

The Role of Light Weapons in creating internal instability: Case study of Pakistan

Muhammad Munir*

Abstract

Easy availability and free flow of light weapons threaten national peace and stability in any country. The proliferation of SALW in recent years is growingly being recognized as a principle element behind regional and national instability in various parts of the world. The conflicts in the South Asian region are no exception as the supply of illegal arms fuels and intensify them. This situation has proved to be catastrophic in Pakistan and has adversely affected its socio-economic fabric. As the title indicates, this paper is an attempt to analyse the role of SALW in creating internal instability in Pakistan. The paper discusses the various dimensions of the issue, e.g., the situation of human (in-) security, state of instability, the major factors relating to the overall situation, local production and supply of arms, Afghan jihad, various de-weaponisation campaigns and policy issues. The discussion reflects the gravity of the situation and suggests some measures for its improvement.

Key words: Small arms, light weapons, SALW, internal instability, insecurity, Pakistan

1. Background to the Issue

One prominent non-traditional security threat the world faces today is the use of 'small arms and light weapons'. The illegal proliferation of these arms creates various problems. It creates risks to human safety, prolongs and intensifies conflicts, impedes aid from getting through to

* Author is a Ph.D. Scholar at DSS Department, Quaid-e-Azam University and presently working as Acting Director (Admin) at Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI), Islamabad – Pakistan.

the needy segments of the population, hinders economic development, and contributes to the terrorism problem. Furthermore, as in Afghanistan these arms limit the provision and efficacy of foreign aid. Often foreign aid workers are afraid of working in the countryside to implement their projects. It also makes private investors to stay away from such localities. Therefore, "small arms proliferation, with its multiple impacts on societies, is not only a disarmament or arms control issue but also has become a burning humanitarian concern in the international community." (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 7-8 March 2001.)

The term 'SALW' is not new to the world but it was given a proper recognition at the UN General Assembly in late 1995. As an outcome of this resolution a new field of research was initiated on small arms and light weapons being used conflicts situations. The UN deals with the Work on SALW through two main departments i.e., (i) the Department for Disarmament Affairs (DDA), and, ii) the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), which carries out research in arms control affairs.

The main distinction between small arms and light weapons is that Small arms are easily hand carried which could be from pistols to automatic weapons. However, light arms could be categorised in the domain of anti air craft guns to RPGs. The illegal trade of the small arms and the light weapons is a primary source of conflicts, crime and terrorism. Many terrorists take small weapons as their first option for their activities. According to US state Department 2003 report out of 175 terrorist attacks half of them were committed by the use of light weapons. The illegal trafficking of small weapons has indirect contribution to terrorism one such example is of Al Qaida. The evolving international scenario and globalisation has greatly benefited the terrorist organisations who when displace from one locality rapidly move towards a place where the law enforcement agencies are not really strong environment. The survival of terrorist's organisations is directly proportional to the gapes and lapse in the international system. (Munir, November 01, 2007).

2. SALW, Human Security and Regional (In-)Stability

The consequences of illegal trafficking of small arms have been extensive. Regardless of its evident threat to the regional and

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international security, small arms trafficking consequences have also been felt indirectly. The negative and most dangerous use of small weapons includes its use by terrorists which could be against a group of people or against any peacekeeping mission etc. (Calhoun, 2001: 8-14).

It is noted that number of people who die each year by small arms is more than those who died in the two nuclear explosions of 1945. The explosion of SALW casts negative effects on the state as well as society. Viewed either through the prisms of state or human security, small arms constitute a grave threat. Banning their use, like that of landmines, is only a utopian concept best left to some sections of the civil society engaged in advocacy. However, with appropriate measures, the flow and use of these weapons can be restricted to a large extent. And even if some portions of it can be accomplished, a great service to humanity would have been achieved. The uncontrolled proliferation of illicit (and to some extent licit) SALW becomes a major roadblock in peace and social economic development especially in those regions of the world where volatile internal political and domestic situation prevails. (Boutwell and Klare, June 2007:1-8).

