CHAPTER 5

Small Arms Trafficking in Bangladesh: Threat to National Security

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5.1 INTRODUCTION

With the changing nature of conflicts and violence in contemporary history, the relative importance of small arms and light weapons (SALW) has increased manifold in escalating conflicts, notwithstanding the devastating effects on the fabric of the society, polity and economy around the world. Small arms are the weapons of primary choice in 46 of 49 post-Cold War conflicts causing 90 per cent of the casualties. The targets are mostly innocent people including women and children—a significant shift from traditional warfare where unarmed civilians remained mostly unaffected in war. Inter-state wars are exceptions, rather than the norm. Today’s wars are fought with small arms that are in the hands of non-state actors. Easy access to and availability of small arms and light weapons by non-state actors around the world have triggered organised crime, societal violence, violent political movement and in many cases, ethnic insurgency. While there are international restrictions on the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, such restrictions are lax in the case of small arms proliferation. The irony is that weapons of mass destruction are not killing the people while small arms are continuing to do so. To a large extent, flexibility in state regulations regarding small arms control contributes to increase trafficking. The most conflict-prone zones of the world continue to suffer from illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons. The global hotspots for arms trafficking are Middle East, Central Africa, South America, Eastern Europe and South Asia.
Among the South Asian countries that are experiencing decades of violence and terror induced by SALW, Bangladesh has been a major transit country for illegal weapons transfers to the insurgency-ridden areas of southern Asia on the one hand, and drug trafficking route of two of the world's largest drug producers, Golden Crescent and Golden Triangle on the other, "without being the primary supplier or user of both."\(^3\) The weapons that the law enforcing agencies recovered, ranging from hand guns to military style weapons such as AK47, AK56, M16, hand grenades, rocket launchers,\(^4\) had been pilfered from security forces, or smuggled from a larger bulk of weapons with end destination to a third country. Today, gunrunning has emerged as a major security concern for Bangladesh to the extent that security experts are considering the possibility that in the near future, Bangladesh may emerge as an end destination for illegal arms, unless concerted efforts are taken by the government to control its trafficking. These weapons that fall into the category of SALW come from Afghanistan and Pakistan on the one side and from Thailand, Singapore, Myanmar, and Cambodia on the other before going to other destinations through sea and land routes.\(^5\)

The threat of illicit small arms is increasingly being linked to national security. Experts believe that one of the major contributing factors for the recent rise of terrorism in Bangladesh has been the easy availability of small arms. It was also a well talked about issue throughout the year 2009, as the elected government of Awami League led 'Grand Alliance', after taking over power on 06 January 2009, embarked on reinvestigating the arms hauls cases in various times including the ten trucks of arms seized from Chittagong Port in 2004.\(^6\) What are the security implications for Bangladesh caused by illicit arms trafficking? What are the capacity building options available for Bangladesh to address the issue of small arms control? How can Bangladesh address the issue (that at times can be very sensitive) without compromising on its national interests?

The answers to these queries will first include a background analysis of the nature and magnitude of illicit trafficking of small arms in Bangladesh, and the threat it poses for national security. The paper aims to discuss dispassionately the challenges that undermine effective small arms control, as well as explore the options for effective management and capacity building of the state
security agencies of Bangladesh. The paper argues that, illicit small arms in Bangladesh are increasingly becoming accessible to non-state actors, mainly due to relaxed and ineffective counter-arms trafficking measures in Bangladesh. It argues further that compromising on measures to effectively control small arms trafficking will result in compromising on national security. The paper addresses the issue of arms trafficking by taking into account regional and international initiatives on one hand, while emphasising on national capacity building on the other. It concludes by suggesting that a strong counter-trafficking strategy will make arms trafficking a less lucrative business within and beyond Bangladesh, and offer relatively more security to the state and its people.

A qualitative methodology has been applied to this chapter. Data and information have largely been culled from published works, newspaper reports and analyses. Websites have also been used for research materials. The collected information and data have been critically scrutinised and used as objectively as possible to accomplish the objective. Apart from the Introduction and Conclusion in Section 1 and 6 respectively, the present chapter has five sections: Section 2 gives an overview of SALW trafficking in Bangladesh while Section 3 examines the effects of small arms trafficking on national security of Bangladesh; Section 4 discusses the initiatives to control SALW in Bangladesh; Section 5 identifies the challenges of controlling small arms trafficking, while discussing the priorities and options for national capacity building.

5.2 OVERVIEW OF SMALL ARMS TRAFFICKING: GLOBAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

5.2.1 The Dilemma of an Acceptable Definition

Small arms are technically known as crew portable firearms, although there is no single acceptable definition of it. There is not even agreement on the precise contours of the problem.\(^7\) The 1997 Report of the United Nations Panel of Government Experts on Small Arms defines small arms as weapons designed for use by several persons serving as a crew. Revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, submachine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns fall within the category of small arms.\(^8\) Similarly, the definition of illicit trafficking has also emerged as a problematic issue.
According to Canadian proposition, international transactions not authorised by one or both state parties, constitute illicit trafficking. However, countries like Pakistan, Qatar, Sudan and Syria find that this definition violates the UN Principles of self determination and the right to self-defense. The UN Guidelines for International Arms Transfers defines illicit trafficking as “that international trade in conventional arms, which is contrary to the laws of States and international laws.” Amidst the different definitions, it is clear that illicit trade of weapons needs to be differentiated from legal trade, although, as one expert notes, the difference is not always straightforward, as almost all illicit arms start life as licit. Proliferation of SALW is often a symptom rather than a root cause of a problem; in which easy availability of small arms aggravate conflicting situations.

Today, illicit trafficking broadly covers various types of illicit transfers including transfers using fraudulent documentation, theft and leakage from stockpiles, capture through conflict, transfer without permission, cross-border smuggling by individuals and groups supplying to non-state actors. While it is easier to point fingers at state and non-state actors engaged in illicit arms transfer, arms brokers, arms manufacturing and exporting companies often go unnoticed even though they are arms brokers and occasionally intimately involved in illicit SALW trafficking. In other words, the importance of an agreed definition of small arms trafficking is not only for generic purpose, but also it is vital for effective controlling measures worldwide. Scholars argue that the definition of small arms, light weapons and firearms reflects directly on how, when and with what means illicit trafficking is dealt with nationally as well as internationally.

5.2.2 Global and Regional Trends of Small Arms Trafficking

The demand and supply of SALW has not changed significantly although the end of the Cold War was expected to ease global and regional tensions. One reason for its legal production to continue may be the profit factor. The small arms industry continues to be a “big business” in the West as well as in many of the mid-level developed countries. For instance, in the United States (US), this industry plays an important role in its economy. In the year 2009, it exported arms worth US$ 6795 million which made it the largest seller of weaponry in the world. On the other hand, the country
imported weaponry worth US$ 831 million. Consequently, USA became the eighth largest buyer of arms globally. A year ago in 2008, the US sold weaponry worth US$ 6090 million and purchased weaponry worth US$ 808 million.¹⁴

Israel too, though not among the world’s developed countries but the most powerful military machine in the Middle East, is both an important exporter and importer of arms. Even North Korea earned around US$ 100 million in 2008 from arms trade.¹⁵ Despite all the efforts by the international community to curb the menace of small arms, SALW continue to spread at ominous speed. Sadly enough, it is the industrialised North who is the biggest producer of small arms, while the effects of small arms are taking devastating tolls in the developing world. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), global arms transfers rose 22 per cent from 2000-04 to 2005-09.¹⁶ Furthermore, the manufacturing capacity has increased of other countries as well. One must, therefore, take into consideration the larger picture of arms transfer, the global business of small arms and light weapons being one that is very profitable for the producing country as well as the intermediaries, which is why the scale and volume of arms production continue to increase every year in spite of the devastating effects of SALW.

