

Forum: General Assembly 1
Issue: Reducing illegal arms trade to prevent mass shootings and urban violence
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Introduction

The illegal arms market continues to pose significant threats to societies around the world, undermining public health and security. Amnesty International states more than 600 people die every day as a result of firearms violence, which is driven in part by easy access to firearms – whether legal or illegal. The issue of illegal arms trade, in the context of preventing mass shootings and urban violence, encompasses the unregulated circulation and trafficking of firearms and weapons across national borders and within local communities. “In April 2017, over 578 firearms and 776 pieces of ammunition were seized as part of a joint operation targeting the illegal movement of firearms, explosives, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear material through the Ukraine–Moldova border” (EUROPOL). Albeit being an issue that has garnered significant attention and concerted efforts to address it, the complexity of the illegal arms trade persists as a formidable challenge. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime finds that this arises from the fact that firearms are produced and exchanged through both legal and illegal channels, rendering the identification and tracking of unlawfully manufactured and trafficked weapons exceedingly challenging. Adding to the complexity, a substantial number of firearms originate from legal sources but are diverted into illicit markets. Notably, illegal arms play a pervasive role in various forms of violent crimes and bolster the influence of organized criminal factions.

Firearms trafficking is adapting to modern sales avenues, such as the Internet and its encrypted networks. Organized criminal entities exploit these new technologies while still relying on traditional channels and established markets. For instance, recent police investigations revealed that certain organized crime factions employ parcel services to smuggle firearms across borders. They often opt to send firearm parts and components separately as they are less likely to be detected, employing this tactic to circumvent detection measures (UNODC)

Due to this, the illegal arms trade escalates mass shootings and urban violence, fostering an environment where the misuse of firearms becomes more prevalent and devastating. In the United States

alone, more than 35,000 people have died due to gun violence as of October 2023. Although the United States consistently records the highest number of mass shootings globally, the profound repercussions of these events reverberate across the world. Other significant incidents include the targeting of two mosques in New Zealand, claiming 51 lives, an Easter Sunday bombing in Sri Lanka causing over 250 deaths and 500 injuries, and an assault on a popular nightclub in Istanbul resulting in 39 fatalities, all in 2019. Europe has also faced numerous mass shootings, many linked to terrorism, in recent years. Tragically, the aftermath of these tragedies often entails enduring physical and psychological trauma for survivors and their families, contributing to long-term negative impacts on the affected countries' populations.

In order to address the issue, strengthening cooperation between nations to share intelligence, trace illicit weapon flows, and disrupt trafficking networks is imperative. This involves bolstering existing international agreements and mechanisms while establishing new frameworks to facilitate information exchange and coordinated action. Implementing stringent regulations on arms manufacturing, sales, and transfers, both domestically and internationally, is crucial as well. Additionally, promoting public awareness and education regarding the dangers of illegal arms trade and the impact of mass shootings and urban violence is essential, with consideration of victims taken into account.

Definition of Key Terms

Firearms

"Firearm" shall mean any portable barrelled weapon that expels, is designed to expel, or may be readily converted to expel a shot, bullet or projectile by the action of an explosive. This includes rifles, handguns, shotguns, automatic or semi-automatic weapons, etc.

Mass Shootings

A mass shooting is a violent crime in which one or more people use a firearm to kill or injure multiple people at once. Note that there is no widely-accepted definition of "mass shooting" as different organizations use different definitions.

Urban Violence

Urban violence refers to various forms of violent acts occurring within urban settings or densely populated areas. It encompasses a range of aggressive behaviors such as assaults, homicides, gang-related violence, armed conflicts, and criminal activities predominantly taking place in cities or metropolitan

areas. Within the context of this committee's focus, urban violence will specifically stem from the utilization of firearms.

Background

The unrestricted flow of illicit arms, facilitated by underground networks, transnational crime syndicates, and porous borders, significantly amplifies the incidence and severity of mass shootings and urban violence. These weapons, often unregistered and untraceable, find their way into the hands of criminals, extremists, and individuals with malicious intent, enabling them to perpetrate acts of violence with devastating consequences.

World War I

The onset of World War I created a heightened demand for firearms. American firms sold arms and ammunition to the Allied powers as this decision facilitated a substantial surge in American military exports, escalating from \$40 million in 1914 to \$1.3 billion in 1916 and further to \$2.3 billion during the war's final nineteen months. This period marked a pivotal shift, establishing American arms manufacturers as significant players in the global arms trade (Klare, 2018).

The Cold War

During the Cold War period, the United States and the Soviet Union became the main exporters of arms. The intense geopolitical rivalry between these two superpowers fueled a substantial increase in the production and distribution of weapons. The surplus arms not only flooded legitimate markets but also found their way into black markets. These illicit channels exploited the excess supply, diverting weapons to unauthorized users, non-state actors, and conflict zones, ultimately contributing to the rise of illegal arms trade.