According to the Red Cross one out of every two casualties in a war is a civilian women or children stuck in the crossfire. The easy use and light weight of small weapons have made the job of combatants easy who convinced children to become militants. (Norwegian Initiative on Small Arms Transfers, April 22, 2011). This situation raises an important question as to what comes first - Conflicts or the Arms? The prevailing situation of several volatile regions of the world reflects that if conflicts occur first then the intensity of these conflicts spurs the usage and accumulation of arms. Whereas, if a society is already armed, as is the case in many modern conflicts, then the very presence of these weapons strengthens and enhances power and viciously escalates the ongoing conflict.

The historical facts shows that due to the vast quantities of small arms the conflicts get even severe but also increasing their danger of creating huge people displacements. Moreover, because of small arms the threat of massive civilian casualties increases which also result in the creation of chaotic and contentious situation. Since conflicts tend to weaken the writ of the state which resultantly tempts smugglers, international criminal groups and terrorist outfits to keep the pot steaming, they use the conflict region as a safe heaven for their operations. This kind of situation, by no means peculiar to any specific region or zone of conflict, makes it extremely difficult for mediators to resolve the conflict peacefully, or establish any kind of post-conflict rehabilitation and re-development programmes (Boutwell and Klare, June 2007, pp. 1-8).

The small weapons have worked as a fuel in many national and international conflicts through out the world will killed; injured millions of people including women and children. These incidents are including countries from Albania to Congo. In other words these light weapons have actually proved to be the today's weapon of mass destruction. Writing an account of *World Conflicts*, Patrick Brogan (1999, p. 98) that number of people who died in wars since 1945 is about 20 to 30 million. Similarly, the Institute for International Studies (ISS) of South Africa reveals that Africa alone has suffered nearly six million victims in the last 50 years mostly due to small arms and light weapons (Calhoun, 2001, pp. 8-14).

3. The State of (In-)Security in Pakistan

When talking about the state of (in-) security, Pakistan is considered one of the most volatile countries in the world. Here, the situation of internal peace and stability has particularly got worse after the 9/11. Unfortunately nowadays, sectarian and ethnic violence, bomb blasts, target killing, kidnapping and suicidal attacks have become daily norms for the people of this country. With its multi-dimensional aspects, this situation has become extremely complex. It is beyond the reach of this short piece of research to present a detailed analysis of this situation. Therefore, in the following paragraphs, the discussion mainly focuses on the situation of small arms, policy issues, and local production of small arms, jihad culture, light weapons, drug culture and related issues.

3.1. Situation of Small Arms

World wide circulation of 875 millions small arms are responsible for half million deaths per year. Out of 75 million estimated firearms in South Asia about 63 million are in civilian hands, as reported by International Action Network on Small Arms (IAANSA) ; (May 15, 2011). India and Pakistan overpoweringly account for most of the weapons, i.e., 40 million and 20 million, respectively. These countries are major consumers as well as producers of these arms.

As mentioned above, there are an estimated 20 million guns in Pakistan, which has a population of 140 million; this translates as one gun for every seven persons. There is difference of agreement regarding figures of illegal arms in the province of Khyber Pakhtoon Khawa. Some give the total figure as 4 billion while other give as 7 million. The number of Arms of armed licenses issued in KPK since 1970 to 2000 is about 2 million. However, in Punjab the number of illegal arms is between 3 to 5 million according to a police report of 1997. It is doubted that these numbers could have increase to two million by now, (Jan, November 05, 2010). In the province of Sind, Karachi has 0.2 to 0.3 million licensed weapons, while government sources claim that illegal arms are less in number. This claim has been challenged by the independents analyst who is giving the figures of illicit arms in Karachi as not less than half a million. A total of 383,000 arms licences are known to have been issued in Balochistan, (Jan, November 05, 2010).

3.2. Major Factors behind propagation of Light weapons in Pakistan

The propagation of light weapons at large number in Pakistan began in the early 1980s, i.e., after the Soviet invaded Afghanistan .Similarly, the continuance of the conflicts like Afghanistan and Kashmir contributed in the propagation of small arms in the Pakistan . “There are four magnitude to the production of small arms, i.e.: i) legal sales by arms producers, part of which become illegal, ii) illicit sales and flows, iii) illegal sales from illegitimate local producers, and iv) illicit production of weapons”. Some of the important factors which have been responsible for illegal proliferation of small arms in Pakistan are discussed in the following paragraphs.

