage. Many attempts have also been made on an international level to undermine the maritime trafficking routes that serve as the backbone of the illegal arms trade. Maritime patrols are conducted by multinational coalitions like the European Union Naval Force (EU NAVFOR) and the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) on shipping routes along the Gulf of Aden, and the Indian Ocean which are vital for arms smuggling. It has been achieved through these naval missions that some of the



shipments, especially those that are being transported through the sea, have been intercepted. As a result, it has become increasingly difficult for the traffickers to move the weapons around openly.

The magnitude of the area that they are supposed to monitor coupled with the lack of resources has, however, meant that the level of the success of these operations has ranged from moderate to poor. Furthermore, smugglers have changed their tactics and now use small boats and hidden compartments in legitimate cargo ships to make it impossible for naval operations to completely stop the flow of arms.

Efforts to solve the arms trade issue have also relied on bilateral efforts. The United States, for instance, has extended military assistance to Somalia and other neighboring countries to improve security forces and counterterrorism operations. Such efforts have included training programs for Somali security personnel and provision of equipment for enhanced border and maritime security.

Nevertheless, such help has mixed results for some of the arms supplied to government forces find their way to local militias, insurgents, and criminal networks. Low attention to detail and accountability have led to weapons intended for government forces flowing through illicit routes. The United States and other Western nations have also backed sub-regional security measures as the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), later transformed into the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS). These missions have had more comprehensive objectives of stabilizing the country, countering extremist movements, and enabling peace-building. But while the peacekeeping forces have concentrated on anti-terror operations and provided security, the advanced logistics of arms trafficking have limited their involvement in the fighting arms trade.

However, the peacekeeping forces have been concerned with activities that disrupt terrorism and provide security. Their attempts to address arms trafficking directly have faced logistical hurdles along with inadequate funding and the complicated political environment in Somalia. Like all ways that have been employed to attend to the problem of arms trade in Somalia, this strategy has also faced challenges due to frail enforcement frameworks,





contending methods, and the strong arms smuggling market. Arms embargo placement, regional security efforts, international naval interventions, and bilateral assistance have all shown some success in seeking to mitigate the level of violence that exists due to the availability of illegal arms.

Nonetheless, none of these attempts have been sufficient to completely eliminate the problem and restore peace in the region. The prevailing arms trafficking of Somalia undergirds arms smuggling, which remains as one of the most pervasive and stubborn issues to tackle in the region.

## **Solution Alternatives**

One of the possibilities of addressing the issue is the development of a strong regional arms control system that permits Somalia, its neighbors, and international agencies to work together. Regional attempts like those of Kenya and Ethiopia, have been largely ad hoc and passive in their focus.

A new approach could be the adoption of an informal regional arms control agreement, which would obligate all adjacent states to enforce measures that curtail the diffusion of illegal arms. This system could facilitate the establishment of standard arrangements for the control of borders, the sharing of intelligence, and the employment of technology to check movements of arms across the borders. Moreover, a regional arms sales registry could be instituted to control and monitor the legal sale and transfer of arms for more effective accountability.

This segment implies that the same degree of engagement should not only include Somalia's neighbors, but also super powers with interest in this region like the US and the EU. A joint approach by regional perpetrators may help fill the holes in national security gaps through divided actions for operational efficiency with scarce resources and lesser vulnerabilities for smugglers.

Another potential way forward is concentrating on Somalia's own governance and rule



of law which seems to be the key facilitator for discrepancies in arms trading. There have been attempts at supporting Somalia's transitional government from the UN and other foreign actors, however, the weak state and the disorganized system in the center has made it easy for smuggling networks to operate and escalate.

One beneficial route here could be undertaking a vast and deep-seated decentralization program that reduces the level of arms trade within the regions by increasing the strength of local governance structures.

Coupled with this comes the need for deep overhaul of arms modification policy in Somalia by strengthening the arms amendment judicial department and increasing the rate of prosecution and conviction of arms traders. More efficient regional courts and law enforcement agencies are required so the state can make more systematic attempts to combat the uncontrolled arms trade. In order to adequately prepare for these changes, international partners can set up training and capacity building centers for Somali officials where the focus could be on anti-smuggling measures, investigations, and prosecution of organized crime syndicates.

This plan of action would tackle the state control deficit head on and build a stronger and more self-sustaining Somalia.

An additional, rather neglected solution is to develop economic incentives and alternative livelihood programs targeting individuals and communities who are involved in or are at risk of becoming involved in arms trafficking. These programs would seek to mitigate the economic causes allowing arms smuggling by providing alternative sources of income to people who engage in the trade out of necessity. For instance, some rural regions bordering Somalia may be given opportunities in sustainable agricultural production, construction activities, or even small-scale manufacturing.

Some incentives might seek to provide direct funding and other community-based development options, such as educational and health services and even microfinance schemes. The initiatives must be contextualized, to make them relevant to the people that



will be affected by them. Adopting an arms smuggling prevention strategy that takes into account the wider socio-economic environment enables the establishment of sustainable reduction of local involvement in trafficking activities.

## Useful Links

- UN Security Council Resolution 733 (1992):  
<https://undocs.org/S/RES/733>
- UN Security Council Resolution 1816 (2008):  
<https://undocs.org/S/RES/1816>
- UN Security Council Resolution 2142 (2014):  
<https://undocs.org/S/RES/2142>
- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1):  
<https://undocs.org/A/RES/70/1>
- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (1982):  
[https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention\\_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos\\_e.pdf](https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf)
- Djibouti Code of Conduct (2009):  
<https://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/Security/Pages/DCoC.aspx>
- Protocol to the Palermo Convention (2000):  
<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/organized-crime/intro/UNTOC.html>
- Montreux Document (2008):  
[https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/icrc\\_002\\_0996.pdf](https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/icrc_002_0996.pdf)
- Global Initiative Report: Arms Trafficking in Somalia:  
<https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/arms-trafficking-somalia-ocindex/>
- ISS Africa Analysis: Arms Smuggling to Somalia:  
<https://issafrica.org/iss-today/an-ocean-of-weapons-arms-smuggling-to-somalia>
- AP News: Chinese Fishing Vessel Hijacked Off Somalia:



- <https://apnews.com/article/91d071c26f4a45abf2942eafdb2626d6>
- Reuters: Fuel Oil Smuggling Network Linked to Iran:  
<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/fuel-oil-smuggling-network-rakes-1-billion-iran-its-proxies-2024-12-03/>
- ReliefWeb: Somalia Crisis Updates:  
<https://reliefweb.int/country/som>
- World Bank: Somalia Country Profile:  
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/somalia>
- International Crisis Group: Somalia Reports:  
<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia>
- Human Rights Watch: Somalia Overview:  
<https://www.hrw.org/africa/somalia>
- International Chamber of Commerce: Piracy Reporting Centre:  
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Committee Name: United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA)  
Student Officer: Duru Taş  
Agenda Item: Countering smuggling of illicit arms through Somalia

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