



Disarmament and International Security

Topic:

Addressing the nexus between digital recruitment by transnational organized crime (TOC) and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW)

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Committee background:



DISEC is one of the six main committees of the United Nations. It was created as the first UN main committee when the UN's main charter was signed in 1945 after the Second World War. Its creation and function were formally established with the creation of the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC) in 1952, with initial discussions focused on atomic energy and its regulation.

The main goals of DISEC are Global disarmament, focused on the regulation of conventional weapons, nuclear disarmament, and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Addressing the security implications of technological advancements and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, which affect global stability and cooperation, collaborating with bodies such as the Security Council and the Conference on Disarmament to implement measures that strengthen

Background information on the topic

Many transnational organized crime groups have been using social media as a tool for propaganda and recruitment for years. This tactic has been used by many organizations, such as the Islamic State, the Sinaloa cartel, MS-13, and other TOC groups.

Since 2008, the jihadist organization Al-Qaeda has been promoting its radical ideologies through radical imams who have been spreading Salafist ideas to young Muslims around the world. Later in 2014, during the proclamation of the caliphate by the hand of the Islamic State, the internet became an important source for recruitment for the Islamic State. Many violent videos made by ISIS were commonly found on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Telegram. This excessive use of cyber media led to the coining of the term “cybercaliphate”.

This propaganda helps these organizations to normalize their activities and recruit new members to do illegal activities such as illegal smuggling of weapons and illicit substances, paramilitary activities, and other crimes.

One of social media's characteristics is that many people can freely share their points of view; that is why many TOC groups are taking advantage of this characteristic and are using these platforms to spread their ideologies, objectives, and even their activities to attract recruits to their organizations. Between 2022 and 2024, 48.3% of the victims in the cases of online recruitment verified by the Office belonged to Indigenous peoples (260 cases) and Afro-descendant communities (58 cases). Furthermore, 39.7% of the victims between 2022 and 2024 were girls or adolescent women (261 cases), who are particularly affected by gender-based violence, including sexual and reproductive violence, and by recruitment through child grooming or harassment for sexual purposes. Also, there are job offers or supposed opportunities



that are criminal traps that circulate on social media (for example, fake offers that lead to exploitation or involvement with violent groups).

Violent groups such as terrorist groups have expanded their cyber capabilities, using the dark web for recruitment drives, fundraising, and operational planning, facilitated by social media and emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI). The dark web has progressed in the virtual space and is used for circulating disinformation, as in the ongoing Hamas-Israel conflict.

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) is defined as a sudden increase in the number of small arms and light weapons, beyond legitimate security needs. The rising tide of SALW is responsible for millions of deaths each year; it also incites displacement and exacerbates existing humanitarian crises.

It is estimated that there are around one billion small arms and light weapons in circulation worldwide. And, citing data from the UN Human Rights Office, 48,000 civilians died in 2024 from causes related to armed conflict, a 40% increase over the previous year, and in some cases, up to 30% of those deaths were caused by small arms. The increase in weapons, and therefore armed conflicts, also disrupts education, destroys health systems, and hinders sustainable development.

Frequent small-scale trafficking can collectively move enormous quantities of firearms and ammunition over time and can have a significant impact on security, as is the case, for example, with firearms trafficking across the borders of Mexico and the United States, or from the Western Balkans into Europe. In other cases, illicit traffickers organize large-scale arms shipments, reaching hundreds of tons or more, which evade numerous national law enforcement agencies. Frequently, such large illicit shipments are associated with supplying parties involved in armed conflict or shipments to embargoed destinations. Diversion can occur at any point in a firearm's life cycle, posing several challenges to its control. One documented phenomenon is the diversion of stockpiles, whether civilian or national.

Position of major nations:

Mexico:

Firearms cause a large part of the homicides and exacerbate the violence of organized crime, with 70-80% of the weapons seized coming from the US, driven by illegal trafficking, lack of control, and negligence of manufacturers, despite Mexico's efforts to sue companies and promote international treaties to curb this flow, according to reports from 2024-2025. Among the latest solutions against the proliferation of weapons is cooperation with the European Union. Both parties consider it important to increase synergies between the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives and Other



Related Materials (CIFTA, chaired by Mexico) and the European Union's strategy against illicit small arms and light weapons and their ammunition, as well as international cooperation programs developed by the European Union, such as the Arms Trade Treaty Phase III Outreach Program.