3.2.1. Absence of Proper Mechanism and Control

In tribal areas of Pakistan it has been found that there are no records of the manufacturing and sales of small arms. Until 1999, there was not even a proper policy to control the proliferation of small arms. It has been observed that more than 80 percent of arms licences issued in the Punjab during 1988 to 1995 were found to have been issued without proper verification of background of the holders. Further the facts shows that most of the weapons issued on license were used for smuggling of arms and holding more than one weapon. (Jan, November 05, 2010).

Shoaib Suddle, a former Police Officer while speaking at IPRI Seminar held in 2001 (IPRI, 2001) stated that as many as 5.2 million licences were issued in Pakistan during 1970 to 2000. According to him the number of unregistered weapons is around 10 million in Pakistan and that on average, and the number of recovered weapons since last decade is 53,366.He suggested that the local traditional arms producers of Darra Adam Khel should be provided with suitable alternatives to curb the production of weapons. According to his opinion the manufactures of weapons should be given alternatives to their jobs and the neutrality of police force is necessary to contain the flow of small arms ((IPRI Factfile, March 15, 2001)

There should be proper record keeping of a weapon from its manufacturing up till it reaches its owner. In the absence of proper

policy the covert production of arms remains ignored .only after the end of the cold war the international community realised the seriousness of the situation about the proliferation of the small arms (IPRI Factfile, March 15, 2001)

3.2.2. Major Sources of Local Production

Darra Adam Khel is considered one of the traditional sources of small arms which was earlier a cottage industry. It has now become a huge industrial enterprise, free of government control and taxation policies. The private gun-manufacturing units of Darra have a production capacity of not less than a hundred AK 47s per day. Proud of their skill, the gunsmiths of Darra Adam Khel and Landi Kotal, as well as those scattered around Peshawar, certain parts of Balochistan and Afghanistan are proficient enough to manufacture any kind of sophisticated firearms, at a much cheaper cost (Agha, 2000).

“ On the basis of various sources of supply, these weapons can be categorised into the following four groups:

- i) there are weapons that leaked from the US-supply arms pipeline;
- ii) the stocks of Soviet weapons captured by the Mujahideen during the conflict;
- iii) arms manufactured by the small-scale producers within the region (include both the Darra private gun manufacturers and the state licensed and regulated public arms producers); and,
- iv) Arms bazaars of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa are full of miscellaneous weapons that arrive in the region through extremely circuitous routes - from Vietnam to the Middle East” (Agha, 2000).

It is observed that sub-state or non-state forces make extensive use of such arsenals due to easy accessibility, storage and handling. Insurgent forces, irregular troops and freedom fighters, criminal groups and groups harbouring ethnic, religious and sectarian agendas use SALW for their particular motives with impunity. Generally speaking, the most perturbing aspect of these conflicts is that more than 80 percent of the casualties are civilian non-combatants - mostly women and children. Irregular forces do not distinguish and, being equipped

with whatever type of weapon they can acquire, use them with impunity. Here, the important point to note is that small arms, when used by disciplined regular armed forces, a clear distinction is made between combatants and non-combatants. With regard to the manufacture, production and sale of light weapons, we can divide the domestic producers of SALW in Pakistan into three broad categories (Paul Jipson V. (January30, 2009):

- i) the state owned or public sector enterprise;
- ii) private manufacturers (operating under state licence and regulations); and,
- iii) Darra Bara gun making cottage industry (which is not under any state supervision).

The fourth non-domestic source, but a major perpetuator of weapons proliferation and diffusion has been the neighbouring Afghanistan and the corresponding Kashmir freedom struggle. Both have enhanced not only the demand and supply factors, but have also kept active the free flow of weapons between the northwest and northeast of Pakistan contributing greatly to the weapons problem in the country.

