

## Policy Strategy to Combat Illegal Firearms Smuggling as Transnational Organized Crime into Indonesia

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### Abstract

Illegal firearms smuggling represents a significant threat to Indonesia's national and regional security. This study seeks to evaluate the Indonesian government's policies and strategies for mitigating this transnational crime, measure their effectiveness, and uncover persistent challenges. By employing a literature-based approach combined with case data and policy analysis, the study delves into the geographical and institutional complexities that influence the dynamics of arms smuggling in Indonesia. The findings reveal that, despite considerable legislative and operational efforts, gaps in monitoring and enforcement remain, enabling smuggling activities to persist. Key challenges include limited resources, inadequate inter-agency coordination, and the pressing need for stronger international collaboration. To address these issues, the study recommends enhancing inter-agency and international partnerships, improving law enforcement capacity, and launching public awareness campaigns to bridge existing gaps. This research provides actionable insights for policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and academics, supporting the development of a more integrated and effective approach to combat illegal firearms smuggling.

**Keywords:** Prevention Policy, Smuggling, Illegal Firearms, Transnational Crime.

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### INTRODUCTION

Illegal firearms smuggling is categorized as transnational organized crime, often facilitated by professional groups, and poses significant threats to national and international stability (Legrand & Leuprecht, 2021). This phenomenon not only destabilizes security but also contributes to other transnational crimes such as terrorism, armed violence, organized crime, and regional conflicts, thereby undermining national development and endangering human security (Syahmin, 2015).

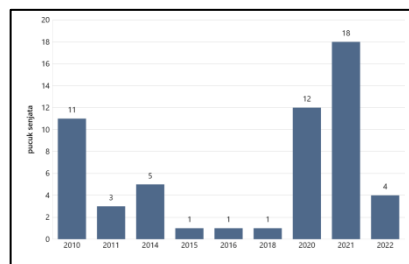
Indonesia's strategic location, with extensive maritime borders, positions it as a key transit point for illegal firearms smuggling in Southeast Asia (Yeo, 2023; Prayoga, 2022). Southeast Asia, historically, has been a region where firearms from previous conflicts remain accessible due to their durability and longevity. As observed by Squires (2021), Most conventional arms trade consists of existing firearms

rather than newly manufactured ones, a factor that exacerbates smuggling activities. The Philippines, particularly Mindanao, has been noted as a significant source of affordable firearms in the region (Novitasari, 2017; Picard, 2021).

With its open and complex archipelagic borders, Indonesia remains vulnerable to Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) networks (Vermonte, 2003). Factors such as restrictive firearm import policies and high taxes drive the demand for smuggled arms, especially in conflict-prone regions like Aceh, Central Sulawesi, and Papua. These weapons are often used by separatist groups to support anti-government agendas (Yulianti, 2014).

Illegal firearms are not only sourced locally but also smuggled from abroad through various routes, such as sea, land, and air. Transnational crime networks employ sophisticated methods, smuggling arms by sea in small boats disguised as fishing vessels or via land routes using the "ant" method, where individuals carry small quantities of arms to an agreed destination (Bruwer, 2020; UNODC, 2020). Between 2010 and 2022, smuggling incidents in Papua alone saw the confiscation of 56 firearms, with various actors including civilians, military, police, armed groups, and political entities involved in the trade (Kompas.id, adapted 08/06/2024).

The following is the data in the form of a table related to the number of firearms smuggling. Based on statements and evidence in court in the year (2010-2022).



Source: databoks. katadata.co.id (adapted on March 30, 2023).

**Figure 1.** The Number of Firearms Smuggling is Rampant in Papua, the Highest in 2021.

The United Nations Convention on Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), along with Indonesia's Emergency Law No. 12 of 1951 and Article 49 of the Criminal Code, forms the legal basis for combating arms smuggling (Abidin, 2023; Syahmin, 2015). Indonesia also adopted the UN's Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (PoA) to guide its preventive efforts. As a UN member, Indonesia is committed to implementing the PoA at national, regional, and global levels (Triwulandari & Antari, n.d.). Based on the description above, the author is interested in studying it further regarding "Policy strategy to combat illegal firearms smuggling as transnational organized crime to indonesia".

