

Small Arms and Brokers

Brokers of small arms have flourished because:

- **Small arms are in high demand among abusive governments, militias and criminals**
- **Small arms are easy to transport and conceal**
- **Small arms controls are generally weak and seldom enforced**

During the Cold War, rival governments recruited arms brokers, which are private traffickers that carry out arms deals. Those pipelines remain operational today, with brokers continuing to use them for their own purposes or on behalf of governments and official agents. These same pipelines are also employed to transfer drugs, endangered animal species and products, precious minerals such as diamonds and other valuable commodities.

Arms trafficking networks involve the cooperation of a number of actors, often scattered in several countries. Pilots based in Belgium, Ukraine or South Africa, for example, have been known to pick up weapons from Eastern Europe and deliver them to clients stretching from Africa to Afghanistan. These operators are also called arms brokers. Some of them, such as Victor Bout or Leonid Minin, are known to police and security forces around the world.

Private arms brokers are motivated primarily by profit and are indifferent to the human rights records of their clients. They are skilled in using counterfeit documents, or legitimate documents acquired through bribery, in finding clandestine transport means (primarily via air and sea routes), and in developing business relationships with corrupt officials.

Private arms brokers are elusive by definition, and their tracks often run underground. They are able to avoid attention and escape punishment either by successfully circumventing national arms controls and international arms embargoes, or by getting official protection. But they are not beyond scrutiny. The role of these traffickers in the supply of small arms to conflict zones around the world has been documented by the UN, nongovernmental organisations, national intelligence agencies, the press and civil society.

Traditionally, however, illegal brokers have carried on business as usual because of a lack of government oversight or political will to arrest such operators and break up arms trafficking networks. They have also benefited from a lack of domestic and trans-border controls, and a lack of effective national laws and international agreements to regulate their activities.

** Small arms are weapons that can be carried and used by one or two people, including handguns, assault rifles, machine guns, grenade launchers, anti-tank or anti-aircraft guns and light mortars. Light weapons, ammunition, grenades, landmines, and explosives are also part of this category.*