

**Open briefing of the Counter-Terrorism Committee on
“Preventing Terrorists from Acquiring Weapons”**

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Session III: *Highlighting new risks and trends deriving from international arms trafficking via the Internet and across borders, including the consequences of terrorist and criminal access to, and use of, deactivated and reactivated weapons acquired from collectors, including online. Highlighting as well the need to implement proper international arms control standards and to fully utilize existing tools and resources*

Supporting the Application of International Standards to
Prevent Terrorists from Acquiring Weapons

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It is a great honour to join my distinguished colleagues in briefing the Committee on this important issue and I thank CTED for the invitation to do so. I coordinate the development and use by the UN of International Small Arms Control Standards, which derive from global agreements reached by Member States and which seek to provide practical guidance to States on effectively controlling the full life-cycle of small arms and light weapons — from handguns and rifles to mortars and man-portable air defence systems; from manufacture and marking to international transfer, stockpile management, collection and destruction.

My presentation will focus on the need to implement existing international standards and to fully utilize existing tools and resources in preventing terrorists from acquiring weapons. The unfortunate fact is that that the tools, resources and standards that we currently have at hand to address this problem are not being used to the extent that they should be. This is leading to sub-optimum outcomes in many areas, including **export control, end-user verification, secure storage**, illegal **cross-border movements** of weapons, and **tracing** of weapons used by

terrorists. Allow me to focus on these five areas and to provide some recommendations on how the international community could do better in preventing terrorists from acquiring weapons.

Export Control

Let me begin with export control. Terrorist organisations acquire a significant proportion of their weaponry by capturing them during offensive operations. Often, these weapons are supplied by third countries to government forces that are fighting terrorists. This is a reality of counter-terrorism operations; sometimes, tactical defeats happen and materiel is lost to terrorist organisations, who then incorporate it into their own arsenals. This underlines the importance of the risk calculations that third countries must make when considering arming government or irregular forces that are engaged in fighting terrorist organisations. If there is a high risk that weapons exported for this purpose will end up in the hands of the terrorists they are meant to defeat, either directly through capture or indirectly through diversion onto the black market, the export would risk being counter-productive.

By way of illustration, small arms ammunition recovered from Islamic State forces in Iraq and Syria includes ammunition manufactured in 21 countries, some of it within the last 4 years.

The Arms Trade Treaty is the applicable international standard in this regard. Parties to the treaty have agreed not to export weapons if there is an overriding risk that they could be used to undermine peace and security, including through the commission or facilitation of terrorist acts. Building on the Arms Trade Treaty, the United Nations has produced a number of tools that can assist States in minimising the risk that exported weapons could end up in the hands of terrorists, including International Small Arms Control Standard number 03.20 on “National Controls Over the International Transfer of Small Arms and Light Weapons.

<http://www.smallarmsstandards.org/isacs/0320-en.pdf>.

End-User Verification

Closely related to export controls is the important issue of end-user verification — in other words, ensuring that exported weapons reach their intended recipient and not a terrorist organisation. This involves using such tools as end-user certificates, delivery verification and,

where feasible, post-delivery monitoring to ensure that weapons are being securely stored and properly accounted for in the country of import.

Unfortunately, we do not yet have a standardised, internationally accepted end-user certificate template, which means that these documents can be quite easily forged, and not every exporting country requires their use. This is a serious gap. To help fill it until the international community can take action on this issue, the United Nations has developed a voluntary international standard on end-user controls for exported small arms and light weapons in the form of International Small Arms Control Standard number 03.21 (<http://www.smallarmsstandards.org/isacs/0321-en.pdf>).

