

The Shivapuri

Volume: XXVI, 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/shivapuri.v26i1.75833>

Army Command and Staff College, Nepali Army

Shivapuri, Kathmandu, Nepal

Illicit Arms Proliferation and Impact on National Security

- *Lt Col Dinesh Kumar Khadka*

Abstract

The illicit arms proliferation is one of the prominent threats to national security not only in Nepal but everywhere in the world. This paper reviews the dynamics of the illegal arms proliferation in Nepal by looking into historical context, current trends, and impact on national security. Using secondary data analysis, contextualized in the regional context of Nepal, this study aims to highlight the illegal arms circulation enhances crime, weakens public safety, and undermines security within the community. The paper will conclude with the recommendations which necessary to deal with the illicit arm proliferation in Nepal.

Keywords

Illicit Arms Trade, National Security, Illegal Arms Trade, Public Safety, Arms Trafficking, Threat

Introduction

Illicit arms proliferation is one of the major challenges to national security in many regions around the world. The hidden and complex arm market operates outside legal frameworks, allowing arms to reach criminals, armed groups, and other actors, who has desire receive it. The unchecked spread of these arms leads to increased violence,

crime, and public fear, destabilizing societies and undermining public safety (UNODC, 2021).

In Nepal, illegal arms trafficking has become one of the major concerns. Illegal arms have disrupted national security, governance, and public safety in community. Uncontrolled circulation of arms among civilian areas seriously threatens social stability and makes it quite tough for the state to maintain law and order. The complication of efforts put forth to control these arms is because of weak and old regulations and ineffective enforcement; hence, illegal arms have proved to be one of the major threats to good governance and peace.

The security landscape in Nepal became complex with the illicit arms trade contributing to tension and conflict (Sharma, 2020). This study aims to look at the illicit arms proliferation in Nepal, based on how it affects national security. The study will further trace the core factors driving the proliferation of illicit arms, the channels through which they move, and broader societal implications.

Historical Background

Historically, the proliferation of arms in Nepal represents a relationship entailing complex sociopolitical factors linked to the pre-20th century practices of weaponry use for self-defense and in local disputes. Arms control was, in fact, an important means for sustaining power and suppressing opposition during the feudal era, particularly under the Rana regime of 1846-1951. The Ranas made sure that arms and their handlers—the state and military forces loyal to the state—were under firm grasp. Of course, this was meant to control any uprising and further set their control over the people. Until the overthrow of the Rana regime and the introduction of democratic reforms in the 1950s, there was a moment of comparative openness on issues of civilian access to arms. The shift was initially intended to empower the population, but it led to the mistaken proliferation of arms among various groups. The period between 1996 and 2006 was

very crucial for Nepal's history, since during this time, the country experienced an armed conflict that transformed the nature of arms proliferation in the country altogether.

Nowadays, many factors influence the problem of small arms proliferation in Nepal, including, but not limited to, its geographical location and its socio-economic state. Its borders are relatively porous, meaning it's easy for traffickers to move illegal arms into and out of the country without detection. According to the Nepal Police, 2021, there has been a large uprise in firearm-related crimes such as armed robbery, violence, and domestic disputes with small arms. Now, with easy access to arms, the criminal groups committing acts of violence and deterrence among the public, especially contractors, businessmen and high-profile personalities.

Illegal Arms Proliferation in Nepal

Current Trends

The illicit arms Proliferation in Nepal has become a big problem due to diverse factors that combine with the country's social, economic, and geographical environment. One of the major factors is that Nepal is situated between two big countries: India and China. This geographical position has located Nepal in a very important place for arms trafficking. Due to the open boarder between these two nations, illegal arms often flow into Nepal without strong checks. The report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2020) broke down that these arms entering Nepal are principally from neighboring countries, which indicates the international relationship affecting local security. The very porous nature of Nepal's borders, coupled with poor law enforcement, further facilitates the smuggling of arms. In many remote areas along the border, there is no security personnel at all to monitor and control the movement of goods, making it easy for traffickers to bring illegal arms into the country. This is aggravated by the economic situation of many Nepalese, which may force people into criminal activities, including arms trade, to sustain themselves. Over the past couple of years, there has

been a marked increase in the availability of firearms, especially in urban areas of Kathmandu and other big cities; increased availability of firearms has contributed to high levels of violent crime, thus making the environment much more dangerous for residents.

More illegal arms mean more empowerment for not only criminals but also make the task of the law enforcers even more challenging to keep up public safety and order. Police resources are normally stretched to breaking point, and with the rise in armed criminal activity, police find it extremely difficult to deal with such issues.