3.2.3. Impact of Afghan Jihad (1979-92)

It needs no explanation that small arms proliferation in Pakistan and South Asia was a by-product of the Afghan war. The term 'Kalashnikov Culture' was coined during this period. The afghan war gave a threshold to the smuggling of small arms and light weapons in the tribal areas of Pakistan. "The war in Afghanistan is believed to have opened floodgates of both light and heavy weapons to the adjacent tribal areas and further down the country". Many opted for more accessible and cheaper illegal weapons. Political, religious and ethnic groups took advantage of the situation and got hold of heavy weapons. Despite the presence of one of the world's biggest 'illegal' arms-manufacturing industries in Darra Adam Khel, the situation was not so bad before 1979. Pakistan has now reached a saturation point in arms. (IPRI Factfile, March 15, 2001)

The US support of Mujhahideen against Soviets invasion in Afghanistan flooded the tribal areas of Pakistan with small weapons. The province of Khyber-Pakhtunkhawa and its adjacent tribal areas are reported for their 'gun culture' around the world. In the cultures of

Pathans possession of weapon is considered as a symbol of physical power particularly in the tribal society and culture. "The system, however, had its in-built mechanism for providing security for all. The decision-making system known as the *jirga* ensured security for the indigenous residents. One may debate the basis for the justice provided through the *jirga*, but it was more efficient than the formal legal system that the government has offered. Traditionally, the Darra manufacturers of arms catered to this market. It was actually a cottage industry where profits were marginal. Manufacturers produced mainly because they had been in the trade for years and did not know how to diversify or use their artisanship in other trades. The production catered primarily to the limited demand of the area". (IPRI Factfile, March 15, 2001)

3.2.4. Light Weapons and Drug Trafficking in Pakistan

Light weapons and narcotics threaten regional and international peace and security. These two products have proliferated across frontiers with great ease and a destructive impact. As out come of war the demands of small arms has increased because of two main products war and narcotics. Small arms are required by state as well as terrorists for their specific goals. "Narcotics were another factor for gunrunning because the people involved in narcotics trafficking possessed sophisticated arms. But the government has produced positive results and the menace of narcotics has now been controlled to some extent" (IPRI Factfile, March 15, 2001).

3.2.5. Other Causes

The proliferation of small arms is also caused by culture of domination and power politics in which arms are a means to impose one's own point of view. Further they are also considered a status symbol in society. Secondly, the tribal people have considered this as a part of their culture. Resistant movements in Kashmir resulted in the emergence of various armed groups who justify possession of arms for the freedom struggle. Different ethnic, nationalist and sectarian groups are one of the common users of small arms who justify their use as for their personal security. Money-laundering is another factor for the spread of this menace in Pakistan. "Arms suppliers had been providing weapons to both the fighting factions in some of the disputes. Elected

representatives were given quota of arms licences for onward distribution”.

4. Efforts by the Government to Stop Proliferation

In the past, various governments in Pakistan have taken some important steps to control arms proliferation such as ban on firing on any kind of functions and ban on issuance of the licenses. The present government is also following a comprehensive de-weaponisation policy and pursuing dialogue at the places of conflict. There is a need for a regional approach, but that is only possible in South Asia when the Kashmir issue is settled.

4.1. De-weaponisation Campaigns

De-weaponization of the society is one of the most challenging tasks for every government in Pakistan, particularly since the early 1990s. “The Government has initiated different programs with the aim of de-weaponization the federal government also planned to launch house to house search for weapon which was cancelled due to opposition from the provinces which feared a law and order situation. Some provinces even opposed the licences’ re-verification drives, terming them a useless exercise, ending in wastage of precious resources. Failure of these drives is attributed to lack of coordination between various government agencies, directly or indirectly involved in the maintenance of law and order and dealing with arms” (IPRI Factfile, March 15, 2001). Despite cancellation and re-verification of arms licences in Karachi at least three times in the 1990s, the menace of illegal weapons is yet to be controlled in the port city. A de-weaponisation programme in Khyber-Pakhtunkhawa during the first regime of Pakistan’s Peoples Party (1988-90) was a huge failure due to a strong reaction from the holders of illegal arms who were asked to surrender or sell their weapons.

Earlier, a ban was imposed on the display of weapons throughout the country in February 2000, while issuance of fresh arms licences was stopped totally from March 2000. The main stages of this Phased Action Plan for the recovery of illicit weapons were as follows: i) pre-amnesty phase, ii) amnesty period (voluntary surrender of illicit arms, and, iii) post-amnesty phase, i.e., the recovery of illegal weapons. This programme was initiated by launching a comprehensive electronic

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media campaign started on first June, 2001. The main focus of this initiative was to create public awareness and motivate the masses to surrender their illegal weapons. Before granting amnesty, a country-wide massive crackdown was launched, in which 2576 weapons were recovered while 2272 people were arrested in connection with the possession and trafficking of small Arms (Government of Pakistan, 2009). Besides a ban on new licences and display of arms, all the four provinces were asked to prepare lists of the licences issued and work out their own recommendations for de-weaponisation.

