

Forum: The First General Assembly

Issue: Reducing the access of specialized equipment to paramilitary organizations.

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Introduction

Before we undernote the proliferation of specialized equipment instigated within paramilitary organizations, we must understand that the very notion of a ‘paramilitary’ itself can be seen as innately multifaceted. The crossroads separating military from paramilitary is no less convoluted than differentiating standardized law enforcement from vigilantes; crossing the intersection of **political philosophy**, international law, and human rights. Paramilitary refers to organizations operating outside a country’s formal military structure and, by their very nature, blur lines between legitimate state actors and non-state actors. Despite functioning outside these structures, paramilitaries continue to be equipped with specialized equipment, traditionally under the domain of national armies. Proliferation of such equipment has become a major concern in recent decades, leading to national destabilization, fueled insurgencies, and civil unrest in faltering states.

The philosophical underpinnings of paramilitary challenge the classical conception of the state as the protector of its people. Political theorists, ergo Max Weber, argued that the state is defined by its monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. In this framework, only the state may lawfully wield force to maintain order and safeguard its citizens. As the influence of paramilitary expands, this monopoly is eroded, and we are forced to beg the question: What happens when non-state actors, unaccountable to governance, possess the same capacity for violence as the state itself? In what contexts does such force remain legitimate? If both the paramilitary and state fight for the protection of the public, should security only be in the hands of autonomy? Or those who lack the governance?

Historically, paramilitary groups evolved alongside the development of modern states. While irregular forces have existed since ancient times, the modern paramilitary as a distinct entity took

shape in the 19th century. The most notable being The Pinkerton National Detective Agency in the United States, a private paramilitary tasked with enforcing law and suppressing labor strikes. At its peak, Pinkerton's force outnumbered the U.S. Army, demonstrating early risks of non-state actors in quasi-military roles. In the early 20th century, paramilitary groups were frequently tied to fascist movements, with Nazi Germany's Schutzstaffel (SS) representing one of the most infamous examples.

Following World War II, paramilitary groups became key players in decolonization and Cold War conflicts. In Latin America and Southeast Asia, they were used to suppress communist insurgencies. The United Nations recognized the threat these groups posed and sought to regulate them through arms embargoes. The Belgian Congo crisis and the Vietnam War both saw use of paramilitary forces, exacerbated by foreign intervention.

The 1980s saw a surge in the use of paramilitary forces as state policy tools, especially under the Reagan Doctrine, which saw the U.S. supporting paramilitary groups to counter leftist movements in Latin America, notably in Nicaragua and El Salvador. The Salvadoran Civil War (1980–1992) between the government of El Salvador and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front illustrates how arming paramilitaries without governmental oversight can fuel prolonged violence and societal instability.

The proliferation of specialized equipment to the paramilitary became especially urgent in the 21st century, as the rise of the global arms trade made advanced military technology accessible. Today, paramilitary organizations possess high-powered rifles such as the XM7 and AK-47, drones, and encrypted communication systems, enabling them to function as powerful actors in both local and international conflicts. In Yemen, Somalia, and Libya, paramilitaries equipped with advanced weaponry have been able to challenge state power directly, leading to civil wars and breakdown of civil society.

The debate over paramilitary groups also extends into the public domain. While governments claim to protect citizens under structured law, some populations view paramilitaries as protectors in the absence of strong state power, and in fragile states without a strong autonomy this creates a societal divide: one segment favoring centralized government control, while the other supporting paramilitary expansion, believing these groups better serve their security needs. This

divide amongst paramilitary groups, especially those involved in criminal activities, insurgencies, and terrorism, have wreaked havoc in fragile states. The devastation caused by well-armed paramilitary forces is evident in regions like the Sahel, where groups such as Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb have taken advantage of weak borders to smuggle advanced weapons, perpetuating violence and instability across boundaries.

Moreover, the rise of Private Military Companies (PMCs) complicates the issue. While PMCs operate legally in many instances, providing security services for governments or corporations, they often operate in legally ambiguous zones. Countries like the United States, South Africa, and China have seen a growth in these entities, which sometimes border on paramilitary activity, further complicating global arms control.

From the Schutzstaffel of Nazi Germany to the Interahamwe militias in Rwanda, paramilitaries have shown the capacity for large-scale atrocities, often operating with impunity. Today, the global landscape is filled with such groups, whether in the form of political militias, organized criminal syndicates, or extremist organizations like Al-Qaeda and ISIS. Their access to specialized military equipment not only enhances their ability to commit violence but also prolongs conflicts, making global peace ever harder to achieve.

Definition of Key Terms

Paramilitary Organization

A non-state or semi-military force operating outside of a country's formal military structure. These organizations engage in armed conflicts and civil unrest and can range from militias to private military contractors. Paramilitaries often blur the line between legitimate state actors and non-state actors. Examples include rebel factions in Latin America, Libya and Yemen.