Technological Advancements

In the present time, advancements in transportation and communication technologies have facilitated the globalization of illicit arms markets. Improved transportation networks, the internet, and encrypted messaging platforms have made it easier for criminal networks to coordinate arms production, smuggling, and sales across international borders.

This increased accessibility to illicit arms has directly contributed to the escalation of mass shootings and urban violence as seen in the case of the US displayed in Figure 1.

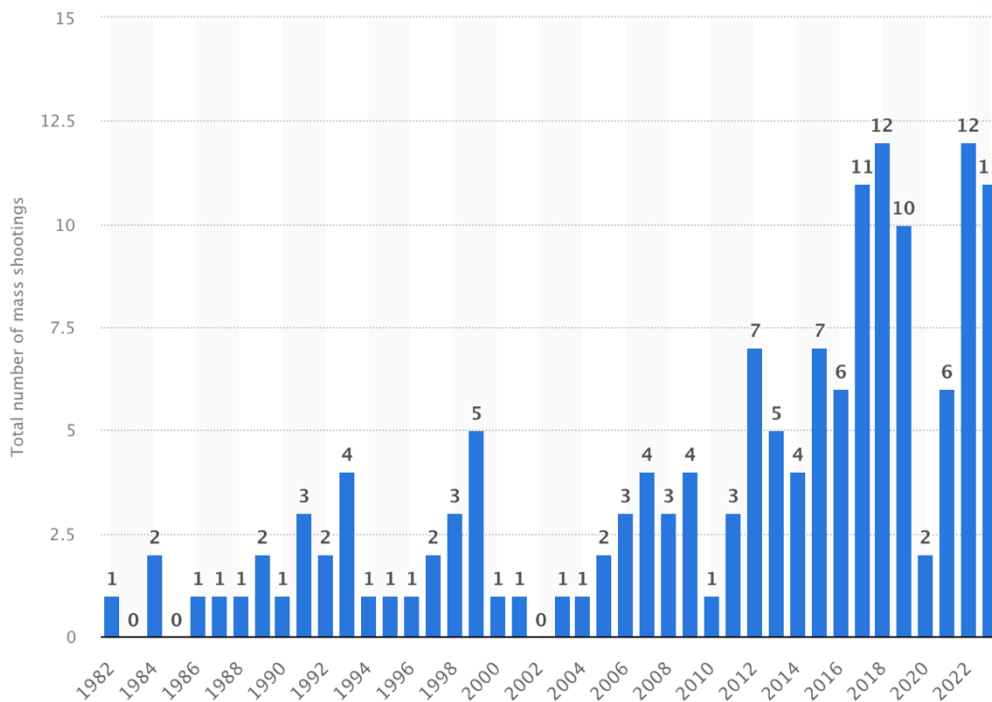


Figure 1: Number of mass shootings in the United States between 1982 and October 2023

Major Parties Involved

United Nations Office of Drug and Crime (UNODC)

As the specialized agency of the United Nations mandated to address drugs, crime, and terrorism, the UNODC works closely with member states, international organizations, and civil society to promote global cooperation and coordinate strategies to tackle illegal arms markets. The UNODC's primary objective is to assist member states in building capacity and implementing effective measures to prevent mass shootings by disrupting arms trafficking networks and promoting alternative development opportunities for countries relying on the illegal arms market.

International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL)

Acting as a global law enforcement network, INTERPOL facilitates international cooperation and coordination among member countries to combat transnational organized crime, including arms trafficking. The organization serves as a hub for the exchange of intelligence and data related to firearms

trafficking among member countries. This shared information includes details on criminal networks, emerging trends, and the identification of individuals involved in the illegal arms market.

United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNPoA)

The UNPoA addresses the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, aiming to prevent their proliferation and misuse. It promotes international cooperation and provides guidance to countries on strengthening controls over these weapons.

European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol)

Europol focuses on enhancing cooperation among European Union member states in combating organized crime, including illicit arms trafficking and terrorism-related activities. Europol's European Counter-Terrorism Centre (ECTC) supports member states in information-sharing and operational cooperation with regard to monitoring traffic in illegal firearms in the context of anti-terrorism.

United States of America (USA)

By being the country with the most mass shootings globally, the USA is an essential actor in relation to this issue. High-profile mass shootings in the United States have consistently sparked intense debates on the efficacy of gun control measures, the need for stricter firearms regulations, and their direct correlation to public safety.

