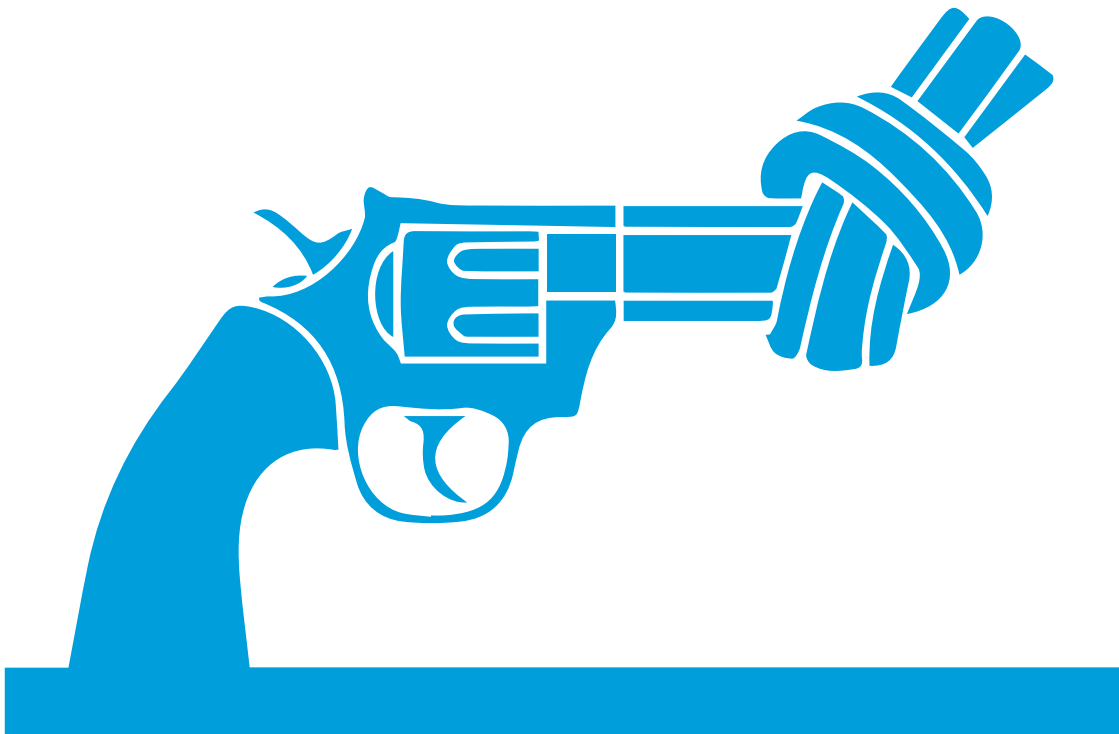




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DISEC
Research Report

GALILEE MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2025
Disarmament & International Security Committee Research Report
Safeguarding Democracy:
Addressing Foreign Arms Interference in Civil Wars.

DEFINITIONS

Democracy: A political system that allows the citizens to participate in political decision-making, or to elect representatives to government bodies.¹

Conflict: A struggle or clash between opposing forces.²

Civil Conflict: A conflict between opposing groups of citizens of the same country.³

Foreign: Located outside a particular place or country, especially outside one's own country.⁴

Transparency: Being completely visible and open to scrutiny, so that it's clear that nothing is being hidden.⁵

Military support: The assistance provided by armed forces to enhance the capabilities of allied nations or groups during conflicts or crises.⁶

Humanitarian crises: An event or series of events that represents a critical threat to the health, safety, security or wellbeing of a community or other large group of people.⁷

Alliance: A formal agreement between two or more states for mutual support in case of war.⁸

1 Definition of Democracy. *Oxford Reference*, 2024, www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095709688.

2 Definition of Conflict. *Dictionary.com*, 2019, www.dictionary.com/browse/conflict.

3 Definition of Civil War. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, 2018, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/civil%20war.