In the midst of licit arms trade, the issue of illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons remained in the dark for decades. Disarmament of nuclear and biological weapons found themselves in the top agenda of most conferences, summits and talks held during the Cold War era. It was only in the 1990s, when studies identified SALW to be the cause of 90 per cent of the war casualties worldwide, the attention shifted to weapons that were small and light yet wreaked much greater havoc. What it is that makes small arms so desirable? For one thing, rapid development in technology has made small arms truly small, light and ‘user friendly’ to the extent that sometimes an hours training is only required to be able to operate these. It is small enough to carry by hand or on shoulder and easy to transport from one place to another in huge quantities without being caught by law enforcing agencies. There are also other practical reasons for small arms being a popular choice for the users. Small arms are comparatively cheaper option, if considering the price one would have to pay for a conventional, chemical or even a nuclear weapon. Small arms are easy to operate that even a child of 10 or 12
years can pull the trigger, explaining one of the reasons for the rise in child soldiers in conflict areas of Latin America, Africa, as well as some parts of Asia. In South American countries, children have been recruited by leftist armed groups. In Colombia, the separatist group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) has recruited children as soldiers even from Venezuela, Panama and Ecuador. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), about half of the world’s child soldiers happen to be in Africa. The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (CSUCS), says that, more than 500,000 children, aged less than 18 years, have been recruited into armed groups worldwide (it means about 250,000 child soldiers exist in Africa) among whom, about 300,000 are actively involved in fighting either against the government troops or opposition armed groups all over the globe. While scenarios are grim in Africa, it is not pleasant in Asia either. Albeit, child soldiers do exist, it is not easy to determine their exact number(s). For example, in Afghanistan, militant groups often recruit child soldiers. In Myanmar, the government itself recruited children as soldiers. The Maoist insurgents of Nepal recruited and used large number of child soldiers. The now extinct Sri Lankan insurgent group LTTE extensively used child soldiers during the civil war. It had been accused of having used around 5,794 child soldiers since 2001.

Unlike major arms trade, data on small arms trade is less transparent. Even then, by using other indicators, such as number of bullet-wounded victims and perpetrators of armed violence, the nature, scale and impact of this clandestine trade can be partially measured. Following are some facts and figures on small arms that will shed some light on the intensity of the problem:

- There are over 600 million small arms in the world, or one for every ten people.
- Nearly 60 per cent of small arms are in civilian hands.
- Majority of illegal small arms start out as legally traded weapons.
- More than 500,000 people on average are killed with small arms every year: one person every minute.
- Small arms are the cause of 60 per cent-90 per cent of direct conflict deaths.
In spite of the alarming statistics of arms trafficking, it is very difficult to identify and take action against those who are involved in the transactions. The vested interest groups are numerous and diverse: manufacturing companies, gun lobbyists, the intermediaries, businessmen, arms dealers, non-state actors such as insurgents, organised criminals, drug lords. Even, intelligence agencies are accused in many countries to play a vital role in the transfer of arms to non-state actors of other countries. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the role of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of USA in supplying arms to the Contras in Nicaragua or to the Mujahideens in Afghanistan not only encouraged the arms manufacturing industries to produce more weapons, but allowed arms transfers to go into the hands of non-state actors and underworld criminal syndicates. The business is commercially so profitable that more and more arms manufacturing companies are literally turning a blind eye to the effects of unchecked and unverified sales to third parties. In most of the cases, the developing countries are the end users of the weapons that have been produced legally by companies located in industrialised countries, but shipped off to illegal destinations. There are evidences which clearly suggest that vast numbers of weapons transferred by authorised means end up being transferred or used illegally, “be it days, years or decades after the original transfer.”

Closer to home, South Asia is also a violence and conflict prone area that experiences the brunt of both legal and illicit arms transfers from state and non-state actors. Although it is not a home to major arms manufacturing complexes, India and Pakistan are the most important small arms producers in South Asia. Interestingly, they are also home to the largest illicit production of small arms. The spread of weapons in this region can be traced back to the first Afghanistan war, in which both sides procured weapons from around the world. Many of these weapons have since flowed to Pakistan and India. Similarly, the end of war in Cambodia made available large numbers of weapons that have found their way into Sri Lanka, north-eastern India and Kashmir. The recent US-led war in Afghanistan, the on-going violence between India and Pakistan, Kashmir, and until recently the internal violence in Sri Lanka and Nepal, continue to add to both the supply of and demand for small arms in the region. According to the International Action Network
on Small Arms (IANSA), there are now an estimated 75 million firearms in South Asia, 63 million of which are in civilian hands.\textsuperscript{25} India and Pakistan overwhelmingly account for most of the weapons (40 million and 20 million respectively) where there is local production as well.\textsuperscript{26} The impact of these weapons has been felt from Sri Lanka to Afghanistan. Thirty years of violence between India and Pakistan over Kashmir has killed tens of thousands of people. The Maoist insurgents of Nepal have been largely responsible for the rapid spread and availability of small arms in the country. According to an estimate, there are about 55,000 small arms and light weapons in the hands of various armed groups, criminals, private militias and common people other than the Maoist separatists.\textsuperscript{27} In Karachi alone, small arms were used to kill an estimated 20,000 people between 1992 and 1998.\textsuperscript{28} Myanmar has been a major source of arms supply to the region as it has its own domestic small arms industry.\textsuperscript{29}

5.2.3 Mapping Small Arms Trafficking in Bangladesh

\textbf{Tracing the Origin}

For decades, Bangladesh has been a transit country for illegal weapon transfers to the insurgency-ridden areas of southern Asia. According to one report, “Bangladesh experiences a tremendous amount of illegal smuggling of arms, explosives and ammunition. Its open-ended import and export laws, along with its extensive coastline and shared borders with many conflict-ridden areas, make it an ideal transshipment point for weaponry.”\textsuperscript{30} It is only recently that security experts agree for a fact that Bangladesh is also an end destination for a considerable bulk that is enough to create social and political havoc in the country. Weapons that range from locally made hand guns to military style weapons such as the AK47, AK56, M16, hand grenades, rocket launchers, etc. These weapons that fall into the category of small arms and light weapons come from Afghanistan and Pakistan on the one side and from Thailand, Singapore, Myanmar, and Cambodia on the other before going to other destinations.\textsuperscript{31} Bangladesh’s sea and land borders were routes for illegal trafficking of weapons that were off loaded at the offshore of Cox’s Bazaar and transported through different trawlers, boats, and trucks to insurgency groups of the neighbouring countries. The advantages for such transshipments to take place in the first place were
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many. Some of the ‘convenience factors’ for the traders/smugglers to carry out their operations in clandestine manner are the country’s geographic location near the high seas, less border control, the hilly terrain, and sometimes corrupt law enforcing agents. The fact of the matter is that trafficking is by definition a clandestine activity that does not necessarily involve the governments of the countries it is operating. Even though Bangladesh was initially a transit country only, the smugglers could also see the potential of this country to become an end destination itself. They also knew that even though the market was small, there was a possibility that the demand would rise in the future.

The process, in which Bangladesh transformed from a transshipment country into an end use destination was gradual. It can be divided roughly into four periods that may be overlapping sometimes. The first phase of arms trafficking started within a few years after Bangladesh’s creation. Disgruntled members of later outlawed political leftist parties such as the Sharbahara and the Purbo Bangla Communist Party members retained their war weapons. Even today, these outlawed criminals possess considerable weapons that are sold or rented out to common criminals. These members had turned into criminals and gangsters. The second phase of fresh inflow of illicit arms started with the insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The Shanti Bahini—the armed wing of the Parbattya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS), acquired arms from various sources, but mainly from India. The third wave of arms inflow came perhaps in the late eighties with the demand for small arms primarily from mainstream political parties. Allegedly, all major political parties were buying arms through illicit sources such as the outlawed political parties, underworld criminal syndicates, the Shanti Bahini, Rohingya Muslims entering Bangladesh. It is perhaps at this point that political violence all over Bangladesh reached its peak in terms of casualties including deaths, murder, as well as public and private property destruction.

The fourth and present phase of flow of small arms into mainstream political and social life of Bangladesh started in the nineties with the emergence of religious extremist groups such as the Jama’atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami, Bangladesh (HUJI-B) etc. The extremist groups armed themselves with military style weapons such as revolvers, assault
rifles and grenades; some of them even received training from outside of the country. JMB grew in number and strength unnoticed between 1998-2005.\(^{35}\) Their visibility as an armed militant group was witnessed with the series of bombing targeting civilians. The Udichi bombing, the bomb blast at the Ramna Batamul, the simultaneous 500 bomb blasts in 63 districts are to name but a few.

**Current Trend**

In mapping small arms trafficking in Bangladesh, the present situation needs to be first assessed. Based on crime reports and various statements made by concerned authorities, the current trends of the problem in Bangladesh suggest the following:

1. Armed Violence in society has gone up sharply raising the demand for small arms and improvised explosive devises.
2. The demand for sophisticated arms has increased due to globalisation and the end of the Cold War. More and more lethal weapons are now available in the black markets of Bangladesh at affordable prices, and
3. More and more innocent people including women and children are becoming targets of gunfire, either directly or through crossfire.