Timeline of Events

| Event/Date | Description |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Treaty of Versailles (1919) | Following World War I, this treaty aimed to regulate arms trade and prevent future conflicts by restricting Germany's access to certain weapons, affecting global arms trade. |
| Prohibition Era (1920s-1930s) | Illicit arms trade surged during the U.S. Prohibition era, with organized crime groups smuggling firearms to support their illegal activities, contributing to increased violence. |

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| Columbine High School Massacre (1999) | A mass shooting in Colorado, USA, where two students carried out a shooting spree, leading to 13 fatalities, sparking national debates on gun control and school safety. |
| UN Firearms Protocol (2001) | The United Nations adopted the Firearms Protocol to combat illegal arms trafficking, establishing measures for international cooperation and law enforcement efforts. |
| Mumbai Terror Attacks (2008) | Coordinated attacks in Mumbai, India, involved the use of illegal firearms smuggled into the country, resulting in widespread violence and casualties across multiple locations. |
| Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting (2012) | A mass shooting in Connecticut, USA, where a gunman fatally shot 26 people, including children, prompting renewed discussions on gun control laws and mental health issues. |
| Paris Attacks (2015) | Multiple shootings and suicide bombings across Paris, France, perpetrated by individuals using illegal firearms, leading to numerous casualties and raising security concerns. |
| Las Vegas Shooting (2017) | The deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history, where a gunman used illegal firearms to open fire on a crowd, resulting in 60 fatalities and over 800 injuries. |

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Various international treaties have been established to create a framework for cooperation among nations pertaining to the issue of illicit arms markets. One of the first of them being The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC). The UNTOC's Protocols, notably the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition, was adopted by a General Assembly resolution on May 31, 2001. It became effective on July 3, 2005. This Protocol, the first globally binding instrument addressing small arms, aims to foster

cooperation among States Parties to prevent, combat, and eliminate the illicit manufacturing and trafficking of firearms, their parts, components, and ammunition. Ratifying the Protocol signifies states' commitment to implementing crime-control measures that involve establishing criminal offenses related to illegal firearms activities, setting up a system for legitimate firearm manufacturing and trade licensing, and implementing firearm marking and tracing provisions within their domestic legal frameworks.

After this, The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2013. The ATT aimed to establish international standards for the import, export, and transfer of conventional arms. The treaty sought to regulate the global trade in weapons to prevent their diversion into illegal markets and reduce the risk of human rights abuses or armed conflicts. While many countries have ratified the treaty, its effectiveness has been limited due to challenges in enforcement, varying interpretations of its provisions, and the absence of major arms-exporting countries like the United States, Russia, and China among its signatories.

Yet, several countries have also enacted stringent firearms regulations to address the illegal arms trade and mitigate mass shootings. For instance, Australia implemented significant reforms following the 1996 Port Arthur massacre, including a nationwide buyback program that led to the surrender of thousands of firearms and the implementation of strict licensing and registration requirements. Germany, Japan, and Canada are among the countries with robust firearms regulations, including comprehensive background checks, limitations on gun ownership, and stringent licensing procedures aimed at preventing illicit arms circulation and reducing violence.

Possible Solutions

Illicit arms markets represent a multifaceted challenge necessitating a comprehensive and all-encompassing approach to formulating efficacious solutions. This entails writing treaties that incorporate preventive measures, robust prosecution strategies, and due consideration for international initiatives.

First and foremost, effective prosecution is a crucial component in combatting illicit arms markets. Law enforcement agencies should enhance their efforts to dismantle firearms trafficking networks by conducting targeted investigations, gathering intelligence, and collaborating with international partners. Strengthening border control measures and implementing advanced detection technologies can help intercept arms shipments and disrupt supply chains. Moreover, robust legal frameworks and stringent penalties should be in place to deter individuals involved in arms trafficking to

incentivize the prevention of organized crime. Additionally, addressing corruption within law enforcement and judicial systems is crucial to maintaining the integrity of prosecution efforts.

Pertaining to preventive measures, treaties must consider the significance of education and awareness campaigns to inform individuals, particularly youth, about the dangers and consequences of mass shootings and urban violence. Education plays a pivotal role in raising awareness and promoting early identification of concerning behavior. Implementing educational programs focused on conflict resolution, empathy building, and recognizing signs of distress or violence can empower individuals to intervene and seek help when necessary. Moreover, addressing mental health issues through accessible and comprehensive mental health services, destigmatizing seeking mental health support, and improving access to counseling and treatment are crucial elements. Integrating these preventive strategies collectively aims to build resilient communities and proactively intervene to mitigate the risk factors contributing to mass shootings and urban shootings.

Furthermore, promoting economic opportunities and job creation in disadvantaged communities can help address the socio-economic factors that often drive individuals towards the illegal arms trade. Initiatives focused on economic diversification and development offer viable alternatives by creating sustainable livelihoods and economic opportunities for communities involved in or affected by the illicit arms trade. Investment in education, vocational training, and skill development programs can empower individuals to transition to legal and productive livelihoods, thereby reducing their dependence on illicit activities. Additionally, implementing community-based interventions such as job creation initiatives, small business support, and agricultural development projects can redirect energies away from illegal trade towards legitimate economic pursuits.

It is imperative to acknowledge that illicit arms markets within one nation can have far-reaching implications, spurring the emergence of illicit arms markets on an international scale. Consequently, this issue assumes a global significance, necessitating extensive collaboration among nations.

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