This study employs a literature-based approach, case data analysis, and policy review to comprehensively examine the strategies and policies implemented to combat illegal firearms smuggling into Indonesia. By evaluating current policies and identifying existing challenges, this study aims to assess their effectiveness and propose actionable improvements. The study provides a detailed examination of the existing challenges, including inter-agency coordination issues and resource limitations, and suggests policy enhancements to strengthen Indonesia's response to this critical security threat.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Analysis of Factors Affecting Illegal Firearms Smuggling.**

In Southeast Asia, illegal firearms smuggling, and distribution have become dangerous phenomena, raising serious concerns for human security due to the potential of firearms to escalate crime rates (Clarke, 2020; Prasetyo & Islamia, 2022). Several factors facilitate the smuggling and trafficking of illegal firearms in Southeast Asia. These include the region's geographic location, how weapons are manufactured, imported, and controlled, the technology used for monitoring, arms trade regulations, and the effectiveness of border and government agency surveillance (Bedeski et al., 2002).

Indonesia's strategic position offers economic benefits due to its geographical, geopolitical, and geo-economic advantages. However, it also presents significant challenges for defense and security, particularly in maritime security (Supriyanto, 2021; Gopal & Alverdian, 2021). Non-traditional threats have rapidly increased, making maritime security a crucial issue involving actors at national, regional, and international levels (Heryadi et al., 2022; Liss, 2022). The growth of transnational crime and combat operations at sea highlights the complexity of addressing maritime security issues in Indonesia (Latifah, 2018).

The concept of VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) was first introduced by the US Army War College in the early 1990s to describe the post Cold War multilateral environment. VUCA captures the constant impact of legal, social, and economic changes, which create risks for organizations operating within these conditions (Mack & Khare, 2016). As described by Döner & Efeoğlu (2023), VUCA includes Volatility, the speed and magnitude of change; Uncertainty, the difficulty in predicting future events; Complexity, the lack of clear cause-effect relationships; and Ambiguity, the existence of multiple interpretations of environmental conditions. This framework has proven useful for analyzing dynamic and unpredictable environments, such as the illegal firearms smuggling context.

In terms of volatility, the unstable political and security situations in neighboring countries, like the conflict in southern Philippines, create opportunities for criminal networks to smuggle firearms (Cruz-Ferrer & Lubang, 2021). This instability provides openings that smugglers exploit to distribute illegal firearms into Indonesia (Gultom, 2018). Uncertainty is evident in Indonesia's weak law enforcement and incidents of corruption, which ease the process for smugglers to operate freely. The absence of clear

legal implementation and corruption among law enforcement officers exacerbates this issue (UNODC, 2015). Complexity reflects the sophisticated modus operandi of organized transnational criminal networks, who often use advanced technologies and various smuggling methods, including undetected small boats or hiding weapons among legal goods, making law enforcement efforts more challenging (SOMTC, 2023). Lastly, ambiguity emerges from the lack of coordination between government agencies in combating illegal firearms smuggling. Ambiguities in task divisions and responsibilities among these agencies often result in ineffective prevention and enforcement operations (UNODC, 2020).

The Butterfly Effect concept, originating from chaos theory and initially proposed by Edward Norton Lorenz, introduces the idea that small changes in initial conditions can lead to significant long-term variations. In the context of arms smuggling, minor events like the theft of a firearm from a military base can have considerable impacts, such as sparking communal conflict or aiding in the commission of other crimes. This effect emphasizes that small, unmanaged incidents can yield broad and dangerous consequences (UNODC, 2020; Alwishewa, 2024). Indonesia's geopolitical position, situated among neighboring countries facing security and political issues, is also a factor that facilitates illegal firearms smuggling. Its proximity to conflict areas, such as the southern Philippines and Myanmar, makes Indonesia a prime target for firearm smugglers (ASEAN, 2018).

#### **Detailed Case Study: Dynamics and Challenges in Combating Arms Smuggling.**

A closer examination of firearms smuggling incidents at Indonesia's borders, particularly in Papua and the areas bordering the Philippines, reveals how logistical, legal, and operational constraints pose significant challenges to anti-smuggling efforts. Firearms seizures in Papua from 2010 to 2022 highlight a commonly used maritime smuggling route that leverages small boats, which are difficult to detect. This same modus operandi is observed in southern Philippines, where firearms originating from conflict zones like Mindanao are trafficked into Indonesia via sea routes.