Government statistics reveal that legal firearms number around 1,22,000 in the country. Among these, there are 67,000 rifles and 55,000 are shotguns and other small arms. This is merely the number of legal arms. The arms with private security companies, security guards of banks and financial institutions, security agency personnel do not belong to this account.\(^{36}\) However, the number of illegal arms in Bangladesh is still debatable ranging somewhere between 2,000,000 to 4,000,000.\(^{37}\)

The recent surge of small arms and Improvised Explosive Devices (IED)-induced violence and terror started with the series of bomb blasts across Bangladesh. IEDs refer to home made devises designed to cause injury and death by using explosives alone or in combination with toxic chemicals.\(^{38}\) Never before was the civilian the primary target. Public casualties were until recently accidental or a result of crossfire. The new trend is to terrorise and kill innocent people in public places. Moreover, it appears from the Udichi bomb blast, the bombing of cinema halls in Sylhet and the 21 August 2004
attack on the opposition rally that powerful explosives, such as the hand grenades that are meant for military purpose only, are also available in the black and grey markets. The country-wide bomb blasts within less than an hour on 17 August 2005 also demonstrate that even home-made cocktails can terrorise a country, if used in a coordinated way. Investigations showed that the whole incident was carried out carefully by a dedicated religious extremist militant group, and its links to other Bangladeshi and international jihadi groups and members of the Bangladeshi Diaspora group remain a serious concern.39

The rise in terrorist attacks on civilians, increasing number of arms haul and escalating crime over the last several years surprisingly demonstrate that small arms are the tools or weapons of preference for criminals and terrorists. With the demand for firearms on the rise, the supply has increased too. Contrary to popular belief, not all firearms are smuggled in from external sources. While the more sophisticated weapons are trafficked into the country, crude small arms and IEDs are being indigenously produced within Bangladesh. In fact, over the years a large number of cottage industries of firearms have grown in the big cities as well as in the remote areas of Bangladesh.40 Following are some key points on small arms trafficking in Bangladesh from the previous year, i.e., 2009 that have been collected from various leading newspapers of Bangladesh.41

- The main points of entrance for illegal arms are the land border areas, the airports, and the seaport, that is, the Chittagong seaport. According to a newspaper report, illegal arms are entering Bangladesh from several countries through 48 points of entrance.42
- According to one report, at present, there are about 200,000 illegal arms existing in the country.43
- Apart from small arms, more deadly weapons that belong to the category of light weapons are being trafficked into Bangladesh; for example, rocket-launchers and grenade-launchers are being smuggled into the country. The Chittagong-Bandarban Highway is frequently being used to smuggle and spread arms all over Bangladesh.44
- One of the bloodiest incidents took place on 25 February 2009 when members of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) looted the
arsenal in Pilkhana, Dhaka and brutally massacred many officers of the Bangladesh Armed Forces stationed there along with their families. The looted weapons, albeit very much legal, in many cases, were not recovered.

- Around 8,000 convicts under arms lawsuit, have disappeared or escaped leaving no trace; these people had been accused throughout last 12 years.

- Member of the outlawed political parties in the southeast and southwest parts of Bangladesh smuggle huge amount of arms in and out of the country; there is little doubt that criminal groups also receive a big share of these weapons to continue their anti-social activities.

- On 4 March 2009, two grenades were found at Rangpur Medical College Hospital.

- On 20 June 2009, 40 bombs were recovered in Brahmanbaria.

- Ten grenades were captured along with 3 culprits in the Sherpur, Mymensingh district by the RAB on 13 October 2009.

- The grenade, among other small arms, has become widely available in Bangladesh as arms hauls recovered these from throughout the country.

- Another remarkable incident was the seizure of arms and ammunitions and arrest of the main culprit named Faisal Mustafa by the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) from a madrassah in Bhola district in late March, 2009. The RAB seized 2,500 bullets, 3,000 grenade splinters, an explosive blaster, 200 grams of gunpowder, two remote control devices, two walkie-talkies, two bows, bullet making components and equipment, binoculars and a book on how to operate firearms.

- Student politics has been largely responsible for the rapid spread and availability of illegal arms throughout the country. In recent days, many students belonging to the student wings of different political parties have been engaged in violence with arms. In January 2010, 12 Shibir (student wing of the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami) activists were arrested with
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They were held with four revolvers (three made in Pakistan), three light guns (LGs), 26 bullets, bomb making materials, half kilogram gunpowder and some extremist books.

**Profile of Arms Traffickers and Motivational Factors**

In most cases, the traffickers are among the vulnerable section of the society who are petty criminals, thugs and goons, organised criminal syndicates, terrorist, outlawed political activists, student activist, insurgents, external actors, and sometimes even law enforcing agents. Most of the criminals, including those involved in trafficking are youth between the age of 15-30 years. There are mainly two types of arms traffickers: Those who are local confine their operations within the borders moving from one destination to another; and there are the transnational traffickers, who are engaged in such illegal trade across borders. In any case, more than one person are involved in the process before the firearm finds itself in the hands of the end user. As a result, tracing the origin of the arms supplier becomes difficult, involving the manufacturer, distributor, importer, trafficker, broker, and end user who are all part of the trafficking scheme.

Arms traffickers sustain in such illegal trade because of their alleged nexus with vested interest groups including corrupt law enforcing agents, “ambitious” politicians, influential people, external intelligence agencies, terrorists and insurgent groups from both sides of the borders. For example, among others, there was speculation over the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) being involved in the Chittagong arms haul of ten truckloads. Arms trafficking is undoubtedly a risky trade. If caught, traffickers can be sent to imprisonment. What motivates one to be engaged in such a dangerous and risky trade? Studies related to human security and supported by field research identified social, political and economic factors that lure young unemployed men, women and even children to this trade. Some of them are briefly discussed below:

a. **Economic Factor** plays a major role in arms trafficking. Small arms mean big business! But this is a global phenomenon and it is one of the reasons for global production that is mainly concentrated in the industrialised countries is thriving. In the Bangladesh context, arms business is
profitable too whether by trafficking, marketing or terrorising innocent people.

b. **Social Factor** such as unemployment coupled with factors such as poverty, peer pressure, lack of family values, drug addiction, etc lure many youth into the underworld of crime. In their initial years, these youth are used by their “big brothers” as drug carriers and arm traffickers.

c. **Political Motive** is perhaps one of the major causes for the increasing demand for small arms in Bangladesh. Activists and supporters who have political patronage aquire both licensed and unlicensed arms which they use sometime indiscriminately in political violence, extortion, dispute over tender rights etc. In the name of student politics, armed cadres belonging to the student wings of major political parties, are used by godfathers in arms trafficking from one place to another.

d. **Ideological Motivation** in the form of religious extremism is the new addition to the list of causes for acquiring small arms through illegal channels. However, unlike the background of earlier criminals and terrorists (poor and illiterate), religious extremist groups recruit educated youth from various institutions, including the madrassahs. The organisation is reportedly involved in transnational criminal activities. The arrest of a key leader in late 2008 revealed JMB’s involvement in a counterfeiting ring run by LeT across South Asia, and in arms smuggling across the Indian border.

The number of traffickers and arms trafficking are both increasing mainly due to the above mentioned factors. Moreover, due to its strategic location, Bangladesh is widely perceived to be a safe haven for traffickers of illicit arms destined for other countries. The proliferation of small arms and explosives in recent times has not slowed down in spite of several measures to seize illegal arms and ammunition that are trafficked into Bangladesh. Whether Bangladesh is a transit country or an end use country has been debated in great length. It should be clear that, Bangladesh is not a destination country. It is used by transnational actors for trafficking purpose. From various reports, it is apparent that Bangladesh territory has often been used clandestinely by a third party for trafficking weapons.
Although for a long time, arms trafficking was believed to have very little, if any at all, security threat for transit countries, studies have shown this to be untrue. The spill-over effects should not be undermined, for they are equally devastating. Incidences of bomb blasts, terror attacks, armed attack has risen sharply over the decades, impacting both state and human security, details to be discussed in the following section.