Private Military Companies (PMCs)

Legally registered firms that offer military services, such as providing armed personnel, combat support, and logistics. PMCs operate in conflict zones on behalf of governments, but their operations exist in legally ambiguous areas. They are becoming increasingly relevant to modern conflicts, with companies like Wagner Group and Academi.

Auxiliary Paramilitary Forces

Support/backup forces that assist regular military units, often in unofficial capacity. These forces can include armed civilians or militia mobilized in emergencies. They tend to be found in unstable regions where governments rely on non-formalized groups for control.

Arms Proliferation

The rapid and uncontrolled spread of military-grade weaponry and technology to non-state actors, including paramilitary groups. This often occurs through illicit arms markets or via loopholes in international arms trade agreements. Arms proliferation has been especially problematic in regions like the Sahel and the Middle East.

Specialized Military Equipment

Advanced weaponry and military technologies traditionally used by state militaries but now increasingly available to paramilitary groups. Examples include armored vehicles, drones, and high-powered assault rifles like the XM7 and AK-47.

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)

Portable firearms and other lightweight weapons, including assault rifles, pistols, machine guns, and RPGs (rocket-propelled grenades). The easy access and proliferation of SALW, particularly in the MENA region, has fueled the rise of paramilitary groups

Arms Embargo

A ban on the export of weapons and military equipment to specific countries or groups, usually imposed by international organizations like the United Nations. Arms embargoes are aimed at preventing the escalation of conflicts.

End-User Certificate

A document issued to certify that the purchaser of military equipment is the intended final user and will not transfer the equipment to other parties. Manipulation of these certificates often allows paramilitary groups to access advanced weaponry illicitly.

Insurgency

A rebellion by non-state actors, often paramilitary groups, against an established government. Insurgencies frequently use guerrilla tactics and aim to disrupt government control. Paramilitary

groups involved in insurgencies are often armed with specialized equipment, allowing them to prolong conflicts and challenge state forces.

Rebel Faction

An organized group rising in armed opposition to a recognized government. Rebel factions often operate as paramilitary forces, seeking political control, autonomy, or major policy changes. Examples include the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front in El Salvador and the Houthi rebels in Yemen.

Proxy Warfare

A form of conflict where external powers indirectly engage in warfare by supporting local paramilitary groups, insurgents, or militias with funding, weapons, and intelligence. The Syrian Civil War is an example where multiple foreign states backed different factions.

Porous Borders

Weakly regulated or unmonitored national borders that allow the unchecked flow of weapons, goods, and fighters. Porous borders enable paramilitary groups to smuggle in specialized military equipment, exacerbating conflicts in regions like the Sahel.

State-Sponsored Paramilitaries

Paramilitary groups covertly or overtly supported by national governments. Support can include weapons, funding, or logistical aid, often to achieve political agendas without direct involvement. Historical examples include the U.S.-backed Contras in Nicaragua.

Mercenary

A professional soldier hired to serve in a foreign army or paramilitary group, often for personal profit. Mercenaries are commonly associated with private military companies and are frequently employed in conflict zones where state authority is weak.

Civil-Military Divide

The gap between the official state military forces and paramilitary/non-state actors who claim to protect citizens. This divide is pronounced in fragile states where paramilitary groups are seen by a part of the population as protectors in the absence of effective government forces, leading to societal division on who must wield legitimate force.

Legitimacy of Force

A philosophical and legal concept concerning the right to use violence to achieve political or social objectives. In traditional state theory, the state holds a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. The rise of paramilitary organizations equipped with specialized weaponry challenges this monopoly.

Key Issues

Proliferation of Specialized Military Equipment to Non-State Actors

The unchecked spread of advanced military equipment - such as assault rifles, drones, and encrypted communication systems - into the hands of paramilitary organizations has significantly altered the landscape of modern conflict. What was once the sole domain of national militaries is now accessible to insurgent groups, militias, and even criminal syndicates, enabling them to operate with impunity. This proliferation has shifted the balance of power in regions plagued by weak governance. The ability of paramilitaries to acquire such equipment is often facilitated by porous borders, ineffective export control regimes, and corruption within arms-producing states. In fragile states like Yemen, Libya, and Somalia, these groups have used advanced weaponry to extend conflicts, challenge governments, and spread instability across regions. The accessibility of specialized military tools undermines efforts at disarmament and peace-building, making it difficult for national governments to restore stability.

Beyond the battlefield, the proliferation of advanced military equipment heightens civilian suffering. As paramilitary groups are able to carry out more sophisticated and deadly operations, civilian populations bear the brunt of the violence. Humanitarian efforts are often hindered by the very technologies that paramilitaries now possess, such as drones used for surveillance and targeted attacks.