Organized crime in Mexico is using social media platforms like TikTok, messaging services, and online video games to recruit teenagers and young adults with increasing efficiency and discretion, exploiting their economic and emotional vulnerabilities. According to data from the Ministry of the Interior, as of December 2nd, nearly 7,000 children, teenagers, and young adults up to 29 years old were reported missing in Mexico. Between 2022 and the first half of 2023, the Council handled 42 cases of victims related to video games, the majority (67.5%) between 7 and 15 years old, mainly affecting girls (82.5%). Mexico has several laws and organizations that are responsible for responding to these types of cyberattacks, such as the National Observatory for the Prevention of the Recruitment of Girls, Boys, and Adolescents.

United States:

Access to firearms in the United States, along with their easy manufacture and proliferation, has become a critical problem with international repercussions. Armed homicides, shootings in public places and schools, massacres, and racially motivated and discriminatory crimes are on the rise. The UN Human Rights Office highlighted the lack of adherence by the United States and Russia to the Arms Trade Treaty, in effect since 2014, as a major concern. Both the US and Russia are among the world's largest arms exporters. The ATF reported that law enforcement agencies across the country seized 19,344 unregistered, unmonitored, and untraceable homemade firearms in 2021. This figure represents a tenfold increase since 2016. Among the actions taken, the "Firewall" agreement stands out, aimed at curbing illegal trafficking and strengthening weapons traceability with programs like ERASE to track their origin and stop the flow into Mexico.

Drug cartels and human smuggling organizations have been using social media applications to recruit Americans, including teenagers, to smuggle illicit contraband across the U.S. - U.S.-Mexico border. Among the actions taken, the Combating Cartels on Social Media Act stands out. This legislation requires the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) to implement a national strategy to curb online recruitment.

Colombia:

In Colombia, armed groups used WhatsApp to lure minors to clandestine parties designed to secure recruits during national lockdowns. These encounters served as



entry points into criminal structures, where young people were either enticed with small loans or coerced through abduction. The trend continued as the pandemic subsided. Between 2022 and 2024, armed groups in Colombia recruited children using social media platforms like TikTok and Facebook, according to a recent report from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia. The number of illegal weapons circulating in Colombia has steadily increased over the past 20 years. Around 80% of the weapons entering the country come from an illegal market that supplies both illegal armed groups and criminal gangs with handguns, drones, and high-caliber rifles from countries such as the United States and Central America.

Cambodia

The proliferation of small arms in Cambodia is a legacy of decades of conflict (civil war, Khmer Rouge, border disputes), with large quantities of weapons in the hands of the government and still beyond its control, originating in part from China and the Soviet era. This has led to disarmament and reintegration programs, although the illicit flow persists, complicating regional security and stability, especially with recent border tensions with Thailand. It is estimated that some 22,000–85,000 weapons continue to circulate illegally in Cambodia. This is a considerable reduction from the situation in 1993 and suggests that the concerted efforts of the Government of Cambodia and donors, notably the EU ASAC and JSAC, have had a considerable impact on weapons proliferation in Cambodia.

Definition of key terms

Proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW): Uncontrolled proliferation of firearms such as pistols, rifles, and machine guns, which fuels conflict, organized crime, and terrorism globally

Transnational organized crime (TOC): organized groups that operate across national borders to commit serious crimes for power, influence, or financial/material gain, using corruption and violence to protect their activities.

Digital recruitment: use of online platforms and communication mechanisms by international criminal networks to find, groom, and enlist individuals and victims for illegal activities

Artificial Intelligence (AI): technology that enables computers and machines to simulate human learning, comprehension, problem solving, decision making, creativity, and autonomy.



United Cyber Caliphate (UCC): pro-ISIS hacker organizations that use cyberattacks for propaganda, recruitment, and sabotage against perceived enemies, aiming to establish a digital presence for extremist ideologies

Guiding questions:

What cybersecurity measures and cooperation between international agencies are necessary to prevent the recruitment of young people by organized crime?

How are new technologies, such as artificial intelligence and new and growing online platforms, changing recruiters' strategies?

What immediate actions can be taken to block and investigate international light arms trafficking routes?

How can international organizations detect organized crime propaganda without directly interfering with freedom of expression and violating the security and privacy of other users?

How can we intervene in the creation and distribution of small arms in countries with laws that allow easy access to firearms?

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