Types of Arms Trafficked

The most trafficked types of arms in Nepal include small arms and light weapons. These include as pistols, rifles, and even homemade guns that can easily be made with the help of readily available materials. All these are posing serious threats to public safety because of the availability and use of such arms, which have been one of the causes for the increasing crime rates and growing violence, particularly in urban centers.

Advancement in technology and the emergence of social media platforms and dark web markets have also had a profound impact on the proliferation of arms. Online platforms are safe havens for traffickers to advertise and sell illegal arms with greater anonymity and reach. Buyers can get in contact with sellers effortlessly, evading traditional measures by law enforcement. This ease of access is making the job of tracking and combating the illicit arms trade increasingly difficult for authorities. The anonymity provided by the internet is a major challenge for law enforcement agencies in terms of possibly adapting to new technologies and tactics used by traffickers.

Impacts on National Security

Intensification of Conflict

The illicit trade in arms has intensified and prolonged the different armed conflicts by providing arms to the different actors. In essence, this makes such conflicts

violent and prolonged. The use of illegal arms has allowed the arm group to resist the security forces and expand their interest, thereby destabilizing entire regions. Like, porous borders in Afghanistan have allowed the supply of illegal arms to support insurgencies, including the Taliban. In South Asia, the influx of illicit arms has aggravated violence in various conflicts, such as ethnic tensions in northeastern India (Adhikari, 2020). These examples demonstrate how arms do not only prolong but also intensify conflicts, with the civilian populations mainly bearing the burden. Displacement, loss of life, and the destruction of infrastructure are all common rituals during violent occurrences and instability (UNODA, 2022).

Weakening of State Governance

The proliferation of illicit arms basically undermines the authority of a state and erodes its ability to enforce the rule of law, maintain internal order, and guarantee security to its citizens. In fragile governance environments, illegal arms embolden the positions of non-state actors with respect to state sovereignty. Hence, these often assume territorial control, use resources, and coerce civilian populations to their will.

Further ramifications of illicit arms trading in state authority degradation include an increase in violence, disruption of economic activities, and the displacement of civilians. Apart from that, ineffective measures against arms trafficking by law enforcement agencies lead not only to the erosion of faith among the public towards the government but also to an increased circle of insecurity. In addition, communities most affected by the presence of illegal arms usually face heightened levels of fear, reduced access to justice, and a breakdown in social cohesion.

Arms Trafficking and Terrorism

Porous borders are a major factor in the flow of arms to armed actors. For example, during the Syrian civil war, smuggled arms equipped groups like ISIS, enabling them to launch attacks and control territories across Iraq and Syria (Wezeman,

2022). Similarly, in South Asia, arms smuggled across borders have fueled cross-border terrorism in conflict areas such as Kashmir, complicating peace efforts between India and Pakistan (Singh, 2021). The consequences of arms-enabled terrorism are multifold: besides inflicting casualties, terrorist attacks paralyze economies and deplete security resources while instilling fear into populations. Furthermore, the international nature of terrorism, made possible by illicit arms, complicates even further the possibility of an effective response by governments.

Humanitarian and Societal Impact

The illicit arms trade is having devastating effects on communities and individuals. Illegal arms contribute to widespread violence, human rights abuses, and mass displacement that may pose lasting challenges to governments and humanitarian organizations. Civilians bear the highest cost of violence perpetrated through illicit arms. Armed groups, militias, and criminal networks frequently use arms against civilians to instill fear, gain control, or punish dissent. For instance, gang violence in Central America has left several thousand civilians dead, forcing many to flee their homes for asylum in other countries (Muggah & Dudley, 2020). Forcibly displaced people due to armed violence place a heavy burden on host nations and international organizations. The living conditions are usually poor, access to services is limited, and psychological trauma is long-lasting, considering these displaced communities. It, in turn, affects their potentials of getting their lives together again for rebuilding and contributes to the noxious circles of poverty and insecurity (UNHCR, 2022).

Recommendations for Nepal

Border Security Enhancements

Improvement in border security will help control the influx of illicit arms. The porous nature of Nepal's borders with both India and China eases the smuggling of arms. Improving border security could be done through better surveillance, establishment of

joint patrols along the border, and use of advanced technology in monitoring border areas. Collaboration with neighboring countries, especially India, is a must for effective response to cross-border trafficking (Sharma, 2019). For instance, joint police and military task forces of the two countries can be formed for real-time intelligence sharing and coordinated operations. International cooperation could also enhance the sharing of intelligence and resources, hence amplifying efforts to secure borders.