4 Definition of Foreign, *The Britannica Dictionary*, www.britannica.com/dictionary/foreign.

5 Definition of Transparency. *Dictionary.com*, 2019, www.dictionary.com/browse/transparency.

6 Definition of Military Support. *fiveable*, 2021, library.fiveable.me/key-terms/apush/military-support.

7 Humanitarian Coalition. "What Is a Humanitarian Emergency?" *Humanitarian Coalition*, 6 May 2015, www.humanitariancoalition.ca/what-is-a-humanitarian-emergency.

8 Haglund, David G. "Alliance | Politics." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2019, www.britannica.com/topic/alliance-politics.

BACKGROUND

In the aftermath of the Cold War, there has been an increased focus on civil wars. This has come about due to the fact that these conflicts have become more frequent, especially in regions like Africa and the Middle East, where they are often fueled by foreign intervention. While some cases of foreign intervention can be described as having humanitarian goals, such as the provision of medical aid, food, water, and sanitation, there are also cases of foreign intervention of a military nature that provide military support, arms supply and financial support, to different sides, which ends up aggravating the conflict in question.⁹

We can observe that military interference by foreign states tends to extend internal civil conflicts via a number of ways. It does so by introducing new objectives and interests, fueling further infighting between the combating parties, that would not have arisen were it not for their intervention. Moreover, external states forging military alliances and conducting arms trade deals with local combatants and parties creates friction among other intervening states and opens the door to additional interference. It is this dynamic that lengthens many civil war conflicts, such as the civil war in Yemen that erupted in 2012–13. It is therefore important to explore the shifting patterns of conflict and alliances, as they were exemplified in a number of cases of civil conflicts, in order to improve our general understanding of the mechanisms that increase the duration of internal warfare.¹⁰

We can therefore recognize that many civil wars tend to become “Internationalized”. This means that they cease to relate only to the internal dispute between parties, but also develop to involve numerous state actors from around the world. The internationalization of civil wars has various contributing factors, three are particularly significant:

- **Bad neighbourhoods:**
Internal conflicts rarely emerge in geographical isolation. Instead, they usually arise in regions affected by economic weakness, ethnic tension, or regional power struggles. In such situations, states may intervene in neighbors’ conflicts to secure resources, expand their influence, or secure themselves and protect their own security.

9 Woo, Jung-Yeop. *Foreign Intervention in Civil Wars*. 2017. <https://www.cambridgescholars.com/resources/pdfs/978-1-4438-9147-9-sample.pdf>

10 Lawson, Fred H. “Why Foreign Military Interventions Prolong Civil Wars: Lessons from Yemen.” *International Politics*, 1 Nov. 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-021-00357-6>.

GALILEE MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2025

Disarmament & International Security Committee Research Report

- **The threat of transnational terrorism:**
Since the September 11, 2001 attacks, various countries have gotten involved in conflicts abroad in order to stem or contain what they see as a global terrorist threat. This is complicated by the fact that many non-state armed groups are deeply involved in local conflicts, like the jihadists. The idea of national self-defense has effectively been broadened to allow preemptive strikes against terrorist bases both existing and emerging.
- **Global political tactics:**
As economic and military power becomes more widespread, great power competition and regional struggles for dominance increase. Such competitions are taking place in multiple spheres. Competition for influence over fragile regions is driven by both tangible factors like resources and intangible factors such as prestige and complicating peacemaking attempts. In worst cases, such as in the Middle East, all these factors combine to fuel extremely violent civil wars. External actors such as the United Nations are diligent to use tools such as mediation and peacekeeping for managing civil wars. Additional factors, such as tensions over large movements of refugees and migrants and fears of nuclear proliferation, may also push powers to intervene.¹¹

Military foreign intervention does not necessarily come about due to the conscious decision of states based on their strategic or political interest. They can also come about due to the pursuit of economic gain, when countries give license to their local arms manufacturers to supply warring factions with military equipment for a profit. The global arms trade is a lucrative industry worth over \$100 billion annually and as such many actors look for conflict zones where demand is high. This deadly commerce, often shrouded in secrecy, undermines peace efforts and fuels human suffering on a global scale as it adds fuel unto the fires of civil conflict, empowering extremist groups, fueling sectarian violence, amongst others thus hindering efforts to build a lasting peace.