Illicit Arms Trade and Smuggling Networks

One of the main drivers of proliferation to paramilitaries is the global illicit arms trade. Smuggling rings, corrupt officials, and arms brokers operating in conflict zones or regions with weak governance have created a black market for military equipment that paramilitaries exploit. In regions such as the Sahel, the Middle East, and Latin America, paramilitary organizations rely

heavily on these underground networks to acquire high-powered rifles, armored vehicles, and even missile systems.

The arms trade is not confined to borders - regional instability in one country can have widespread effects with arms smuggling networks operating transnationally. For example, the collapse of Libya in 2011 created a massive outflow of weapons from the country's looted military stockpiles, many of which ended up in the hands of militias and terrorist organizations across North and West Africa. This flow of arms is perpetuated by weak border controls and the complicity of local officials who profit from illegal arms sales.

These smuggling networks have grown so powerful that they often operate independently of state control, contributing to judicial breakdown in external nations. Their ability to evade sanctions or embargoes imposed by the United Nations, such as the arms embargo on Libya, demonstrates the **ineffectiveness of current international frameworks**

Weak governance and Fragility

Paramilitary groups thrive when state power is weak, governance is fragmented, and law enforcement is ineffective. In states suffering from internal divisions, corruption, or civil war, paramilitary organizations act as alternative sources of authority, filling the power vacuums left by ineffective governments. This is evident in countries like Somalia, where paramilitaries such as Al-Shabaab operate with relative autonomy in Somali territories. In these environments, governments may even tolerate paramilitaries if they maintain a semblance of order or pursue the government's political objectives. This blurs the lines between formal military forces and paramilitaries, making it hard for international bodies to identify who must be held accountable for violations of international law.

Furthermore, weak governance contributes to the systemic corruption that enables paramilitary groups to acquire weapons. In some cases, state actors may sell military equipment directly to paramilitary organizations, while in others, government officials look the other way as arms brokers and smugglers operate freely to paramilitary.

Public Perception and Civilian Support for Paramilitaries

The rise of paramilitary organizations is not only a result of state weakness but also stems from

the perception that these groups serve as protectors in the absence of effective government forces. In many conflict-ridden regions, segments of the population view paramilitary groups as defenders of their rights and security, particularly when national governments are perceived as corrupt, inept, or unable to protect civilians from external threats. This dynamic creates a profound divide within the society at which it operates.

In nations like Yemen and Libya, paramilitary factions often have the backing of local tribes or communities who believe their interests **are better served by such groups than by the central government**. This societal split complicates efforts to disarm paramilitaries, as disbanding these groups is viewed as stripping communities of their means of protection.

This civilian support for paramilitary organizations often makes disarmament efforts impossible without addressing underlying grievances that lead to the formation of paramilitaries in the first place. Without addressing issues such as political marginalization, lack of security, or economic disenfranchisement, efforts to dismantle paramilitary are met with resistance from the very populations they claim to protect.

Proxy Warfare and Geopolitical Agendas

Paramilitary groups can serve as tools for external actors pursuing geopolitical interests through proxy warfare. Foreign governments often provide military and financial support to paramilitaries aligned with their objectives. This practice is evident in the ongoing conflict in Syria, where various foreign powers, including Russia, Iran, Turkey, and the United States, have backed various paramilitary groups in pursuit of strategic interests.

The involvement of external powers in conflicts further entrenches paramilitary groups, as they become reliant on foreign aid to be used as tools of foreign policy. This proxy warfare dynamic creates a situation where paramilitary organizations are no longer driven solely by local grievances but are used to destabilize regions on behalf of external sponsors. This is evident in the Middle East, where funded militias such as the Houthi rebels in Yemen have become key players in regional power struggles. Proxy warfare not only prolongs conflicts but also complicates peace negotiations, as paramilitary groups are incentivized to continue fighting as long as they receive external support.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

United States of America

The United States has historically played a significant role in the proliferation of specialized equipment to paramilitary, justifying its act as geopolitical and counterinsurgency objectives. During the Cold War, the U.S. used paramilitary groups to counter communist movements, particularly in Latin America. Under the Reagan Doctrine, the U.S. funneled weapons, training, and financial support to paramilitary forces in Nicaragua and El Salvador, with the intent of countering leftist insurgencies. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) plays a central role as within this region due to numerous paramilitary units under the CIA umbrella. According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, from 1981 to 1990, the U.S. allocated \$300 million in military aid to the Contras in Nicaragua, arming them with assault rifles and tactical equipment.

More recently, the U.S. has been involved in providing military assistance to Syrian rebel groups in their fight against the Assad regime. A 2017 Pentagon report stated that the U.S. supplied over 12,000 rifles, 6,000 machine guns, and hundreds of military vehicles to Syrian opposition forces, many of which have ended up in paramilitary factions. Although the U.S. claims its arm transfers are tightly regulated, there were instances where U.S.-supplied weapons have ended up with unintended groups, including factions such as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Free Syrian Army (FSA).

