

# HABSMUN 2022

## DISEC<sup>†</sup> BRIEFING PAPER



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# The Question of the Sale of Illicit Arms on the Dark Web

## Background

The dark web initially created by the US government to allow spies to exchange information completely anonymously was developed in the mid-1990s (technology known as TOR- The Onion Router) and was released into the public domain for access for everyone, but has been since characterised for its use of illicit and even illegal purposes, notably the sale of illicit arms.

The increasing international movement of firearms and explosives worldwide spikes a number of issues, despite efforts to regulate firearms and firearms sales, there are multiple avenues to bypass this control and traffic weapons across international borders which has emerged as extremely relevant for EU security, despite strong firearm control.

The role of the dark web has grown in the sale of illicit arms enabling facilitation for terrorists and organised criminals whom seek firearms. This links back in recent years to the 2016 Munich Shooting where an 18 year old terrorist who killed nine people illegally purchased the 9mm Glock 17 pistol through the dark web. In addition, the November 2015 Paris terrorist attacks reported that the four assault rifles used in the attack had been originally obtained on the Dark web and were found to be purchased from a German supplier going by the user name 'DW Guns'. Reports about a possible weapons network operating in the UK have also surfaced in September 2017 where the UK authorities revealed that Umair Khan from Birmingham had used the dark web to purchase ammunition for firearms classified as 'obsolete' due to the nature of these being outdated and out of circulation. However, he managed to successfully adapt these into fully functioning illegal weapons for sale to criminal gangs. This highlights the availability of weapons to be potentially used by terrorists with the dark web being attractive due to being able to provide a virtual veil of anonymity.

However, despite these examples of the serious concerns faced, very little is known about the size and scope of the weapons trade on the dark web due to the nature of the dark web requiring specific software that is not indexed by conventional search engines.

## Key Issues

To address the gap of little being done to investigate the role of the dark web in relation to the illicit arms trade, RAND Europe designed a research project to explore the worldwide illicit arms trade. The overall aim of the study was to estimate the size and scope of the trade in firearms including the number of dark web markets listing firearms and related products and services for sale.

### Key findings of the project include:

- The dark web is an enabler for the circulation of illicit arms already on the black market, and also as a potential source of diversion for legally owned weapons.
- The dark web is increasing the availability of better performing, more recent firearms for the same, or lower, price, than what would be available on the street on the black market.
- The US appears to be the most common source country for arms that are for sale on the dark web. Almost 60 per cent of the firearms listings are associated with products that originate from the US. However, Europe represents the largest market for arms trade on the dark web, generating revenues that are around five times higher than the US.
- Firearms listings (42 per cent) were the most common listings on the dark web, followed by arms-related digital products (27 per cent) and others, including ammunition (22 per cent).
- The dark web has the potential to become the platform of choice for individuals (e.g. lone-wolves terrorists) or small groups (e.g. gangs) to obtain weapons and ammunition behind the anonymity curtain provided by the dark web. In addition, the dark web could be used by vulnerable and fixated individuals to purchase firearms.
- The illegal arms trade presents further challenges for law enforcement agencies and national governments. These challenges largely derive from the anonymity of individuals that use the dark web to purchase arms.

Recommendations include increasing infrastructure to ensure proper regulations are in place, maintaining traditional policing and investigating techniques and keeping existing international instruments for combating arms trafficking.

### Timeline

The marking and tracing of small arms and light weapons (SALW) received increasing international attention in the late 1990s when the UN panel of Experts (PoE) produced a study on marking, and the Organization of American States adopted the standards for marking, record-keeping, and tracing in the Inter-American convention against Illicit Manufacturing and Trafficking of Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives and other Related Materials (CIFTA).

In 2001, the United Nations adopted the Programme of Action (PoA) to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in all its aspects.

Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 56/24V (2001), the Secretary General established a feasibility study recommended by the PoA. The GGE issued its report in July 2003. In its report, it concluded that it was both “desirable” and “feasible” to develop an international tracing instrument. It recommended that the General Assembly take a decision to negotiate such an instrument within the United Nations framework. In keeping with the GGE’s recommendation, the General Assembly established an Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) “to negotiate an international instrument to enable States to identify and trace, in a timely and reliable manner, illicit small arms and light weapons”.

On 8 December 2005, the General Assembly called upon all States to implement the International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons (ITI). The ITI identifies tracing as a key mechanism in preventing, combatting and eradicating illicit SALW by requiring states to ensure that weapons are properly marked and that records are kept.