5.3 IMPACT OF SMALL ARMS TRAFFICKING ON NATIONAL SECURITY OF BANGLADESH

5.3.1 Correlation between Small Arms Trafficking and National Security

'Security' in the simplest way is the state of feeling happy and safe from danger or worry. One is considered secure if he or she can exist in an environment free of coercive power. The concept of national security is as old as nation state which is a 19th-century European phenomenon. It came to be widely used and discussed in international relations following World War II. In today's world, nation-state is the basic unit and security of a nation-state is an indispensable element in contemporary international relations. Till the demise of Cold War national security discourse has mostly been dominated by traditional security that was limited primarily to a military dimension of interstate relations. The state, especially its defense from external military attacks, has conventionally been the exclusive focus of security policies. Since the early 1990s, there has been a growing trend to expand traditional definition of security to include non-traditional challenges. These challenges include threat from environmental degradation, illegal migration, HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases, transnational crime, and others which pose serious threats to the security and well-being of communities and individuals. In tandem with this trend, was also the clear tendency by governments, civil society actors, and policy community to designate and treat an increasing list of national and transnational issues as security matters. A modern definition of National Security according to International Working Group on National Security (IWGNS) is “National Security is the first and most important obligation of government. It involves not just the safety and security of the country and its citizens. It is a matter of guarding
national values and interests against both internal and external dangers—threats that have the potential to undermine the security of the state, society and citizens. It must include not just freedom from undue fear of attack against their person, communities or sources of their prosperity and sovereignty, but also the preservation of the political, economic and social values—respect for the rule of law, democracy, human rights, a market economy and the environment—which are central to the quality of life in a modern state.  

Bangladesh is located at the southern part of South Asia. It is faced with a wide range of severe challenges in the field of security intertwined by both traditional security (TS) and non-traditional security (NTS) issues. Threats to its security, as understood from the traditional perspective, never disappeared. Occasionally, such threats manifested vividly constrained by poverty, backwardness, underdevelopment, human deprivation, mis-governance, environmental degradation, turbulent process of socio-economic and politico-cultural development etc. In recent years, Bangladesh, like its other South Asian neighbours, also faced many common non-traditional challenges. Amongst those, small arms trafficking has been a growing concern for Bangladesh. One may not immediately see the relationship between illicit trafficking and national security, the linkage, however becomes obvious later. Illicit trafficking, whether it is in commodities or persons, takes place against national and international law. Contemporary security experts view a direct relationship between illicit trafficking and national security, arguing that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons is an immediate security challenge to individuals, societies and states around the world. Most, if not all of the illicit weapons, are owned by non-state actors such as terrorists, criminals, warlords and insurgents—all of whom challenge the stability, and in extreme cases, the existence of the state. Thus, compromising on measures to effectively control small arms trafficking will eventually lead to compromising on national security.

In the case of Bangladesh, far from popular belief that it will remain unaffected from small arms and light weapons since Bangladesh is not fighting a ‘classical’ war nor faced with any insurgency movement like its neighbours, the effect of arms
trafficking on security has proven otherwise. The number of illegal firearms as well as the number of legal arms in illegal hands have increased manifold over the last two decades. From what was a handful of old and rusted 303 rifles in the immediate post-1971 Liberation War, today's weapons amount to thousands of new shiny automatic revolvers, grenades, machineguns, shotguns etc. smuggled from outside the country. In spite of several measures to seize illegal arms and ammunitions in major cities and bordering areas of Bangladesh, the proliferation of small arms and explosives has not slowed down. Whether Bangladesh is a transit country or an end use country has been debated in great length, but without any definite answer. Beyond doubt, the extent of small arms trafficking in Bangladesh is comparatively lower from some of the neighbouring South Asian countries; however, recent incidents of arms haul in Bangladesh over the last years (see Annex), indicate that the pattern, frequency, quality and magnitude have changed significantly. According to police sources, criminals and terrorists are arrested with weapons and ammunitions that even the security authorities of the country are not equipped with. There is no doubt today that there is a direct relationship between the current trend of arms trafficking and the rise of armed violence and terrorist attacks on the state and individual. The incidences of the bomb blasts on the one hand (the Udichi function in 1999, the grenade attack on 21st August 2004 on the then leader of the opposition and present Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in Dhaka, the assassination of former Finance Minister Shah A M S Kibria on 27th January 2005 in Habiganj, the countrywide bomb blasts on 17th August 2005), and arms recovery on the other (the Bogra arms haul incidence in 2003, the seizure of ten trucks of sophisticated arms in 2004) point out the nexus between arms trafficking and the possibility of Bangladesh to be exposed to external actors unguarded. This itself is a concern for Bangladesh's national security. Easy access to and widespread availability of illegal weapons in Bangladesh has armed the militant and the petty criminal alike. In the long run, both territorial security (TS) and human security (NTS) have been directly and indirectly affected, as the following discussion would show.
5.3.2 Impact on State/Traditional Security

The impact of small arms trafficking on state or traditional security is overpowering and overarching. Arms trafficking eventually leads to availability of weapons in the black market; access to those weapons empowers non-state actors including insurgents and criminal syndicates and eventually endangers the security and the stability of the state. The insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts is a case in point. The Shanti Bahini could sustain fighting the Bangladesh Army because of the supply of weapons the former received from various sources including from neighbouring India. Alleged political support, ignorance and denial by the relevant government agencies encouraged criminals like Pichchi Hannan or Sweden Aslam, political extremist groups like the Sharbahara, and “Jama’atul Mujahideen (JMB) not only to be armed to the teeth but their activities have impinged directly on state security.

Terrorism is a case in point. Empowerment of the non state actor eventually included the arming of terrorist groups in Bangladesh with small arms and explosives. Experts today may even consider terrorism to be a greater security threat to Bangladesh’s security than a territorial invasion by India—the latter view that was held during the Cold War by most Bangladeshi academicians, policy makers and men in uniform. Small arms and terrorism are now natural allies. Arming of militants with sophisticated arms and explosives has led to a series of nation-wide terror attacks in Bangladesh (see Annex). Currently, two types of extremist groups have been involved in terror activities in Bangladesh—the religious extremist groups and the left-wing political extremist groups. While the religion-based extremist groups operate across the country, the ultra-leftist groups are concentrating mainly in the north and south western districts of the country. Powerful IEDs and hand grenades were used in the bomb blasts that targeted the unarmed civilians. The first suicide attack using human bomb was carried out in 2005 in front of a court in Gazipur, was reported by a BBC correspondent as “a major escalation in what has become a campaign of violence.”

Counter-Terrorism finds its place in the top agenda of protecting Bangladesh’s national security. After the landslide victory in 2008, the current government focused and acted on counter terrorism needs. The security forces’ drive against the terrorist outfit continued round the year, and confirms the governments pledge to
condemn terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. Most of the terrorists' activities in Bangladesh were believed to be home grown. However, in 2009, arrests of a number of terrorists of India and Pakistan, allegedly operating from Bangladesh gave rise to an apprehension that international terrorist organisations or groups may be giving direct or support to the homegrown militant outfits. Such an international link is dangerous and likely to put the security of Bangladesh at stake.

The most concerning effect of small arms trafficking on national security is the gradual weakening of the state machineries, in particular, the security agencies. Like many developing countries, the state is in a disadvantageous position vis-à-vis the non-state actors. In encountering the terrorists and criminals since the Udichi bombing, state security agencies found themselves not only unprepared with the new form of terrorism, but they lacked the necessary infrastructure, expertise, resources etc. (discussed in detail in the following section). On top of it, corruption in the public sector, such as in the police force and justice sector can act as barriers for security. Secondly, most of the militants, extremist and criminal groups were armed with better weapons than the law enforcing agents. At a time when police were armed with WWII 303, revolvers, automatic rifles, grenades and even AK47 were being recovered from criminals and terrorists. Finally, most of the extremist activities in Bangladesh are thought to be home grown. However, with the recent arrests of Indian, Pakistani, and Myanmarese (Arakanese) terrorists and criminals (with arms) and even British citizens in Bangladesh, one is tempted to draw a number of possible scenarios concerning potential threats to Bangladesh's security. Such arrests also shed light into the nature of underground activities taking place without the knowledge of the State. It not only raises question on the effectiveness/management of the present border security, but also creates tension in bilateral/diplomatic relations with neighbouring countries, especially with its bordering states.