¹¹ “Fragile Contexts Are Increasingly Battlegrounds in Geopolitical Contests.” *United Nations University*, 22 Nov. 2024. <https://unu.edu/cpr/project/fragile-contexts-are-increasingly-battlegrounds-geopolitical-contests>.

TREATIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

To prevent Foreign Arms Interference in Civil Conflicts from spiraling out of control, numerous international treaties have been established to regulate the arms trade. Here are the a few key treaties and organizations working to address this issue:

Arms Trade Treaty (ATT):

“The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2013 to regulate international trade in conventional arms by establishing the highest international standards and to prevent and eradicate illicit trade and diversion of conventional arms. The ATT contributes to international and regional peace, security, and stability, reducing human suffering, and promoting cooperation, transparency, and responsible action among the international community”.¹²

Geneva Conventions (1949):

The 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols are international treaties that contain the most important rules limiting the barbarity and cruelty of war. They protect people who do not take part in the fighting (civilians, medics, aid workers) and those who can no longer fight (wounded, sick, and shipwrecked troops, prisoners of war), these conventions emphasize the importance of protecting civilians’ lives which influences controlling arms interference.¹³

The United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC) Formation (1952):

“In 1952, the General Assembly created the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC) under the Security Council with a mandate to prepare proposals for a treaty for the regulation, limitation and balanced reduction of all armed forces and all armaments, including the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction”. Today, the UNDC takes a very important role in addressing all issues related to arms control.¹⁴

12 “The Arms Trade Treaty | Home Page.” *Thearmstradetreaty.org*, ATT, 2018, thearmstradetreaty.org/.

13 “The Geneva Conventions and Their Commentaries.” *International Committee of the Red Cross*, 30 Jan. 2024, www.icrc.org/en/law-and-policy/geneva-conventions-and-their-commentaries.

14 “United Nations Disarmament Commission.” *UNODA*, 2017, disarmament.unoda.org/institutions/disarmament-commission/.

Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW):

“Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons or CCW, is a key international humanitarian law instrument. The purpose of the Convention is to ban or restrict the use of specific types of weapons that are considered to cause unjustifiable suffering to combatants or to affect civilians indiscriminately”. This Convention was adopted on 10 October 1980 and entered into force in 1983.¹⁵

United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (UN PoA):

Established in 2001, “The UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (PoA) is a globally agreed framework for activities to counter the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and control the negative consequences of Small Arms and Light Weapons”.¹⁶

Wassenaar Arrangement:

“The Wassenaar Arrangement was formed to enhance regional and international security by fostering transparency and responsibility in the trade of conventional arms and dual-use goods and technologies. Participating States strive, through their domestic policies, to prevent these items from being used to develop or strengthen military capabilities that undermine security goals or are diverted to support such capabilities.”¹⁷

UN Register of Conventional Arms (1991):

In December 1991, the United Nations General Assembly created the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA), a “universal and non-discriminatory” mechanism. It invites nations to voluntarily submit annual reports detailing their imports and exports of specific conventional weapons from the previous calendar year.¹⁸

15 “The Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.” *UNODA*, 2017, disarmament.unoda.org/the-convention-on-certain-conventional-weapons/.

16 Twenty4. “Programme of Action.” *Office for Disarmament Affairs*, 5 Jan. 2024, www.unrcpd.org/conventional-weapons/poa/.

17 “Home - the Wassenaar Arrangement.” *The Wassenaar Arrangement*, 22 June 2021, www.wassenaar.org/.

18 “UN Register of Conventional Arms.” *UNODA*, 2022, disarmament.unoda.org/convarms/register/.

GALILEE MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2025

Disarmament & International Security Committee Research Report

International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons (2005):

This instrument was built on the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons-2001 by promoting international cooperation to track and trace illicit arms flows.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC):

The ICRC helps the victims in conflict zones. In addition to protecting their lives, it also works with governments to limit arms transfers in conflict regions, and raises awareness about the consequences of Foreign Arms Interference in Civil Conflicts.