In early 2011, the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) Heads of State and Government adopted the CARICOM Declaration on Small Arms and Light Weapons, a politically binding agreement which reinforced the joint commitment to fully implement the PoA and take all necessary measures to combat the proliferation of SALW.

### Questions to consider

1. What further infrastructure could be implemented to regulate the sale of illicit arms on the dark web?
2. How can the selling of illicit arms on the dark web impact the security of your delegation?
3. Due to the secret nature of the dark web, would any further action be helpful or be counterintuitive?
4. What are the potential implications of dark web enabling the sale of illicit arms on a national and international level?

### Useful links

[Understanding the Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Dark Web](#)

[RAND Europe - the International arms market on the hidden web](#)

[https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-03/ti622\\_illicit\\_firearms\\_and\\_other\\_weapons\\_on\\_darknet\\_markets.pdf](https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-03/ti622_illicit_firearms_and_other_weapons_on_darknet_markets.pdf)

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/firearms-protocol/news/unodc-analyses-the-policy-implications-of-illicit-firearms-trafficking-on-the-dark-web.html>

# The Question of Supplying the Taliban

## Background

The Taliban are a predominantly Pashtun, Islamic fundamentalist group that returned to power in Afghanistan in 2021 after waging a twenty-year insurgency.

The weapons and military equipment left behind by the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, including largely through the collapse of the Afghan army are now largely left in the hands of the Taliban. Despite US and international efforts to control the spread of this and other military equipment, the US has a long history of leaving weapons behind and as a result these weapons have ended up in the arsenals of adversaries in Afghanistan. Many of these US weapons have been transferred on corrupt Afghan officials and troops selling US equipment, capturing weapons in battle or stealing them in raids. Many of the 'easier-to-use high-tech equipment' such as communication instruments and night vision goggles have been used by the elite Badri 313 unit as they guarded key sites such as the Kabul airport.

Several US government programmes are aimed at stopping weapons from getting to adversaries by keeping careful records of weapons in transit, but evidence has shown that many army transfers to foreign partners in support of the War on Terror lacked these basic end-use safeguards. In 2016 a recent analysis in Task and Purpose, a Pentagon audit revealed that poor record-keeping and monitoring had allowed nearly half of the 1.5 Million small arms provided to Iraqi and Afghan security forces since 2003 to go missing, including nearly 978,000 M4 and M16 rifles. In addition, a 2014 report by the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction found that 43% of weapons provided to Afghan security forces may have ended up in the hands of groups like the Taliban. Despite military promises to do better, the problem still continues, and perhaps if proper procedures had been followed, they could have at least reduced the number of US supplied weapons in the hands of the country's enemies.

In terms of volume, Afghanistan was not a very large recipient of major arms; in 2016-2020 Afghanistan ranked as only the 25th largest recipient in the world. The volume of major arms transfers to the Afghan armed forces grew significantly between 2001 and 2005, but volumes decreased by 24% between in 2016 and 2020.

Transfers from Russia was the second largest supplier of major arms to the Afghan armed forces in the period, accounting for 14% of imports by volume with all of these deliveries taking place between 2002 and 2014. In 2018 BBC reports that Russia is supporting and even supplying arms to the Taliban, and even though they may not be obvious allies, it is speculated that Russian and Taliban interests are becoming more closely aligned.

Pakistan has provided direct military and intelligence aid to both groups, resulting in the deaths of US soldiers, Afghan security personnel and civilians, plus significant destabilization of Afghanistan.

## Key Issues

### **Supply and sale of seized US weapons**

According to a 2017 Government Accountability Office report, the US military transferred roughly 75,893 vehicles, 599,690 weapons systems, and 208 aircraft to the ANDSF between 2003 and 2016. More recently, in a three-year period between 2017 and 2019, the U.S. shipped another 4,700 Humvees, 20,000 hand grenades and thousands of small munitions and grenade launchers. With city after city being captured by the Taliban in 2021, US equipment - including an entire functional air force of Black Hawks - was surrendered in near-mint condition.

Extremism watchers are now concerned by the proliferation of guns, bullets, grenades and other arms. That represents a serious security risk for the countries surrounding Afghanistan because the weapons could easily be sold to militias both inside the country and in places such as Pakistan, said Guy Lamb, safety and violence initiative director at the University of Cape Town.