The U.S. has also ratified the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), which aims to regulate the international arms trade and prevent the illicit transfer of arms to non-state actors. However, domestic resistance and lobbying from the arms industry have hindered comprehensive implementation, allowing for loopholes that paramilitary groups exploit.

Russian Federation

Russia is one of the world's largest arms exporters and has been implicated in supplying military equipment to paramilitary groups, particularly in conflict zones where it has strategic interests. According to SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute), between 2015 and 2020, Russia accounted for 20% of the global arms market, with a significant portion of these arms flowing to paramilitary forces in the Middle East.

In the Syrian Civil War, Russia has been a key backer of the Assad regime, supplying military equipment that has also reached Syrian paramilitary forces such as the National Defense Forces (NDF), a pro-government militia. Human Rights Watch reports that Russian-made weapons, including tanks and advanced missile systems, have been used by these paramilitary groups in these operations; resulting in widespread casualties.

In Eastern Ukraine, Russia has been accused of arming separatist paramilitary forces in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Despite Russia's denial of direct involvement, investigations have shown that Russian military hardware, including T-72 tanks and Buk missile systems, has been used by paramilitary factions such as the Donetsk People's Militia. In 2014, the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 68/262, affirming Ukraine's territorial integrity and condemning the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia. However, Russia's continued support of paramilitaries in Eastern Ukraine has destabilized the region, despite international condemnation and sanctions.

Iran

Iran has been a major player in the proliferation of weapons to paramilitary groups, particularly through its support for Hezbollah and the Houthi rebels in Yemen. Iran's foreign policy, driven by its desire to extend its influence in the region, often involves the direct and indirect transfer of military equipment to these groups. UN Security Council Resolution 2216 (2015) imposed an arms embargo on the Houthis, yet reports from the United Nations Panel of Experts on Yemen have documented Iranian shipments, including drones, ballistics, and SALW, to Houthi forces.

Hezbollah, another Iranian-backed paramilitary organization, is estimated to have over 150,000 rockets and missiles, according to SIPRI data. Iran has consistently provided Hezbollah with advanced weaponry, including precision-guided missiles, which have significantly increased the group's military capabilities. In defiance of UN Security Council Resolutions 1701 (2006) and 2231 (2015), which restrict arms transfers to non-state actors.

Turkiye

Turkey has emerged as a major actor in the proliferation of military equipment to paramilitary factions in conflict zones such as Syria and Libya. Turkish foreign policy has increasingly relied

on paramilitary proxies to project power and achieve strategic objectives, particularly in its opposition to Kurdish forces in northern Syria.

In 2020, Turkey was reported to have supplied armed drones, armored vehicles, and advanced military technology to paramilitary groups allied with the Government of National Accord (GNA) in Libya, as part of its intervention in the Second Libyan Civil War. Despite United Nations Security Council Resolution 1970, which imposes an arms embargo on Libya, Turkey has openly provided military assistance to GNA-affiliated paramilitaries, significantly altering the balance of power in the conflict. Turkish drones also played a decisive role in GNA military operations, allowing paramilitaries to gain ground against opposition forces backed by Russia and Egypt.

Turkey has also used paramilitary factions such as the Syrian National Army (SNA) in its operations against Kurdish forces in northern Syria, providing them with armored vehicles, assault rifles, and logistical support. The use of these paramilitary groups has been central to Turkey's efforts to counter the influence of Kurdish militias, despite criticism from international organizations such as Amnesty International, which has documented human rights abuses by Turkish-backed paramilitaries.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has been heavily involved in the Yemeni conflict, where it leads a coalition fighting the Iran-backed Houthi rebels. While Saudi Arabia's military operations are state-led, it has been reported by the United Nations Panel of Experts on Yemen that Saudi Arabia has provided arms and logistical support to Yemeni paramilitary factions that oppose the Houthis. These paramilitary groups are often poorly regulated, often using Saudi-supplied equipment, including small arms and military vehicles.

In defiance of UN Security Council Resolution 2216, which imposes restrictions on arms supplies to non-state actors in Yemen, Saudi Arabia has continued its support for these paramilitaries, often justifying its actions as necessary for countering Iranian influence in the region. This has led to criticism from international human rights organizations, which argue that Saudi Arabia's military assistance has contributed to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

China

While China does not have a direct history of arming paramilitary groups, it has been involved in the global arms trade, often supplying weapons to states that then transfer them to paramilitary factions. SIPRI data shows that China is a significant arms exporter, with much of its weapons trade going to African and Middle Eastern nations.

In 2017, a Small Arms Survey report found that Chinese-manufactured weapons were being used by paramilitary factions in South Sudan, despite a UN arms embargo. The weapons included automatic rifles and grenade launchers, which were supplied to South Sudan’s government forces but later fell into the hands of paramilitary militias. China’s reluctance to ratify the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) has drawn criticism, as its weapons often end up in conflict zones where paramilitaries operate with impunity.