CURRENT SITUATION

Today, we can notice a vast number of civil conflicts whose life span has been elongated as a result of the supply of arms by foreign powers to various countries. Though a number of efforts by the United Nations have attempted to solve civil conflicts via numerous methods including, relevant to the topic at hand, the discouragement of foreign intervention and the calling for cessation of arms supply to areas in conflict, many of these conflicts do not seem to be reaching an end. It is, therefore, vital for members of the DISEC committee to develop methods and mechanisms that ensure that the supply of weapons, either for strategic, political or trade purposes is curtailed in order to prevent the further escalations of civil conflicts. For examples of civil conflicts that are plagued by foreign arms supply, please continue reading the following section.

RELEVANT CIVIL CONFLICTS

Democratic Republic of Congo

The crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) stems from a long history of post-colonial power struggles. Decades of conflict have been fueled by ethnic tension, political rivalries, corruption, and competition over control of the country's valuable natural resources. Additionally, neighboring countries, especially Rwanda and Uganda, are providing weapons and military equipment to armed groups, and have played a significant role in DRC's conflict either by supporting armed groups or intervening militarily for political, economic, or security reasons. Moreover, Russia and China both have been accused of providing weapons and military equipment to the Congolese government, a side in the conflict in question.¹⁹

Sudan

The Sudanese Civil War is an ongoing armed conflict that erupted in April 2023. The conflict primarily involves the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), two powerful military groups.²⁰ Additionally, the conflict is significantly affected by regional and international countries. For instance, the UAE has been heavily involved

¹⁹ Amnesty International. "Why Is the Democratic Republic of Congo Wracked by Conflict?" Amnesty International, 5 Nov. 2024, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2024/10/why-is-the-democratic-republic-of-congo-wracked-by-conflict

²⁰ Center for Preventive Action. "Civil War in Sudan." Global Conflict Tracker, Council on Foreign Relations, 3 Oct. 2024, www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/power-struggle-sudan.

GALILEE MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2025

Disarmament & International Security Committee Research Report

in providing financial and military support to the Rapid Support Forces including drones, armored vehicles, and training and military advisers to the RSF. This support has significantly enhanced the RSF's military capabilities and has led to the prolonging of the conflict.²¹

Syria

After the Arab Spring erupted, many protests filled the streets of various Arab countries. This also took place in Syria, which then triggered the commencement of a civil war that began in 2011 and has morphed into a highly-complex conflict with multiple international and regional nations being involved. The war escalated rapidly with Bashar Al Assad's regime and its forces fighting against the free Syrian army – a rebel group composed of defected Syrian soldiers and patriotic citizens. As the violence intensified, the international committee became increasingly divided, with Russia, China, and Iran supporting the Assad regime politically and diplomatically as well as providing direct military support which prolonged the conflict. Whereas the European Union, Turkey and several Arab nations were backing up the opposition. This international polarization coupled with the influx of arms and fighters from various countries, prolonged the conflict and led to a humanitarian crisis of immense proportions.²² Despite the fall of Bashar Al Assad in December 2024, the conflict does not seem to have many factions holding out with arms supplied by numerous foreign actors.

Yemen

The Yemeni civil conflict is one of the most complex conflicts of the post-Cold War era, where the Houthis rebels backed by Iran are pitted against the Saudi-led coalition backing the internationally recognized Yemeni government. Iran has provided advanced weaponry to the Houthis including drones, ballistic missiles, and anti-tank missiles and financial support such as funding their military operation, purchasing advanced weaponry. Due to this support the Houthis were able to attack Saudi Arabia and other regional rivals. In response, Saudi Arabia, along with other Gulf states established a military alliance in favor of the Yemeni government that has carried out multiple airstrikes in support of Yemeni government ground troops to combat Houthi advances.²³ Additionally, the Houthis have, since 2023, launched numerous attacks on civilian shipping, targeting oil

21 Mohammad, Talal. "How Sudan Became a Saudi-UAE Proxy War." *Foreign Policy*, 12 July 2023, www.foreignpolicy.com/2023/07/12/sudan-conflict-saudi-arabia-uae-gulf-burhan-hemeti-rsf/.