According to a news report published in the *Daily Dawn* on 14th January 2003, there were nine illegal arms for every licensed weapon currently held by individuals in the country. Similarly, the officials of the Ministry of Interior revealed that there were approximately 18 million illegally-held weapons in Pakistan compared to some two million weapons that were in the hands of legally-licensed owners. During the year 2001, General Musharraf's government launched a countrywide anti-arms drive in a bid to curb the 'Kalashnikov culture' that provides easy access to illegal weapons. The campaign led to the recovery of over 210,000 illegal arms in the first 18 months. This was just a small fraction of the estimated number of illegal weapons in circulation in the country.

It is noteworthy that despite the official ban on the sale and purchase of non-licensed weapons, unauthorised arms and ammunition remain in circulation and the illegal arms trade and gunrunning continue in the country. 3,390 weapons were seized in Peshawar in 2002. "In 2002, a US firm placed a Rs. 120 million order for 24,000 guns. The two-century-old gun-manufacturing market in Darra Adam Khel still has around 900 small and big factories, all of them illegal, with some 150 arms and ammunition shops". (*Dawn*, January 14, 2003).

After gaining power General Musharraf initiated five phase de-weaponization process. The first phase include complete ban on fresh arms license. In second phase display of weapons was forbidden in the entire country. These two phases remained quite successful because in Darra Adam Khel received a great decline almost up to 90 percent in arms dealing. Due to the ban on display and sale of heavy weapons there was a visible decline in smugglings of arms across the border. The third phase stated the employment of arms manufacturers from Darra to POF Wah Cantt so this way the arm manufacturing

industry of Darra was to observe under the Soft. This was requested by government of KPK in 1998 to Islamabad in a report.

It is notable that during the third phase which was carried out in 2000, POF employed skilled workers from the tribal areas to POF's main manufacturing units in a number of 14 countries and thus able to reduce illegal trade of arms. POF Chairman Lt Gen Abdul Qayyum was quoted as saying in August 2003 that: 'So far, we have brought in around 100 skilled artisans to the complex. Their absence from the market and their presence here is certainly making a big difference' (*Jang*, August 09, 2009). Afterward, the Ministry of Interior also successfully launched the new Computerized Arms License System (CALs).

4.2. Post-9/11 Violence in the Country

The event 9/11 brought many changes in the world in general and to Pakistan in particular. When the country joined the US led War on Terror, it embraced massive waves of violence. The spill-over effect of the violence in Afghanistan further worsened the situation. It is estimated that during the post-9/11 violence in Pakistan, around 35,000 people have been killed in this country. The Pakistani Army also has lost 2,795 soldiers while 8,671 soldiers have been wounded. There have been 3,486 bomb blasts and 283 major suicide attacks. The estimate of financial loss is US\$68 billion while the social loss is immeasurable in quantitative terms (*Nation*, September 12, 2011).

There are many reasons for this sorry state of affairs. One of the important factors is that some of the NATO weapons meant for coalition forces fighting in Afghanistan are ending up in the hands of sectarian militants, Taliban and other criminals. These stolen and snatched weapons are easily available in black markets in Pakistan's tribal regions which is a major source of supply for militants and anti-social elements. These weapons are also being used by the Taliban against Pakistani forces in various tribal areas, including Bajaur, Mohmand and Khyber agencies, where militants have established their strong resistance against various army operations. According to Major General Athar Abbas, spokes person for the Pakistan Army: 'The (Pakistani) Taliban are equipped with sophisticated US-made weapons, which they either procure from deserted Afghan soldiers or snatch from Afghan and US troops in ambushes, and ultimately use

against our forces. This phenomenon is fuelling militancy, both in Pakistan and Afghanistan. And it must be checked by the US forces based in Afghanistan because it has not only been creating trouble for us, but for them as well' (Latif, June 22, 2011).