The Bangladesh-Myanmar relation is a case in point where arms trafficking along the border can cause bilateral tension. Although by and large the Bangladesh-Myanmar border has been quiet and peaceful for many years since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, the relationship between Myanmar and Bangladesh used to be
considered as a friendly one. However, over the years frictional issues like the influx of Muslim Rohingya refugees in 1979, raiding of Bangladesh Border Out Post (BOP) by Myanmar Army in December 1991 and push in of Rohingya refugees again in 1992 had strained the relationship. Presently, the issues that are acting as stumbling blocks between the good neighbourly relationship of the two countries include: (i) Rohingya refugee issue; (ii) Maritime boundary delimitation; and (iii) Myanmar security forces activities along Bangladesh-Myanmar border including erection of barbed wire fencing. Currently, there are 26,000 officially documented Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh residing in the camps. These are part of over 250,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh during 1991-92 to escape from forced labour, rape, and religious persecution at the hands of the Myanmar military. Though they were taken back by the government of Myanmar after reaching an agreement of repatriation by the two countries, most of them after repatriation again returned to Bangladesh and started living in and around Bangladesh-Myanmar bordering areas. According to the UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC), there are some 200,000 Rohingya living in Bangladesh, of whom only 28,000 are documented and in two government camps assisted by the agency. Some of the refugees have been allegedly involved in various crimes including smuggling of arms and ammunition. In fact, in one of the Panel Discussions held in BIiSS, one of the panelists said that a large number of Rohingyas are involved in gun running along the Bangladesh-Myanmar. Some have been even connected to supplying weapons to terrorist and criminal syndicates including the JMB.

The year 2009 witnessed a different kind of threat to state security. On 25-26 February 2009, members of the Bangladesh Rifle's (BDR) carried out a brutal attack on army officers and their families at its headquarter at Pilkhana, killing 74 people including 57 Army officers. Two major observations can be made from this gruesome killing incident. First, it demonstrates that the state security forces and their unlawful use of arms can be a source of threat to state security, and two, stringent measures should be taken to protect the arms warehouses. A renowned Professor of economics, Abdul Bayes, in an editorial for The Daily Star, posed a key question: "How could soldiers get arms instantly from the store that lies almost one kilometer away from the [meeting] hall?"
Small Arms Trafficking in Bangladesh

The Home Ministry’s probe committee could not ascertain the real cause and motive for the carnage and suggested further investigations to identify the plotters. Describing the background of the bloody mutiny, the committee led by a retired secretary, said that the grievances the BDR soldiers had harboured against their commanding officers from the army were the immediate reason for the rebellion and hinted that the players behind the scenes might have pulled strings capitalising on the discontent to destabilise the country in a planned way. Though there were speculations regarding the militant links to the BDR incidents, the committee in its primary findings has not found any militant links. Following the incident, the virtual abandonment of the border check-posts along the entire Bangladesh frontier left the country’s borders open making the country vulnerable to infiltration, smuggling and illegal movements that take much joint effort to curb. The incident has caused massive damage to the country’s two of the major defense institutions in many counts. The timing of the incident within one and half months of the newly elected democratic government was a major challenge for the government it started its democratic journey after a free, fair and credible election on 29 December 2008.

5.3.3 Impact of Small Arms on NTS/ Human Security

Non Traditional Security (NTS) encompasses “issues and factors that impinge on the security/stability of the state or individual and has become more noticeable after the demise of the Cold War.” NTS threats today include alone or combined political threats such as political instability, terrorism, human right abuses; economic threats such as poverty, the impact of an economically powerful or unstable neighbouring state, and piracy; environmental or man-made threats such as natural or man-made disaster, global ecological changes, degradation of land or water, lack of food and other resources; and social threats such as overpopulation, organised crime, transnational drug trafficking, illegal trade, uncontrolled mass immigration and disease. Most of these are somewhat prevalent in Bangladesh. In this section, the impact of SALW on human security will be discussed briefly.

As discussed in the previous section, SALW has emerged as a real threat to national security of Bangladesh. When there are so many ramifications of arms trafficking on traditional security, it is only
natural that there will be spill over effect on human security. Arms trafficking has led to availability of small arms and IEDs in black markets where criminals and terrorists have easy access to those weapons and thus use these weapons indiscriminately in criminal offence and terrorist acts. With the rise in armed violence in the community/society, the targets are obviously innocent civilians, including women and children. Hence, the link between SALW trafficking and human insecurity undeniably exists. A London-based non governmental international organisation working on community security—Saferworld, has identified the following impact small arms have on human security.81 (1) Increased risk of physical attack, (2) Increased incidences of social violence, (3) Crime among drug addicts, (4) Threat to women’s right and security (5) Risk to child security (6) Education system has suffered over the past few decades (7) Armed Violence affects livelihood and slows down productivity, and (8) Threat to livelihood.

Keeping in view the above vulnerabilities within the realm of human security (defined in terms of freedom from fear and freedom from want), the impact of armed violence is two-fold: (1) Political and (2) Socio-economic.

**Political Insecurity**

Insecurity or lack of peace sometimes is the result of violence stemming from social or political instability. Political instability continued to remain a concern for Bangladesh. Over the years, organisational politics in Bangladesh has always been made volatile and dysfunctional. As a consequence, politics could never deliver according to the expectation of the people. The year 2009, the first year of the restarted democratic journey after a free, fair and credible election on 29 December 2008 demonstrated a ‘stalling pace of democracy’s consolidation’ as the opposition repeated the previously practiced phenomenon of abstention from joining the parliamentary sessions. It is against this backdrop that SALW has re-emerged as a source of threat to political security after being almost non-existential during the caretaker government’s two year reign.

The revival of the nexus clearly reveals that SALW have become an integral part of our democratic culture—a major political backlash for Bangladesh. All the major political parties support
armed cadres who use SALW to protect and expand their own power base. The nexus between politics and underworld network has had adverse impact on governance, as more and more policies and decision-making are influenced by power, muscle and money. When political disagreement results in political violence, the citizens are affected in their daily activities. Gunfire between two opposing political groups resulted in death and injury due to crossfire, as well as destruction of private property. According to Odhikar and the US-based International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), "Despite successful holding of the national election in 2008, political violence is still an issue in Bangladesh where political parties continue to use aggression as a political tool."

**Socio-Economic Insecurity**

For many years, the problem of small arms and explosives has been undermined in Bangladesh. Factors like "self interest", "power", and "money" led some politicians to be ignorant of the issue and its long term impact, while "fear" and "harassment" crippled the civil society. The combination of the two led to the unchallenged rise of armed cadres and their anti-social activities in Bangladesh. The easy availability of arms and the protection provided by "godfathers", coupled with domestic economic factors (low per capita income, high unemployment rates, illiteracy, poverty, less economic growth, and overpopulation) are pushing more and more youths into the world of crime and terrorism.

Small arms impact the livelihood of vulnerable people directly and indirectly. In more than one study carried out by BIiSS research team, it was found that people making livelihood from rivers, sea, forestry such as fishermen and wood-cutters were the victims of piracy. Piracy has appeared as a threat and major challenge for Bangladesh. Piracy—robbery of ships at sea includes the acts in the sea like kidnapping of people for ransom, robbery, murder, and seizure of items or the ship, sabotage resulting in the ship subsequently sinking etc. Ships preparing to anchor are also becoming targets of the pirates. Lack of adequate information and data related to deep sea piracy appear to be a serious limitation to offer a full picture about the deep sea piracy in Bangladesh. Pirates are powerful organised gangs. They have modern arms and fast moving vessels in their possession, which they use against unarmed
fishermen. They have been identified as the greatest threat for fishermen especially in the coastal areas. Thus, abducting of fishermen, looting their fishes, fish nets and other valuables, taking fishermen as hostages, demanding ransom from their families, using of excessive violence, killing and/or injuring fishermen etc constitute serious security threats for coastal area people.

The recent dynamics of violence and terror in Bangladesh has woken up security experts and law enforcing agencies to the reality that this country is facing. Those who have been in a state of denial for years are now forced to admit that small arms, explosives and light weapons are serious threat to the security of Bangladesh. One fails to understand why it has taken policy makers so long to recognise the potential danger of unchecked flow of weapons that range from indigenous-made firearms to automatic rifles and hand grenades. Today, whether due to ignorance, negligence or inefficiency, small arms trafficking has emerged as a major source of threat to Bangladesh's internal and external security, in spite of the relative stability and homogeneity it enjoys compared to its South Asian neighbours. Even without a classical war or insurgency, the continuous influx of weapons has weaponised societies with both sophisticated and indigenous arms in the possession of criminal syndicates, terrorists, militants, petty criminals, and politicians. Small arms have become the preferred tools for protection, extortion and intimidation. Today, the question is no longer whether small arms is a security threat, rather, to what extent is Bangladesh vulnerable to this particular transnational threat, and how well equipped are the state machineries to control small arms trafficking into Bangladesh? This will be the focus of discussion in the following section.