22 The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Syrian Civil War | Facts & Timeline." Encyclopædia Britannica, Britannica, 6 Dec. 2018, www.britannica.com/event/Syrian-Civil-War.

23 Robinson, Kali. "Yemen's Tragedy: War, Stalemate, and Suffering." Council on Foreign Relations, 1 May 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/yemen-crisis>

GALILEE MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2025

Disarmament & International Security Committee Research Report

tankers and other vessels using drones and missiles. These attacks have disrupted global trade and increased tensions in the region. This ongoing conflict has led to a humanitarian crisis and widespread destruction across Yemen and other regions.²⁴

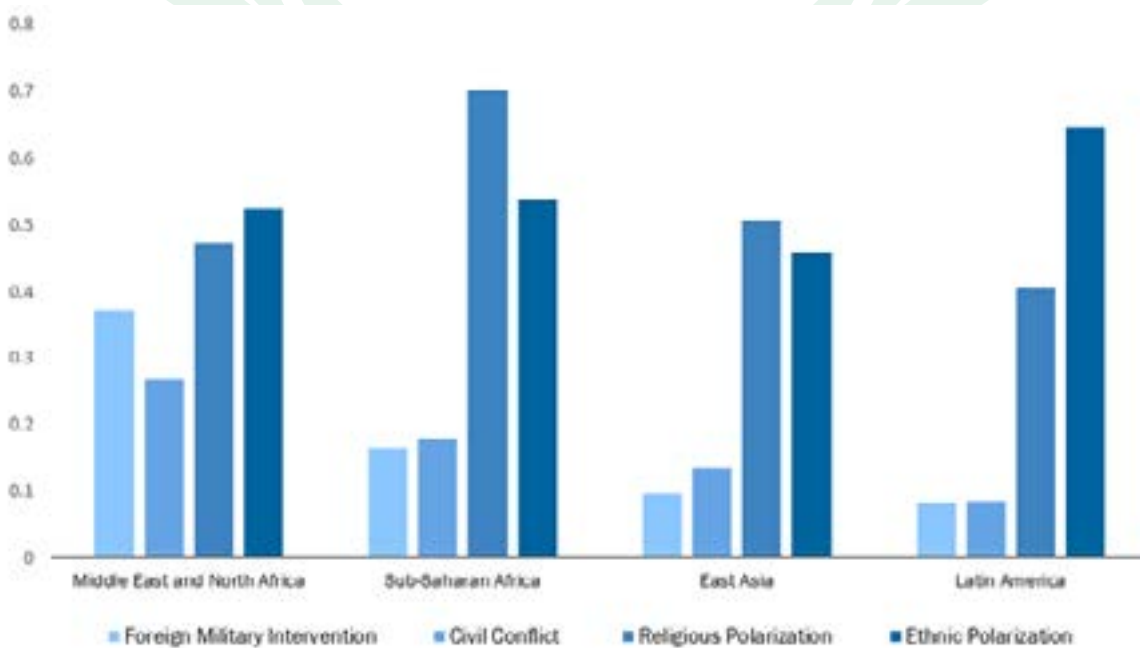
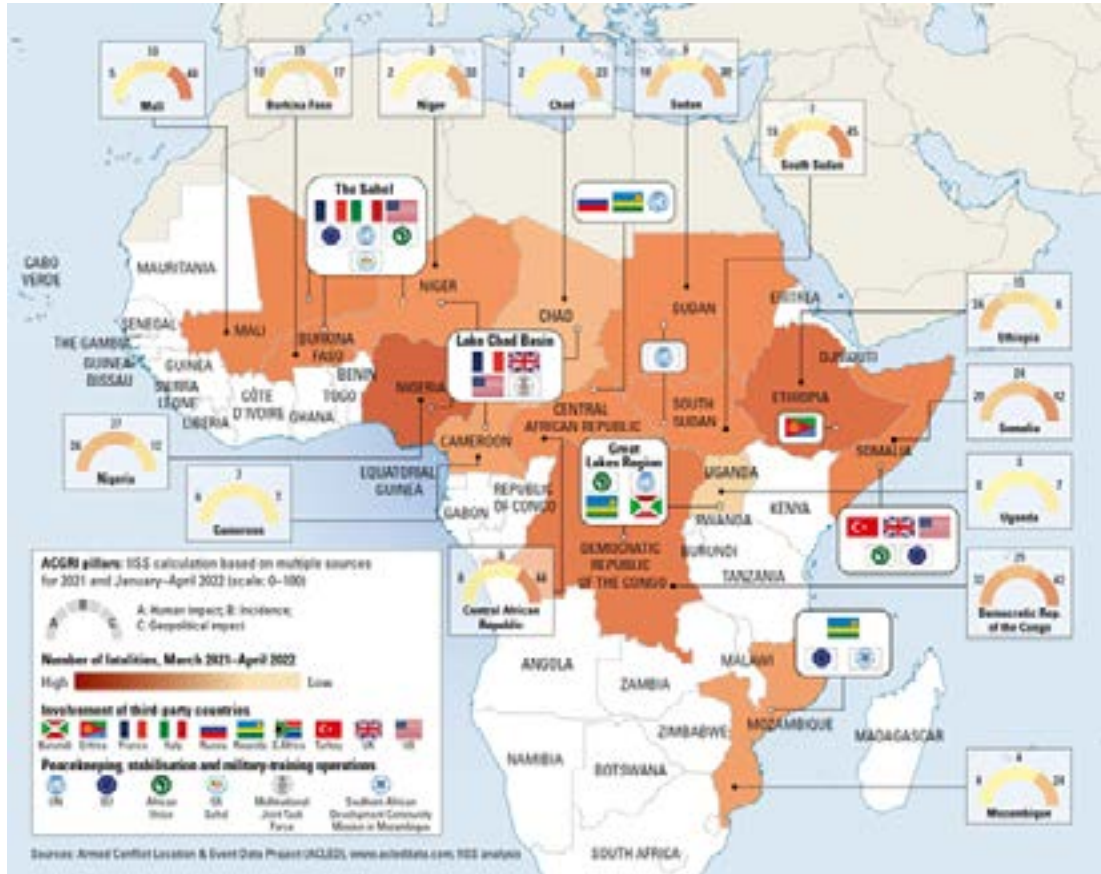
QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Is your country a member of the ATT treaty?
- Are there any foreign arms interferences in your country?
- Does your country do arms transfers for foreign countries?
- What are the mechanisms for preventing and defusing internationalized civil wars?
- Has your country taken any measures to prevent foreign arms interference in some nations?
- How does foreign interference impact the citizens/ the state of the country being affected?
- Is your country relevant to the organizations?
- What would motivate a country to interfere in a civil war?
- Has your country ever played a positive role in another country's civil war? If so, what strategies did it use?
- What methods do foreign countries use to intervene in conflicts without providing direct military support?
- Has your country faced a civil war, if so how did it overcome it?

²⁴ ACLED, Communications. "Yemen Situation Update: April 2024." ACLED, 6 May 2024. <https://acleddata.com/2024/05/06/yemen-situation-update-april-2024/>

GALILEE MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2025
Disarmament & International Security Committee Research Report

RELEVANT MEDIA



HELPFUL RESOURCES

- The ATT Treaty
https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/arms-export-control-arms-trade-treaty_en
<https://thearmstradetreaty.org/>
- Encyclopedia Britannica: Political Causes of Civil War
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/civil-war/Political-causes-of-civil-war>
- Mitigating the Impact of Foreign Interference: The Role of National Prevention Strategies
<https://cic.nyu.edu/resources/mitigating-the-impact-of-foreign-interference-the-role-of-national-prevention-strategies/>
- External support in civil wars and other armed conflicts
<https://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2016/04>
- The Future of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms-
<https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/files/PP/SIPRIPP04.pdf>
- Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons
<https://www.unodc.org/documents/organized-crime/Firearms/ITI.pdf>

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