*“What happens in these situations is that arms brokers will make themselves known [and] offer cash or valuable goods in exchange for those kinds of weapons,”* Lamb said.

A UN report further found that terror groups are experiencing freedom in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, with meetings held between Taliban and Al-Qaeda officials. Furthermore, Pakistan has been known to have been a major purchaser of seized equipment in the last few months.

### **The Taliban’s stable finances**

The Taliban funds itself largely through the opium trade, with Afghanistan supplying the vast majority of illicit heroin across the globe. Insurgents impose a tax at every stage of the drug production process, from poppy farmers to traders who transport the heroin to neighbouring countries.

Experts have expressed fears that opium production in Afghanistan is set to soar amid economic and political insecurity in the country, meaning that cheap heroin could flood the streets of European towns and cities.

Even before its military success this year, some had described the militant group as “the world’s biggest drug cartel”.

Cesar Guedes-Ferreyros, the Kabul representative for the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, said that Afghanistan supplies at least 85 per cent of the world’s heroin. With the Taliban having gained complete control of the opium producing areas in the south and east of the country, experts expect the militants to ramp up production.

The group also makes money through illegal mining and trading minerals. According to a confidential report commissioned by Nato and obtained by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, the group earned \$1.6bn (£1.15bn) in the financial year ending March 2020.

This ultimately means that due to the largely illicit means of income, sanctions are less effective.

## Supply by member states

Accusations of supplying the Taliban with weapons are rife among member states.

Senior United States General John Nicholson said he'd seen "*destabilising activity by the Russians.*"

He said Russian weapons were smuggled across the Tajik border to the Taliban, but could not say in what quantity. Russia has denied such US allegations in the past, citing a lack of evidence

He says Russia has conducted a series of exercises on the Afghan border with Tajikistan. "*These are counter terrorism exercises,*" says Gen Nicholson, "*but we've seen the Russian patterns before: they bring in large amounts of equipment and then they leave some of it behind.*"

However, these allegations largely emerge in the public domain without proof

Likewise, the overthrown Afghan government claimed that they were in possession of "*evidence that shows Iran is supplying the Taliban with weapons*"

## Timeline

**Key dates when US and other involvement in Afghanistan led to increase in Arms obtained by the Taliban.**

1996- Taliban seize control of Kabul and introduce hard-line version of Islam, banning women from work, and introducing Islamic punishments.

2001- US-led bombing of Afghanistan begins following the September 11 attacks on the United States

2002- Deployment of first contingent of foreign peacekeepers- the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)- marking the start of a protracted fight against the Taliban

2008- US President George Bush sends extra 4,500 US troops to Afghanistan, in a move he described as a "quiet surge"

2009- (January) US President Barack Obama unveils new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. An extra 4,500 US personnel will train and bolster the Afghan army and police and there will be support for civilian development.

2009- (December) US President Obama decides to boost US troop numbers in Afghanistan by 30,000 bringing total to 100,000, he says US will begin withdrawing its forces by 2011.

2012- Tokyo donor conference pledges \$16bn in civilian aid to Afghanistan up to 2016, with US, Japan, Germany and UK supplying bulk of funds. Afghanistan agrees to new conditions to counter corruption.

2014- The US and Britain end their combat operations in Afghanistan.

2015- US President Barack Obama announces that US will delay its troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, following a request from President Ashraf Ghani. Later that year, Obama announces that 9,800 US troops will remain in Afghanistan until end of 2016.

2021- Taliban offensive- Taliban took control of country and ended 20 year war on Afghanistan of US involvement.

### Questions to consider

1. How can the global community do to stem existing supplies to the Taliban?
2. Should the General Assembly recommend to the Security Council that sanctions are placed the countries willingly involved in supplying arms to the Taliban? Should the US be held accountable for the vast military reserves left to them?
3. Do the Taliban deserve sanctions? If conventional sanctions won't work - what will?
4. Is it possible to hinder the Taliban's operations without harming the Afghan people?

### Questions to consider

[BBC - Russia 'arming the Afghan Taliban', says US](#)

[I News - who funds the Taliban?](#)

[Reuters - The Taliban's new war chest](#)

[France 24 - Taliban weapons seizures](#)

# The Question of Youth Radicalisation Online

## Background

According to the European Union, radicalisation is a process through which young people start to accept and support changes in society which are against the existing order with the term “violent radicalisation” referring to the process of adopting an extremist belief system with the intent to use, encourage or facilitate violence with the aim of promoting an ideology.