Development of Issue/Timeline

Date	Event	Outcome
July 1, 1855	Establishment of the Pinkerton National Detective Agency	The creation of this private paramilitary force marked a pivotal moment in the history of non-state armed organizations. The immediate impact was the emergence of the first major private security force in the United States, which at its peak employed more agents than the standing army of the United States. This unprecedented development demonstrated how private organizations could amass military-grade capabilities traditionally reserved for state actors. The long-term implications were profound: it established a precedent for private military contractors and showed how non-state actors could acquire significant military capabilities. The Pinkerton Agency's activities, particularly in suppressing labor movements, highlighted the

		potential for private paramilitary forces to influence domestic politics and social movements.
January 6, 1929	Formation of the Schutzstaffel (SS) under Heinrich Himmler	The appointment of Heinrich Himmler as Reichsführer-SS marked the transformation of the SS from a small paramilitary unit into one of history's most notorious and well-equipped non-state military organizations. The immediate impact was the creation of a parallel military structure within Nazi Germany, equipped with advanced weapons and operating outside traditional military command structures. The SS rapidly expanded its arsenal to include cutting-edge military equipment, armored vehicles, and specialized weapons.
March 23, 1933	Enabling Act in Nazi Germany	The act effectively legalized paramilitary organizations like the SA and SS, setting a dangerous precedent for state-sanctioned paramilitaries. The immediate impact was the rapid expansion of these organizations' power and access to military-grade equipment. The long-term consequences reshaped international law: after WWII, the Nuremberg Trials specifically addressed the legality of paramilitary organizations and their accountability under international law. This led to the development of new legal frameworks regarding state responsibility for paramilitary actions and influenced post-war restrictions on non-state armed groups. The experience with Nazi paramilitaries directly influenced the Geneva Conventions' provisions on armed groups and military organizations
February 26, 1936	Creation of the Spanish Blue Division	Franco's creation of this paramilitary force marked a significant moment in European paramilitary history. The immediate impact was the formation of a 47,000-strong volunteer force equipped with German weapons and training. This force would later serve alongside the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front. The long-term

		<p>consequences included establishing a model for state-sponsored paramilitary organizations operating outside national borders. The Blue Division demonstrated how paramilitary forces could be used as tools of foreign policy while maintaining plausible deniability. Their access to advanced German military equipment set precedents for future international arms transfers to non-state actors. The experience gained by these forces would later influence Spanish military doctrine and contribute to the development of modern special operations concepts.</p>
<p>March 15, 1961</p>	<p>CIA-Led Bay of Pigs Invasion</p>	<p>The failed invasion of Cuba by CIA-trained Cuban exiles represented a significant moment in the history of state-sponsored paramilitary operations. The immediate impact was the embarrassing failure of the invasion force, despite being equipped with modern American military equipment including M3 tanks, B-26 bombers, and naval vessels. This event influenced future U.S. covert operations and led to stricter controls on paramilitary support programs. The long-term impact included increased skepticism about paramilitary operations and highlighted the need for better oversight of military equipment transfers to non-state actors. The incident also pushed Cuba closer to the Soviet Union and influenced future Cold War proxy conflicts.</p>
<p>January 16, 1993</p>	<p>UN Security Council Resolution 819</p>	<p>First major resolution specifically addressing the threat of paramilitary groups in the Bosnian War. The immediate impact was establishing "safe areas" and attempting to limit paramilitary operations. The long-term consequences included developing new UN protocols for protecting civilians from paramilitary violence and creating frameworks for disarming non-state armed groups. The resolution influenced future UN approaches to dealing with paramilitary organizations and led to stronger peacekeeping</p>

		mandates. The experience in Bosnia shaped international policies on preventing ethnic cleansing by paramilitary forces
September 10, 2001	UN Programme of Action on Small Arms	First comprehensive international framework specifically targeting the illegal arms trade supplying paramilitary groups. The immediate impact was creating new international standards for weapons tracking and transfer controls. The long-term consequences included improved international cooperation in preventing weapons from reaching paramilitary organizations and establishing better monitoring systems. The Programme influenced national legislation worldwide and led to stronger controls on small arms transfers. It remains a key tool in combating paramilitary armament.
April 2, 2013	Arms Trade Treaty Adoption	First legally binding international treaty regulating conventional arms trades, specifically addressing transfers to non-state actors. The immediate impact was creating new legal obligations for states to prevent weapons from reaching paramilitary groups. The long-term consequences included establishing international standards for arms transfers and improving cooperation in preventing paramilitary armament. The treaty created new mechanisms for monitoring international arms flows and influenced national export control legislation. It remains the primary international instrument for controlling arms transfers to paramilitaries.
July 15, 2016	UN Security Council Resolution 2298	Established new frameworks for preventing chemical weapons from reaching paramilitary groups. The immediate impact was creating specific protocols for monitoring and preventing chemical weapons proliferation to non-state actors. The long-term consequences included improving international cooperation in preventing paramilitaries from acquiring WMDs and establishing

		new verification mechanisms. The resolution influenced later approaches to controlling dual-use technologies and shaped international efforts to prevent paramilitaries from acquiring sophisticated weapons
October 12, 2022	UN Adoption of New Counter-Terrorism Framework	Created specific provisions for preventing paramilitary groups from acquiring advanced technologies. The immediate impact was establishing new international standards for controlling dual-use technologies that could benefit paramilitary organizations. The long-term consequences included improving international cooperation in preventing technological proliferation to armed groups and creating new monitoring mechanisms. The framework influenced national legislation on technology transfers and shaped approaches to preventing paramilitary modernization