Secure Storage and Adequate Accounting

Another significant source of terrorist weapons is unsecured or inadequately secured government stockpiles. In situations where the State is collapsing or has already collapsed, weapons can be looted from unsecured stockpiles in large quantities and can find their way onto the black market and into terrorist hands. Libya is a good example of this. Large quantities of Libyan weapons — including MANPADS — were looted from government stockpiles following the collapse of the government in 2011. They have since been used in ongoing armed conflict in Libya and six other countries throughout Africa and the Middle East, including by terrorist organisations.¹

In situations of State collapse or chronically weak State capacity, it is foreseeable that attempts will be made to loot weapons from government stockpiles and that terrorist organisations will attempt to acquire them. The international community must build on the lessons learned from Libya and become much better at taking action to mitigate these risks.

These risks are not limited to failed or failing States. In developing States and those with weak rule of law, the lack of proper procedures, infrastructure and resources to adequately secure and account for large and small stockpiles of weapons raises the risk that they will be diverted, through loss or theft, onto the black market and from there into the hands of terrorists. Building the capacity of vulnerable States to adequately secure and account for their stockpiles is therefore essential. To assist with this, the United Nations has produced practical guidance in the form of

¹ *Investigating Cross-border Weapon Transfers in the Sahel*. Conflict Armament Research, November 2016.

International Small Arms Control Standard number 05.20 on stockpile management (<http://www.smallarmsstandards.org/isacs/0520-en.pdf>).

Illegal Cross-border movement of weapons

Given the long and porous borders that characterise many of the regions most affected by terrorism or that are home to terrorist organisations, preventing weapons from crossing borders illegally is a huge challenge. But even under conditions of extreme resource constraint, significant improvements can be made through better cooperation and coordination across borders by law enforcement agencies, where the political situation allows for it. The UN has developed specific guidance on preventing the illegal cross-border movement of weapons in International Small Arms Control Standards number 05.60 on “Border Controls and Law Enforcement Cooperation (<http://www.smallarmsstandards.org/isacs/0560-en.pdf>). I’m sure that my colleague from the WCO will have much more to say on this subject.

In addition to weapons smuggled illegally across borders, including by foreign terrorist fighters, terrorist organisations also rely on legal commercial supply chains to procure essential parts and components, including for improvised explosive devices. An investigation into the sources of components used in Islamic State IEDs in Iraq and Syria found that 50 commercial entities in 20 countries were involved in the supply chain that provided I.S. with such components as chemical precursors, detonators and mobile phones.² The focus, therefore, must not only be on preventing the illicit trade in arms, but also on ensuring that terrorist organisations cannot acquire essential parts and components through legal commercial channels.

Tracing Weapons Used by Terrorist Organisations

Finally, weapons and ammunition captured from terrorist organisations during the course of military or law enforcement operations can offer a unique insight into the sources of terrorist weapons, as well as the supply routes through which terrorists acquire weapons. This information will only be actionable, however, if weapons recovered from terrorists are traced to their last legal owner so that their point of diversion onto the black market can be identified and

² *Tracing the Supply of Components Used in Islamic Stated IEDs*. Conflict Armament Research, February 2016.

closed. For weapons that have been illegally recycled from one conflict zone to another for many years, tracing may not be possible. But for many weapons, accurate tracing is possible if the proper procedures are followed. To assist with this, the UN has developed practical guidance on tracing small arms and light weapons in International Small Arms Control Standard number 05.31 (<http://www.smallarmsstandards.org/isacs/0560-en.pdf>) and has assisted INTERPOL in developing the Illicit Arms Records and tracing Management System, or iARMS, which I'm sure my colleague from INTERPOL will explain in detail.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, the UN has followed the lead of Member States in developing voluntary international standards that provide practical guidance on implementing commitments that States have made in multilateral agreements such as the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms, the International Tracing Instrument, the UN Firearms Protocol and the Arms Trade Treaty. Full implementation of these agreements remains essential to preventing terrorists from acquiring weapons.

The International Small Arms Control Standards that the UN has developed to assist States with the implementation of these agreements have already begun to be used in many countries; but the scope for their use is much greater. I urge the Committee to make full use of these standards — along with the support for their application that the UN provides — in your efforts to prevent terrorists from acquiring weapons. The ISACS Inter-Agency Support Unit, which I coordinate, stands ready to assist the Committee in this regard.