When we talk about the issue of SALW in Pakistan, the issue of continued rivalry between India and Pakistan cannot be ignored. Pakistan accuses India of covertly supplying weapons to separatists and other militants in Balochistan province and this is all happening from Afghanistan. In February 2010, Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Salman Bashir told reporters that there was a clear proof of Indian involvement in supporting the terrorist activities in the Province of Balochistan. He further argued that India supplies weapons to militants for conducting terrorists' activities with the aim to destabilise Pakistan (*Sify News*, February 25, 2010).

Although the use of SALW is a problem for the whole country, unfortunately the situation is far more serious in Karachi, the commercial and industrial hub of Pakistan. A report released by the Human Right Commission of Pakistan during October 2011, reveals an extremely sad story. It states that from January to August 2011, as many as 1406 people were killed in the city due to continued violence. The report titled: *Karachi: Unholy Alliances of Mayhem*, was compiled by a fact-finding mission of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and was based on in-depth field work. The Commission made main political parties of the country responsible for these killings because in its view, all these parties have their militant wings involved in violence. The authors of the report called Karachi a deeply fractured city which was in the grip of ethno-linguistic and sectarian polarisation. The report suggested that the state must use all means to safeguard people's lives and properties. It further stated that there was a broad consensus on the need to de-weaponise Karachi, as in its view nothing short of total de-weaponisation would work (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, October 08, 2011).

It is noteworthy that during August 2011, the Government decided to launch a 'surgical operation' in all areas of Karachi. In fact, because of political rivalries between various factions, religio-sectarian violence, target killings and a variety of criminal activities, similar campaigns were also started in 2005 and 2007. However, these campaigns did not produce the desired results. This was mainly for the reason that

previous governments did not properly implement the policy of the possession and display of weapons. Similarly, due to gross irregularities and widespread corruption, those governments also could not take serious steps to monitor or halt the issuance of arms licences. Unfortunately, the main political parties and other relevant groups in the country have always maintained a high degree of ambivalence with regard to arms possession by a number of covertly sponsored extremist formations. Sadly, this situation has created the space for a vast underground trade and network of illegal weapons' possession in Pakistan (Mohanty, August 29, 2011).

5. Review and Reflections

The outcome of this discussion presents a very sad situation of Pakistan's internal safety and security. Unfortunately, this has happened mainly because of the spread of small arms and light weapons in the country. The easy access to these arms is a major threat to the socio-economic fabric of the society as well as the very existence of this country. This situation highlights that conflicts, disputes, disparities and deprivation must be addressed on top priority basis and this is vital to save human lives in Pakistan. "The answer to the problem of small arms proliferation lies essentially in changing the individual attitudes and value system of the members of civil society. Acquiring a level of education, civic sense and ensuring a respectable standard of living for the citizens of the state can accomplish this change in priorities. The second most important thing is effective control of crime. In this process, the people and the law enforcing agencies must collaborate in crime fighting rather than forming a confrontational attitude towards each other. It is equally important that a series of seminars and awareness campaigns be organized to encourage more fruitful dialogue and reach upon a consensus to eliminate small arms". In this context, there are at least a few very important lessons to be learnt.

- The utility of NGOs and Civil Society should not be ignored in highlighting negative effects of small arms. Therefore in any advocacy campaign the role of NGOs and civil society would be very productive.
- Illegal production of arms and smuggling of small weapons can be stopped if alternative means of income are provided

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to the people involved in this business. "Promoting economic development and providing alternatives for financial sustainability and self-sufficiency" (Perry Ms. Jennifer Perry, July 12, 2004) will contribute positively in preventing illegal production of arms.

- For commercial and defence reasons it would be in the interest of all the countries to take effective and appropriate measures to control spread of these illegal weapons.
- The initiative/advocacy to stop spread of small arms should be a continuous process and should not be limited to a specific period.

Conclusion

Overcoming the proliferation of small arms and light weapons is a major challenge for Pakistan, especially when geographically; the country is situated in a sensitive and strategically important part of the world. Therefore, a set of well-considered measures as part of a consisted policy need to be undertaken could include: non-authorized ammunition production units must be stopped; a proper record keeping of arms production, sales and purchase must be ensured at the levels of production units and dealers in between; and in order to ensure good governance there is a need to have computerized documentation of all the existing arms and weapons licences issued in the country.

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