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) (2013-Present)

Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2013, the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) aims to regulate the international arms trade and prevent the illicit transfer of weapons to non-state actors, including paramilitary groups. The ATT requires states to assess arms transfers to ensure they do not contribute to human rights abuses, terrorism, or destabilizing conflicts. While over 110 countries have ratified the treaty, its implementation has faced challenges due to inconsistent enforcement, particularly in conflict zones where illicit arms markets thrive. The ATT has brought awareness to the need for tighter regulation of arms transfers, but the lack of universal ratification. Finding how the treaty can comply with all nation's foreign policy has proved to be challenging.

UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (PoA) (2001-Present)

Adopted in 2001, the UN Programme of Action (PoA) on small arms seeks to prevent and reduce the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons (SALW), which as stated earlier are often the primary tools of paramilitary organizations. The PoA emphasizes improving national controls on

arms transfers, border security, and cooperation between states to track the flow of arms. While the PoA has led to some progress in building national capacity for arms control, the issue of specialized military equipment falling into paramilitary hands remains a challenge due to the complexities of global arms trade.

International Small Arms Control Standards (ISACS) (2012-Present)

Developed by the United Nations Coordinating Action on Small Arms (CASA), ISACS provides technical guidelines to assist countries in controlling small arms and preventing their proliferation to unauthorized groups. These standards are intended to strengthen national legislation, improve arms management, and promote international cooperation. However, despite these guidelines, many regions, particularly in Northern Africa and the Middle East, struggle with enforcement due to corruption and weak governance, allowing paramilitary groups to access weapons through poorly regulated stockpiles.

UNODC Firearms Protocol (2005-Present)

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) adopted the Firearms Protocol as part of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime in 2005. This protocol seeks to prevent the illicit manufacturing and distribution of firearms - which is critical in regions where paramilitary groups operate. The protocol focuses on enhancing international cooperation in tracing and controlling the flow of firearms. However, the scope of the protocol has been limited by the reluctance of some states to share intelligence or fully comply with its provisions due to foreign policy in relation to data security. As of 2023, over 118 countries have ratified the protocol, but gaps in global cooperation continue to allow paramilitary organizations to procure weapons.

The European Union's Arms Export Control Policy (2008-Present)

The European Union (EU) has developed a stringent arms export control policy that emphasizes responsible arms transfers, particularly to regions experiencing conflict. The EU Common Position on Arms Exports (2008) requires member states to assess the impact of arms sales on regional security and human rights. This policy has led to several EU states blocking arms exports to regions such as Yemen, where paramilitary groups are active. However, the policy

lacks coherence, with some EU member states continuing to export military equipment to countries involved in proxy conflicts, such as Saudi Arabia.

The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development (2006)

The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development seeks to address the links between armed violence, development, and security. It emphasizes the need to reduce the proliferation of arms and paramilitary activity as part of broader efforts to promote sustainable development. This declaration has garnered the support of 113 states and highlights the socio-economic impacts of paramilitary-driven conflicts, such as the collapse of governance, and social conflicts that paramilitary can cause internally such as civil-military divide.

UNIDIR's Regional Disarmament Initiatives (2009-Present)

The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) has initiated several regional disarmament programs aimed at preventing paramilitary groups from accessing specialized military equipment. These programs focus on improving arms control and disarmament efforts in conflict zones across Africa and the Middle East. UNIDIR's work includes capacity-building initiatives for national governments to manage arms stockpiles, trace illicit arms flows, and dismantle paramilitary organizations. In regions with porous borders and weak enforcement, these efforts have been undermined.

Possible Solutions

Global Arms Database and Enhanced End-User Monitoring

An upfront and indicative solution that would address the issue in a unique manner could be the establishment of a UN Global Arms Database which aims to track all military equipment from production to end-user through mandatory registration by states. This could be integrated with the International Tracing Instrument (ITI), which would prevent arms diversion to paramilitary groups. UN peacekeeping missions could also inspect stockpiles on a systematic basis, with INTERPOL and UNIDIR aiding in tracking illicit arms flows within given regions or demographics.