5.4 ADDRESSING SMALL ARMS CONTROL INITIATIVES IN BANGLADESH

5.4.1 International/Regional level Initiatives

Due to the nature and scope of illicit trafficking, it is commonly accepted that “only joint efforts can generate the means to prevent and combat it”. Bangladesh has supported all kinds of initiatives that aim to reduce violence, trafficking, terrorism internationally, regionally and nationally. In an effort to strengthen and develop coordinated and comprehensive global action to reduce and reverse
the proliferation and misuse of small arms, the United Nations Programme of Action Against Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons. In All Its Aspects was the first global initiative to control illicit trafficking and proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Bangladesh has signed UNPoA, an indication that it believes that the issue of small arms can be effectively addressed through the framework of multilateral cooperation. It is also a signatory to several protocols, agreements and conventions which are related to trafficking, firearms, and terrorism. The menace of trafficking is actively addressed in the ARF forums including policing the illicit movement of small arms through regional efforts. Bangladesh supports initiatives by SAARC and BIMSTEC in addressing regional security. The SAARC Counter Terrorism Strategy and Convention on Drug Trafficking, has raised the need for regional cooperation to counter trafficking syndicates. As a member of BIMSTEC, Bangladesh also has an obligation to implement some of the anti-trafficking measures at the national level.

5.4.2 Bilateral Initiatives

Addressing the issue of trafficking obviously calls for bilateral talks with neighbouring countries. In the case of Bangladesh, small arms trafficking take place along the Bangladesh-India border and the Bangladesh-Myanmar borders. Government to government talks on addressing the small arms control have been in the agenda in almost all the government level talks between Bangladesh and India. The forums where such talks took place include meetings between Heads of the States, Foreign Ministers meeting, Home Ministers meetings, foreign secretaries meetings, and DG of BDR and BSF. In 2009, India and Bangladesh agreed to finalise three agreements on mutual legal assistance on criminal matters, transfer of sentenced persons and combatting international terrorism, organised crimes and illicit trade. With Myanmar, the bilateral talks on cross-border trafficking with the Myanmar authorities have not always been pleasant. However, during the Bangladesh Foreign Minister, Dr. Dipu Moni’s visit to Yangon, the issue was raised and both parties agreed to cooperate on stopping illegal gun running.
5.4.3 National Initiatives

The law in Bangladesh is very strict on the illegal possession and use of firearms. The Arms Act XI of 1878 dictates the terms of licensing, issuing and carriage of arms and explosives in Bangladesh. Violation of any articles of the Act can lead to a minimum of 6 months sentence. The original law is rather old, formulated during the British colonial period. New acts have been added to deal with the current trend. The Arms Regulating Act in Bangladesh is in the process of further change. The Ministry of Home Affairs of Bangladesh is preparing a draft for that purpose. Along with this, the Ministry is also carefully examining all the licenses for the firearms given between 2001 and 2006 in the country. The list containing the names of the people to whom those licenses had been issued, is now being checked and sorted out. The Ministry, through an order is collecting the statistics of licenses of the firearms from all over the country, issued during the term of the previous coalition government. The government has issued about 500 licenses for firearms for the last one year.

Since arms trafficking is linked to many other criminal activities including drug trafficking, human trafficking, gold smuggling, money laundering and terrorism, control measures have been expanded to those sectors as well. In April and June 2008, the Money Laundering Prevention Ordinance and the Antiterrorism Ordinance were enacted respectively. One vital feature of the act on money laundering is that it states that it is an offence for any individual or entity to provide assistance to a criminal to obtain, retain, transfer, remit, conceal or invest in movable or immovable property if that person knows or suspects that the property is a proceed of criminal conduct. These laws facilitated international cooperation in recovering money illegally transferred to foreign countries and mutual legal assistance in criminal investigation, trial proceedings, and extradition matters. The new ordinances are part of the effort to enable Bangladesh to enter the Egmont Group, the international body of Financial Intelligence Units (FIU) that plays a critical role in fighting terrorist financing.

On the ground, the law enforcing agencies, security forces, intelligence agencies are all responsible for illegal arms seizure, tracing and arresting criminal/terrorist, and investigating crime scene. At times their function may overlap; in general however, they
operate within their respective jurisdiction. In the case of arms recovery from within the Bangladesh territory, the police and paramilitary forces have a major role in arms seizure, arms recovery drives, and arresting the criminals. However, from time to time on the initiative of the government, arms collection drives are undertaken in various parts of the country to curb the diffusion of illegal weapons. Such drives may involve the military and can be undertaken nationwide in a very limited time span as was done in 1972, 1973 and 1974.\textsuperscript{91} Such drives are taken in all parts of Bangladesh, and before national elections. Ever since the forming of the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), police have cooperated with RAB to unearth illegal weapons. The intelligence agencies—DGFI (Directorate General of Forces Intelligence) and NSI (National Security Intelligence), also play a pivotal role in tracking criminals, terrorist and traffickers. To curb trafficking of arms through sea and land boundaries, the BDR (Bangladesh Rifles), for example, checks routinely for illicit movement of arms and explosives while the Bangladesh Coastguard is responsible for checking illicit trafficking through sea and river ways. The ten trucks of arms haul in Chittagong jetty has been one of the most successful operation of arms recovery that involved all the concerned security agencies: Police, Coastguard, intelligence agencies, BDR, and Ansar.

Bangladesh took steps towards the implementation of the UNPoA at the national level. Some of the recent measures were, (1) adoption of destruction as a major means of disposal of confiscated illegal SALW, (2) observance of 9 July every year as “Small Arms Destruction Day”, (3) issuing license for small arms after strict verification, (4) monitoring licensed arms traders to control illegal arms uses, (5) increasing patrolling along its borders and checking all entry points, (6) deploying border security forces at border outposts, (7) monitoring and vigilance of welding machines factory; and (8) monitoring and vigilance of activities of courier service providers and transport agencies.\textsuperscript{92} Recently, the government of Bangladesh has decided that of the illegally confiscated SALW, only those that are re-useable according to expert opinion, would be allocated for use and the rest of such weapons would be disposed of through destruction.

The execution of the top leaders of the Jama'atul Mujahidin Bangladesh (JMB) in 2007 was a clear demonstration of the
government's resolve in dealing with such extremists and can be noted as a significant development in containing extremism in Bangladesh. Subsequently, continuous vigilance and many operational successes by the law enforcement agencies of Bangladesh kept extremist religious groups' activities under control. However, since 2008 and 2009, there have been fresh reports of terrorist groups attempting to regroup and expand their dysfunctional network in different parts of the country. Of the many explanations for the cause of religious extremists' activities, the popular explanations were back-dated/unmonitored education system, political use of religion and the socio-economic backwardness of Bangladesh. These activities may have generated insecurities and threats, impeding socio-economic and political development.

5.4.4 Effectiveness of the Counter Trafficking Initiatives

Unfortunately, the availability and lethality of small arms and explosives in Bangladesh have not slowed down in spite of strict laws that entail punitive measures. The law enforcement agencies' continue to seize illegal arms and ammunition. Several grenade attacks, terrorist attacks, social violence, and seizures of large consignments of arms and ammunitions over the last several years have raised concern for the security agencies. Despite the measures to stop terror financing, extremists and their accomplices continue to send money through illegal channels to buy weapons and ammunitions. Those who had been mercenaries in the Afghan war allegedly continue to receive moral and material support. It is believed that militants such as the JMB outfit received both domestic and external funding. One of the sources is by continuing arms smuggling across the South Asian borders. Some of them reportedly received training in explosive manufacturing, and use their knowledge to train others after returning home. According to Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) sources, as many as 44 Bangladeshis once served Laden in Afghanistan, some of them as his bodyguards. The state has not been able to stop trafficking of arms and raw materials for explosive making into the Bangladesh through land and sea borders either. Gun running continues along the Myanmar-Bangladesh border continues with ease.

If the current trend of arms trafficking continues, availability of and access to small arms and explosives will lead to more violence,
more crimes and more casualties. The capacity of the state machineries to manage small arms proliferation in Bangladesh needs to be questioned. The recent armed incidences clearly demonstrate that both national and human security in Bangladesh are vulnerable to the threats of non state actors, and unless a comprehensive approach is taken by the state to control arms trafficking, Bangladesh will transform into an end-use destination for small arms traffickers, who are always on the look out for new markets. The security system and the controlling mechanisms in the country need to be reviewed further and adjusted if necessary in order to minimise the inflow of both legal and illegal arms and ammunitions. The following section will be an attempt to identify the issues that have challenged the control of small arms trafficking and discuss on the priority areas that need to be given for strengthening anti- trafficking measures.