Community Engagement and Awareness

Community engagement is an important aspect of addressing the societal impacts of illicit arms proliferation. The communities need to be made aware of the dangers of arms proliferation and the importance of reporting illegal arms activities through awareness programs. Building trust between law enforcement agencies and the communities in which they serve is crucial for effective crime prevention (Poudel, 2021).

Such community-based initiatives would further provide citizens in Nepal with a chance to become actively involved in promoting safety and security. Workshops and community gatherings could be organized through local organizations and civil society to discuss the impacts of armed violence and the need for disarmament.

Capacity Building in Law Enforcement

The illicit arms trafficking has thus become a vital threat to the peace and security of Nepal, with an emerging need to boost the capacity of law enforcement agencies on a priority basis through trainings, equipping, and modernization to efficiently monitor and control arms trafficking.

Basic support is required, which entails the supply of sophisticated equipment like surveillance technology, communication systems, and forensic equipment. Special units within police forces can give concentrated efforts toward trafficking networks. Joint training exercises and intelligence-sharing mechanisms can foster a unified

response to trafficking. Besides, institutional strengthening will help in smoothing coordination among government agencies and creating centralized databases related to weapons and analyzing trafficking patterns.

Conclusion

One of the major challenges to national security in illicit arms trading. This was fostered by the historical context of armed conflict compounded with weak governance and instability. The impacts of illicit arms on violent crime, political stability, and societal cohesion are huge and demand urgent attention from policymakers. Such risks can only be reduced through full policy interventions. Different measures of better governance, increased border security, and promotion of community engagement need to be urgently undertaken to effectively address the challenges posed by illicit arms proliferation in Nepal. Taking a holistic approach that includes several stakeholders - government agencies, civil society, and local communities. Nepal can work toward lessening the threats associated with the illicit arms trade for the creation of a safe and stable society.

References

- Adhikari, B. (2020). *Conflict and security in South Asia*. Kathmandu: Tribhuvan University Press.
- Bhatta, S. (2019). The impact of illicit arms trade on governance in Nepal. *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 14(3), 55–72.
- Bhattarai, S. (2022). Governance challenges and the illicit arms trade in Nepal. *Journal of Nepalese Governance Studies*, 8(1), 15–30.
- Cook, P. (2021). *Arms trafficking in Latin America: Challenges and solutions*. Washington, DC: Wilson Center.
- Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. (2022). *The illicit arms trade: A global challenge*. Geneva.

- Krause, K., & Muggah, R. (2020). *Armed violence and development: Perspectives from the Global South*. London: Routledge.
- Muggah, R., & Dudley, S. (2020). *Urban violence in Central America: The role of firearms*. New York: Open Society Foundations.
- Nepal Police. (2021). *Annual crime report 2021*. Kathmandu: Government of Nepal.
- Poudel, M. (2021). The implications of illicit arms proliferation on public safety in Nepal. *Journal of Nepalese Security Studies*, 5(2), 45–62.
- Poudel, M. (2021). Community engagement in combating illicit arms proliferation in Nepal. *Journal of Nepalese Security Studies*, 5(2), 45–62.
- Sharma, R. (2019). Border security and the illicit arms trade: A Nepalese perspective. *South Asia Journal of Security Studies*, 6(3), 78–91.
- Sharma, R. (2019). Governance and arms proliferation in post-conflict Nepal. *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 14(2), 30–45.
- Sharma, R. (2020). Armed groups and their role in the post-conflict security landscape of Nepal. *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 26(1), 45–60.
- Sharma, R. (2020). Domestic violence and the role of firearms in Nepal: A rising concern. *Journal of South Asian Sociology*, 14(3), 115–130.
- Small Arms Survey. (2021). *Arms and war: The impact of illicit arms*. Geneva.
- Singh, A. (2021). *Cross-border terrorism in South Asia: The role of illegal arms*. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers.
- UNODA. (2022). *Small arms and light arms: International approaches to controlling illicit trade*. New York: United Nations.
- UNODC. (2021). *Global study on firearms and the illicit arms trade*. Retrieved from <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/firearms-protocol/global-study-firearms.html>

UNODC. (2022). *The global firearms trafficking report*. Vienna: United Nations.

Wezeman, P. (2022). *Arms flows to conflict zones in the Middle East*. Stockholm: SIPRI.