Paramilitary Reintegration and Economic Diversification of states

Paramilitary, much like military or war veterans, so too face innate cruelty and many casualties

on the battlefield. Developing reintegration programs that provide former paramilitary combatants with vocational training and economic opportunities in sectors like renewable energy and technology could be a manner that gives the current paramilitary a second choice in terms of their career. United Nations bodies such as the Economic and Social Council could partner with local governments and businesses to create employment zones, reducing reliance on arms. Conditional cash transfers, like those used in Colombia under UNDP, would support transitioning combatants.

Decentralized Border Control with Tech-Enhanced Surveillance

Within nations or regions facing major insurgencies with porous borders, we should also aim to employ solutions that focus on empowering or assisting those in need. This could be done by empowering local communities with technology-driven border control, using drones and AI surveillance to monitor and intercept arms smuggling along porous borders. UNODC could implement this in collaboration with peacekeeping missions, especially in regions like the Sahel, to prevent arms from reaching paramilitaries.

Regional Peacekeeping Forces with Expanded Mandates on existing Treaties

Lastly, enhancing regional UN peacekeeping forces with expanded authority on existing treaties such as the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) would allow society to fix existing efforts to become more effective and thereby ensure the quality of past attempts are upheld. Such efforts would likely assist to disarm paramilitary groups and destroy seized arms caches. These forces could be improved upon compared to their past counterparts through the use of better intelligence-sharing networks and generalized technology, as well as collaboration with local governments to secure border regions or porous borders.

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Appendix

	Paramilitary Forces	Pro-Government Militias
Government Link	Official	Semi-official, informal
Functions	Regular and irregular activities	Rather irregular activities
Autonomy from Government	Low	High
Example	National Gendarmerie, France	Janjaweed, Sudan

Figure 1: Dominant Form of Auxiliary Security Forces, 1981-2007

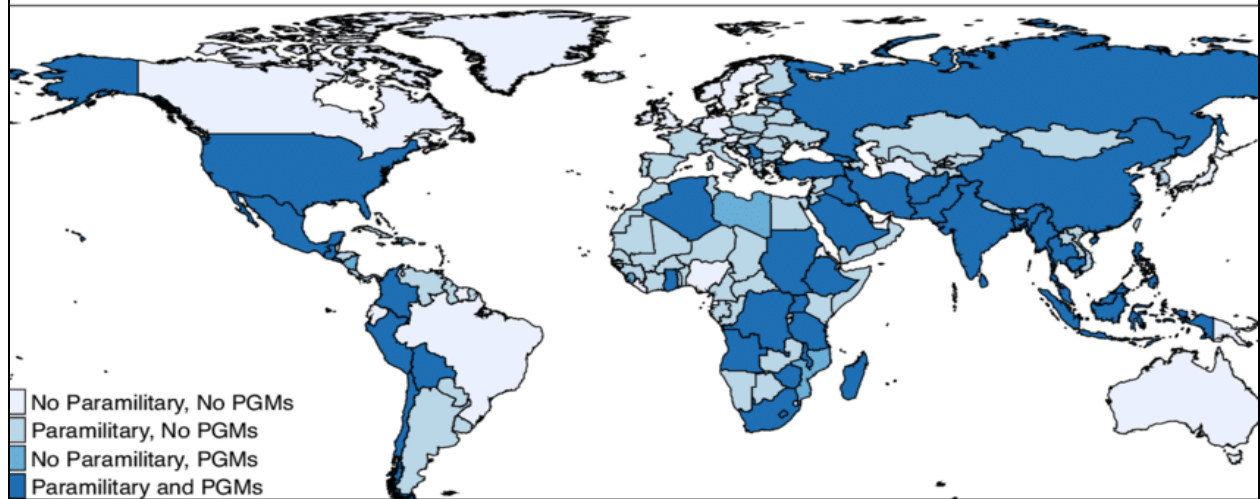


Figure 1: Visual representation of the location of the paramilitary groups based on association with government as ‘Pro Government Militias’ (PGMs), private paramilitaries, or auxiliary paramilitaries.