5.5 CHALLENGES FOR SMALL ARMS CONTROL: PRIORITIES AND OPTIONS FOR NATIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING

5.5.1 Challenges for Effective Small Arms Control

Effective measures to control arms trafficking include a combination of factors ranging from global to national issues. Addressing these issues ideally calls for national, regional and international cooperation and coordination. But in the real world, countries often lack the political will among other factors to take strong action against illicit arms trafficking. Some of the challenges and issues are identified here for a better understanding of the barriers for effective arms control.

**Globalisation and the rise of transnational syndicates**

Globalisation has its merits and demerits. If free trade and free flow of information are the positive aspects of globalisation, the rise of Transnational Organised Crime (TOC) is undoubtedly the darker side. Armed violence, increasing militarised criminal groups, inadequate understanding of the changing nature of TOC and the inter-connectedness of illegal trade in drugs, money laundering and firearms trafficking are national and global challenges in countering trafficking efforts. Bangladesh has fallen prey to transnational criminal networks mainly due to geographical setting and internal weakness.
Lack of Regional Cooperation

It is often said in the discourse of small arms control, that lack of regional cooperation is a major impediment. In fact, South Asia is perhaps the only region where there is still no regional convention or for that matter cooperation on the small arms issue. Some of the common problems are listed below:

- Insufficient information exchange and cooperation;
- Inefficient international transfer controls systems;
- Lack of cooperation among export, transit and import countries;
- Different marking and record keeping practices impede tracing and identification;
- The link between armed conflict and transnational organised criminal syndicates has not sufficiently been addressed by countries;
- Lack of political will, no sense of urgency among political governments to highlight the problem at regional forums.

Unless serious efforts are taken to address the above issues, control or curbing small arms will be difficult, if not impossible.

Limits of counter-trafficking/Law Enforcing Agencies at the National Level

Since the end of the Cold War, the number and intensity of the security issues have increased both in terms of nature and extent. This has not been easy for the state security agencies to cope with. As one author wrote, “The issue of how necessary it is to make the institutions of the state security system adapted to the changed conditions after the end of the Cold War became a preferred research problem.” The country’s economic indicators are dismal, social indicators poor, infrastructure abysmal, employment situation frustrating, trade balance unfavourable, aid dependence embarrassing and, above all, governance indicators and political culture uninspiring. All in all, the attributes or potentials of Bangladesh clearly suggest that the ability of the state to respond to internal NTS concerns and needs is weak indeed. Some of the constraints of the law enforcing agencies are discussed below:
Bangladesh Police

Presently, Bangladesh Police is operating with a strength of 1,16,376 personnel in 571 Thana’s under 7 Ranges and 6 Metropolitan Police.\textsuperscript{97} Besides these, there are Armed Police Battalion and Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) operating under the Bangladesh Police Headquarters. In most cases, police are not well trained to be able to recover enough arms and explosives nor are they as resourceful as some of the armed groups, whether these are criminal syndicates or terrorists. National agencies such as the intelligence agencies, police, paramilitary forces etc need to be trained to deal with the matter more effectively. Building up database, coordination within the agencies and information sharing among the ministries and agencies is necessary in this regard. Role of the police and other law enforcing agencies must be streamlined and standardised.

Para Military Forces

In addition to maintaining the security of the border, BDR is responsible for checking smuggling across the border. Although the BDR is legally empowered, it lacks human and material resources to keep a sharp watch over more than 4000 km long frontiers. In the rugged mountainous jungles of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the thinly guarded frontier is a threat to the security and sovereignty of the country. As such there is a requirement to deploy additional forces in the mountainous jungles of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Although the BDR is fully committed to the protection of border and prevention of smuggling, they are often called out to restore law and order, ensure peaceful elections, provide post-disaster relief and perform many other tasks that hinder their main task of protecting the border of Bangladesh and prevent smuggling.\textsuperscript{98}

Bangladesh Coastguard

Measures to control trafficking of arms and drugs in national waters are weak. The Bangladesh Coastguard was formed to carry out peacetime policing, combating smuggling activities, piracy, drug trafficking, gun running, etc. But due to shortage of necessary manpower and logistics, the Coastguard’s functions are limited to patrolling the ports’ harbours and the forest areas of the Sundarbans only.\textsuperscript{99}
RAB

RAB started its journey on 26 March 2004. It emerged out of a tremendous necessity to fight the prevalent criminal activities which had almost jeopardised the normal course of public life. It was formed by amending the Armed Police Battalion Ordinance 1979 under the Ministry of Home Affairs with the selected members from Bangladesh Army, Bangladesh Navy, Bangladesh Air Force, Bangladesh Rifles, Bangladesh Coastguard, Bangladesh Police, Bangladesh Ansar and VDP and other non-military cadres of the government. At present there are 12 Battalions deployed all over the country with the Forces Headquarters located at Dhaka. They have total manpower strength of 8,289 against an authorisation of 9,727. Although RAB has been quite active and successful in rooting out some of the most wanted criminals and terrorists of the country, including JMB masterminds, it is also criticised by human right activists for extra-judicial killings.

Intelligence Organisations

The National Security Intelligence (NSI) is the national intelligence organisation of Bangladesh. Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), the Armed Forces intelligence organisation and Special Branch (SB) of Police, are also operating at the national level. Beside these all the three services of Armed Forces, BDR and RAB have their own intelligence setup. The structural conditions of all these organisations are not very improved one. They lack appropriate equipment, technological advancement and most importantly, trained manpower to operate as an effective organisation. Most of these organisations in recent years, have been used by the regimes in power for their political gains instead of national interest. As such, questions were frequently raised about their role and efficiency. It is also interesting to note that prior to 2009 there is existed presently no central intelligence coordination committee at the highest level to coordinate the efforts of all these organisations. As a result, the effectiveness of the intelligence to unearth the perpetrators of bomb explosions has not always been satisfactory. Intelligence organisations are reactive rather than proactive. There are numerous intelligence organisations at various tiers, but their efforts are not coordinated. Lack of training and resources to deal with contemporary terrorists may be some of the hurdles.
Legal/Legislative Reforms

Apart from infrastructural and logistical weakness, like most of the developing countries, inadequate legal framework in Bangladesh creates incentives for trafficking. This is called the “Balloon effect” as experts call it where traffickers use countries with weak control regimes for triangulation. The anti-trafficking laws are either inadequate or lack implementation, providing traffickers to ignore/evade the law. A case is often dismissed because of the lack of evidence, lack of legal immunity, fear factor from the victim’s side, etc. In some case the punishment is so less, that a criminal goes back to society and commits the same crime. Unless there are strong legislations with punitive measures, it will be difficult to control traffickers. This holds also true for international legislations.

5.5.2 Priorities and Options for National Capacity Building

In the previous section, we have identified the (1) legislative needs, (2) capacity building needs, and (3) need for international, regional and international cooperation. Bangladesh urgently needs to spend on capacity building of the state itself, as well as seek cooperation from non-state actors and the international community. ‘Shared responsibility’ can help a resource-strained country like Bangladesh to overcome some of the difficulties. Stability has always been a strong demand by the private sector as well as the donor community. The issues that have been identified can be addressed best if the priorities for strengthening small arms control can be set up in a structured, logical and doable way. But at the same time, it must be taken into notice that the order of the priorities can not always be maintained, and that flexibility may be required.

First, it is very important to determine the approach in which Bangladesh would like to control trafficking. It is strongly suggested that Bangladesh takes an integrated approach to the small arms control issue. Firearms trafficking is a transnational and global crime that crosses borders and regions and needs to be addressed through national, regional and global responses and truly integrated approaches. Such an approach would take on board cooperation with external and internal actors at the same time. Not only do external actors interact with internal actors but there must be communication and information sharing between internal agencies/ministries on a regular basis. Bangladesh, being resource-
constrained, can seek out international assistance in national capacity building. The United Nations, for example, extends such cooperation to countries who seek their assistance. Bangladesh may seek UN cooperation to establish effective tracing mechanisms of illegal arms recovered inside the country. It can urge UN for a regional plan and cooperation for combating illicit arms brokering, as well as detail technical training programme for law-enforcement personnel to use modern technology for illegal arms control. Similarly, our borders are weak and porous. Unless there is bilateral cooperation, border security arrangements will always be lax, a problem for both states of the border. Cross border cooperation by enforcement officials can prevent small arms diversion as well.104

Second, All legislations in relation to firearms and trafficking need to be reviewed and updated. No control mechanism can be partially successful without appropriate laws to back up operations. It is very important to review the existing legislations on crime, traffickers, arms possession, smuggling and more. Some of the law enforcing agencies should also be considered to be empowered more, such as the members of the Drugs and Narcotics Control. According to an interview with one of the authors, the senior officials argued that the article 54 needs to be reviewed so that their men were allowed to carry firearms which they were currently not permitted to. In their experience, anti-drug drives were difficult and risky, since most of the drug traffickers were armed.105

Third, Bangladesh has to give more emphasis on capacity building of law enforcement agencies in order to have effective law enforcement. This would include storage and destruction of recovered weapons—a very important step to prevent recovered arms to be recycled in the black markets.