Violent radicalisation may occur as young people are influenced by ethnocentric or other ideologies and societal influences, or perhaps if they face potential for social exclusion and marginalisation. While extremism and radicalisation leading to violence are not a new phenomena per se, their implications for young people and how they reach people online have been highlighted more in recent years.

Social media online can influence youth’s opinions and beliefs and can skew a person’s knowledge of a specific topic due to being provided false information, and this is particularly heightened by the fact that 90% of teens aged 13-17 use social media with 51% report visiting a social media site at least daily. Social media is used for research by extremists making it easy for them to identify those who may be vulnerable and susceptible to their ideas and those whom they think they can easily indoctrinate.

The United Nations Security Council resolution 2250 (UNSCR 2250) is the first resolution on youth, peace and security adopted in 2015 which emphasises the importance of youth as agents of change in the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. The resolution highlights participation, partnerships, prevention, protection and disengagement and re-integration as five pillars for action related to young people’s contribution to peace processes and conflict resolution.

There are many political concerns regarding youth radicalisation gaining momentum with the publication of European citizens moving to Syria, mostly alongside the Syrian opposition with between 400 and 2000 migrating since March 2011 with the supposed threat posed by these European fighters has led to the recent EU Commission Declaration of January 2014 calling EUMS to increase their efforts to prevent radicalisation and extremism.

## Key Issues

### **Protection from harm**

There are many debates about the role of safeguarding and child protection in relation to radicalisation. When there have been incidents that have resulted in severe consequences for children (for example when some children have travelled to Syria or otherwise become involved in extremist activity), this often had a strong impact on staff’s perception of the

harm association with radicalisation. This perceived harm includes psychological, emotional and physical harm. This leads to question the extent to which guardians should protect youths from harm and how they should go about this without restricting the youths internet freedom too much or to an obvious extent.

### **Are authorities doing enough?**

Is the issue due to authorities not doing enough to tackle the issue, or is it due to their efforts not being effective due to the complexity of how online radicalisation is reaching youths? Even if the second is also true, they both stem back to the authorities of nation specific or international not taking enough action. Specifically, in the UK, the systematic review of preventing religious radicalisation and violent extremism by the youth justice board only found a very limited number of programmes that explicitly aimed addressing the radicalisation in the UK. Even if some of these are moderately effective, this is not enough to deal the complexity of how online radicalisation reaches youths, so something stronger and more effective needs to be undertaken.

### **Different forms of radicalisation**

Radicalisation leading to extreme views being undertaken in youths may take diverse forms depending on the context and time period, and may be associated with different causes or ideologies and may take different forms on the internet in terms of reaching youths. Right-wing extremism is a form of radicalisation associated with fascism, racism, supremacism and ultranationalism. This form is characterised by the violent defence of a racial, ethnic or pseudo-national identity and is also associated with radical hostility towards state authorities. The opposite being left-wing extremism which is a form of radicalism that focuses primarily on anti-capitalist demands and calls for the transformation of political systems considered responsible for producing social inequalities and may ultimately employ violent means to further its cause. Politico-religious extremism is a form of radicalisation associated with a political interpretation of religion and the defence, by violent means of a religious identity perceived to be under attack, any religion may spawn this type of radicalisation. Single-issue extremism is a form of radicalisation which is essentially motivated by a sole issue which may include radical environmental or animal right groups, anti-abortion extremists, ultra-individualist or independent extremist movements, that all may use violence to promote their cause. The reason these groups are extreme is that they employ mass murderers whose motivations are partially or wholly ideological may also fall under this category. The disparities between different types of radicalisation reaching youths mean that it is very difficult to target radicalisation holistically due to the many diverse types, meaning that radicalisation of one particularly ideology could be prevented in reaching youths, but another may not be.

### Questions to consider

1. What's the best course of action to deal with youth radicalisation
2. Who should be responsible for preventing youth radicalisation? Why?
3. Should online censorship be mandated to protect youth? Would this be a violation of freedom of speech?
4. Why is youth radicalisation particularly problematic? How can we compensate for it

### Useful links

[YouTube - Preventing the radicalisation of youth \(4 minute video\)](#)

[The US Government on countering online radicalisation](#)

[RAND: Radicalisation in the digital era](#)

[Council of Europe on Radicalisation](#)



*Written/Sourced by Lauren Frankal, President of the General Assembly, for use at the thirteenth annual Haberdashers' Boys' School Model United Nations Conference, 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> March 2022*