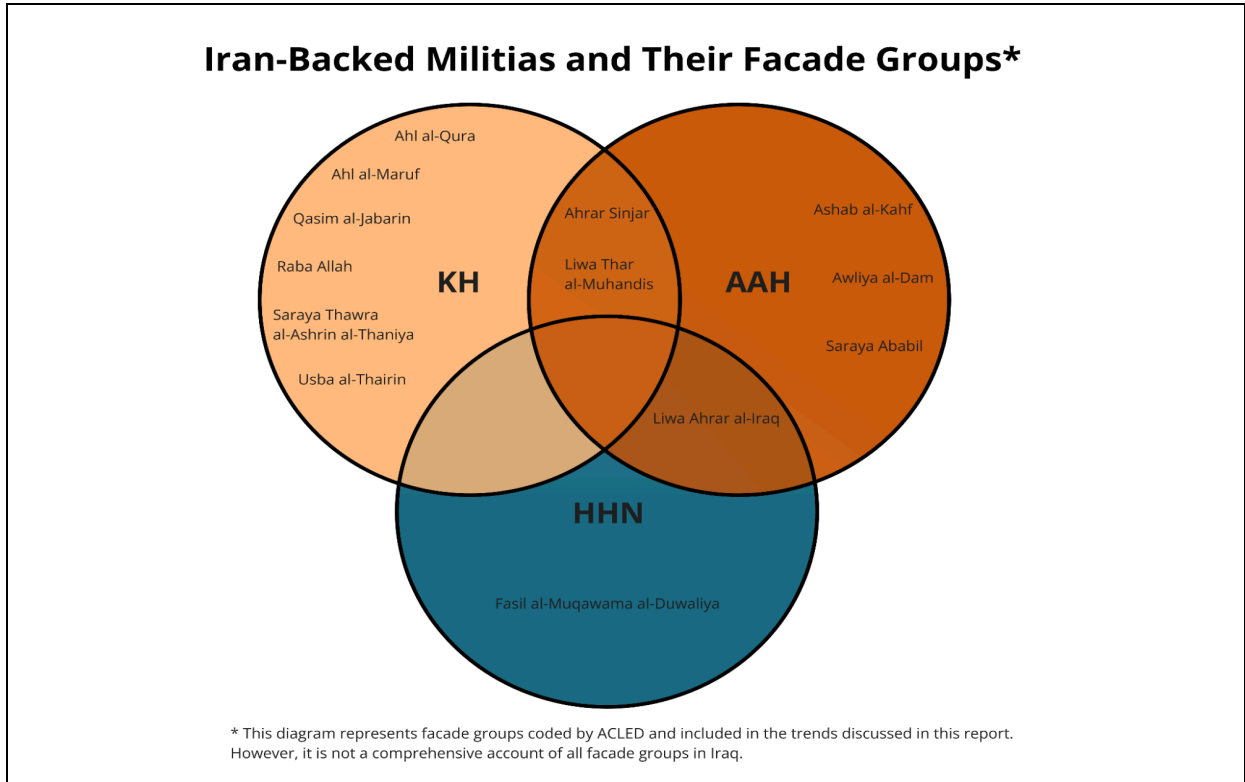


Figure 2: Iranian backed militias represented under their different alliances and regional autonomies.

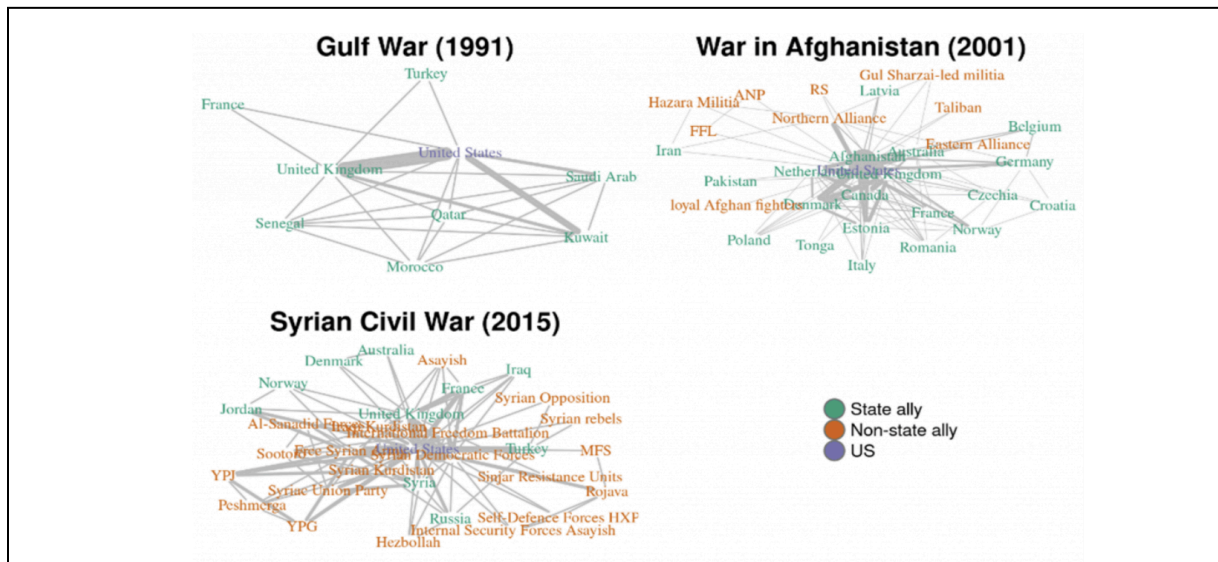


Figure 3: Selected network plots of US operational partners and proxy warfare. The thickness of each connection corresponds to the number of operations performed with that actor. Actos comprise of both state, non-state militia, paramilitary, and United States proxywarfare actors.