Fourth, Bangladesh needs to prioritise human security by investing more in NTS so that improving Bangladesh’s ranking in the human development index, good governance index, economic development index, corruption and similar indexes is not disheartening.

Fifth, another priority area for Bangladesh is interlinking public and private initiatives by seeking meaningful cooperation with business houses and civil society organisations such as selective media and non-government organisations. Civil society organisations at times can reach out more effectively to the grassroots level Their awareness building and training programmes on HIV, human
trafficking and acid violence is laudable. It may be mentioned here, non-governmental engagement on the issue of controlling small arms is very visible in other parts of the world. A number of NGO/Civil Society Organisations actively participates in raising community awareness and campaigning against the use of small arms and explosives. Research organisations and think tanks in Bangladesh can assist the government through studies exploring the linkage between the tools of violence and poverty reduction strategies. The Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BlISS) is one of the pioneer research organisations working in this sensitive area of micro-disarmament. Unless their output/findings are not taken up by the concerned ministry, their recommendations remain shelved forever.

5.6 CONCLUSION

Small arms and light weapons will continue to be a threat to humanity as long as its production and distribution continue without vigorous check and balance. It seems that countries understand the danger but are unwilling to take necessary action to reduce production and restrict distribution. The UN Conference on Small Arms and Light Weapons held in 2000 at the UN Headquarters in New York is still to see the fruit of its endeavours to curb the menace. Bangladesh is a signatory to the UN document. But, little has been done in terms of implementing its share of responsibility. What Bangladesh needs to understand is that now, more than ever, its own security is under the threat of organised crime, transnational terrorism and militancy.

This article clearly demonstrates that the problem of small arms proliferation does not only have internal ramifications but cross-border implications. If these issues are not adequately addressed bilaterally and regionally, it will remain as a misunderstood and contentious issue between neighbouring countries. Thus, in addition to being a security issue, small arms is also a foreign policy issue for Bangladesh. Blame fixing one another as to who is sponsoring and providing shelter to criminals, terrorists and insurgents will not solve the problem. Bilateral talks and meetings of top level officials do address the problem occasionally but how much they are able to resolve the problem remains an open ended question. The fact that there is very little or no result from these talks, is evident from the
continuous flow of arms from and to these countries. It is time now for transborder law enforcement cooperation to essentially curb the infiltration of small arms into Bangladesh and its neighbouring countries.

SAARC meetings, Biennial Meeting of States under the UNPoA, Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) meetings provide great opportunities for Bangladesh and its neighbours to focus on small arms control and how that can reduce the proliferation and misuse of small arms. Participants in a recent regional conference on small arms believed that a Declaration that calls for cooperation among all states in the South Asian region to deal effectively with the proliferation of small arms may be first step towards control. Confidence building measures on micro-disarmament should continue to play a vital role among states so that states can meet to discuss particular issues. But above all, countries of South Asia should have the political will and determination to control and prevent the proliferation of SALW.

Endnotes


2 In this paper, non state actors will refer to the violent type, such as armed groups, terrorists, militia, and all forms of trans-national criminal syndicates.


4 For example, for a summary of recovered weapons in Bangladesh by RAB, see www.rab.gov.bd.


6 Both the print and electronic media have covered the ten truck arms cases in detail. See for a rundown of the case, “Chronological events of Ctg arms haul”, The Daily Star, 16 May 2009.

7 Small Arms Survey, op.cit. p.2.


These figures were taken from www.oxfam.ca/.../control-arms-media-briefing-key-facts-and-figures, accessed on 15 January 2010.


Small Arms Survey, op.cit.


IANSA, op.cit.

Small Arms Survey, op.cit, p. 182.

31 Small Arms Survey, op.cit., p.182.

32 Khan, op.cit., p. 197.

33 Neila Husain, “Problems of Proliferation of Small Arms in Bangladesh”, in Dipankar Banerjee, ibid, p.3.

34 For an interesting account of the nexus between Bangladesh politics and illegal arms see, Asif Nazrul, Rajniti Aboidho Astho o Annanno Shankat, Bidhaprakash, February 1994, pp.9-20.


37 Database on Small Arms compiled by Library and Documentation Centre, BIJSS, 2009.

38 For more information on IED, see http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/intro/ied.htm, accessed on 12 July 2009.


41 Database of Small Arms compiled by Library and Documentation Centre, BIJSS, 2009.


53 Under the Arms Act XI of Bangladesh, a person can get sentenced to 6 months imprisonment to death penalty if found guilty for carrying firearms.

54 For more details, see Neila Husain, op.cit.

55 International Crisis Group, op.cit.


58 Mely Caballero-Anthony and Ralf Emmers "The Dynamics of Securitization in Asia", in ibid., p.21.

59 Ibid.


62 Chris Smith, Lora Lumpe, Aaron Karp belong to the contemporary security school of thought on SALW.

63 The then ruling power allegedly gave political support to Bangla Bhai and his operation in the Southwest, as a way to control the Sarbahara activities there.

64 Discussion with an NSI official.

65 In most of the Cold War writings on Bangladesh foreign policy and security, Bangladesh’s security concern was confined to external threats alone. Whereas, post Cold War authors tend to agree that Bangladesh’s security threats emanate from internal sources.


69 International Crisis Group, op.cit, p. 21.

In 2009, one of the alarming arrests made by RAB was of a British charity worker after a raid of an orphanage which was apparently run as a terrorist training camp and an arms factory. See for detail, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/worldnews/article-1164844/Police-swoop-British-man-accused-running-arms-factory-orphanage-deadly-weapons-cache-revealed.html, accessed on 1 June 2010.


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Recent studies carried out by BIUSS indicated the link between small arms and human insecurity. For instance, Human Security Assessment 2007 (2008) and Climate Change and National Security (2008). Field level surveys showed that communities were vulnerable to organised and unorganised crimes in which small arms were the tools of violence.

It is only very recently that government officials of Bangladesh including diplomats, ministers recognized in national and international platforms the impact of small arms on state and society. See, speeches of the Bangladesh Permanent Member to the UN, URL: www.mofa.gov.bd.

Pericles Gasparini Alves, Illicit Trafficking in Firearms: Prevention and Combat in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, United Nations, 2000, p.16.

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88 The Arms Act, op.cit.
89 United States Department of States, Country Reports on Terrorism 2008 - Bangladesh URL: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country.,USDOS,,BGD,,49fac6a728,0.html
90 Shahedul Anam Khan, op.cit., p.203.
91 Md Kaikobad Hossain, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of Bangladesh made the statement in his presentation on the “Nature and Trafficking Routes of SALW in Bangladesh” at the Regional Conference on Small Arms, op.cit.
95 According to the Bangladesh law, law enforcing agencies mean police, armed police, ansars, Bangladesh Rifles and the coastguard. However, the Election Commission has raised the issue whether to include defence services within the definition of law enforcing agencies.
97 BIISS study for BIDS, op.cit.
99 RAB Journal 2009, p. 3. RAB’s responsibilities are to (i) provide internal security; (ii) collect information on crime and crime related activities; (iii) recover unauthorized weapons, ammunitions, explosives and similar items as directed by government; (iv) conduct investigation of any crime as directed by government; (v) arrest armed organized criminals; (vi) assist police and other law enforcement agencies in maintaining the law and order situation; and (vii) perform any other work as directed by the government.
101 Grassi, op.cit.
102 Ibid.
103 Roy Isbister, op.cit.
104 Interview by one of the authors with officers of the Department of Narcotics Control, 2009.
105 Studies are linking small arms with foreign policies. See for the Bangladesh context, Neila Husain, “Small Arms and Bangladesh Foreign Policy”, BIISS Journal, Vol. 27, No. 4, 2006.
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