Key challenges in combating smuggling include logistical constraints, such as the vast maritime area requiring effective patrol coverage (Hidayat & Tan, 2021; Marliani, 2024). Limited surveillance technology exacerbates this problem, as many small boats can traverse borders undetected (Bowyer et al., 2021). Additionally, legal constraints in the form of limited international frameworks complicate Indonesia's ability to coordinate cross-border law enforcement operations with neighboring countries.

Further operational constraints arise from coordination issues among domestic agencies like the police and military, as well as with authorities in the Philippines regarding border monitoring. While ASEAN level cooperation frameworks exist, these challenges persist due to limited capacity, resources, and differences in operational procedures across countries.

### **Effective Countermeasures and Strategies.**

To address these challenges, Indonesia has established partnerships with neighboring countries, such as the Philippines and Australia, in maritime patrol operations aimed at curbing arms smuggling. These partnerships, exemplified by joint operations with the Philippines, Australia, and the United States in border waters, facilitate timely intelligence sharing and more coordinated patrols. These operations also use advanced technology to detect small boats potentially carrying illegal firearms, which has proven effective in reducing smuggling activities along border areas.

In addition to international cooperation, the adoption of advanced technology including satellite-based monitoring systems and intelligence data analysis tools has become a crucial component in anti-smuggling efforts. Through these technologies, Indonesia can respond more swiftly to threats, particularly in vulnerable maritime border areas.

The Indonesian government also prioritizes strengthening national capacity through specialized training for security personnel, focusing on investigative techniques, cross-border surveillance, and management of surveillance technology. Training sessions, often supported by international organizations such as UNODC and ASEANAPOL, enhance law enforcement's capabilities in identifying and dismantling transnational smuggling networks.

### **Recommendations for Strengthening Anti-Smuggling Policies.**

Based on the case study above, several policy recommendations can enhance Indonesia's response to illegal firearms smuggling. First, enhancing intelligence cooperation with neighboring countries to monitor arms trafficking networks is crucial. Utilizing advanced technologies and integrated intelligence systems will allow for faster and more effective responses to smuggling threats. Second, conducting joint operations involving maritime and land patrols, with support from partner countries, can improve border surveillance and law enforcement efforts against arms smuggling at both sea and land borders.

Improving the national legal framework to align with international standards is also necessary to facilitate legal cooperation and extradition of transnational criminals. Furthermore, a public awareness campaign should be developed to educate the public about the dangers of arms trafficking and the importance of international collaboration. Such campaigns are also expected to encourage public participation in reporting suspicious activities.

With these steps, Indonesia can bolster international collaboration, enhance law enforcement effectiveness in addressing firearms smuggling, and contribute to national and regional security.

### **Strategy for Policy to Combat Illegal Firearms Smuggling.**

United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspect (2001).

The United Nations Programme of Action (UNPoA) provides a structured framework for combating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, which comprises five key parts. The UNPoA's structure is briefly outlined as follows: a. Preamble; b. Preventing, combating, and eradicating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects:

1. At the national level;
2. At the regional level;
3. At the global level; c. Implementation, international cooperation, and assistance; d. Follow-up to the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects; and e. Annexes, which include:
  - Initiatives undertaken at the regional and sub-regional levels; and
  - Statement by the President of the Conference.

As an official member of the United Nations, Indonesia has the obligation to ratify and implement the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA). This program offers strategic guidelines for member countries to address illegal firearms trade through several core steps:

#### 1. Legislation

Indonesia has strengthened its laws and regulations concerning firearm ownership, trade, and use. Robust legislation serves as the foundation for effective prosecution of illegal firearms trafficking perpetrators. Implementing the PoA encourages countries to adopt internationally aligned laws that regulate the production, storage, and distribution of firearms and components (UNODC, 2020).

#### 2. Weapon Destruction

The Illegal Weapons Destruction Program under PoA promotes the periodic destruction of seized illegal firearms to ensure that they do not re-enter illegal circulation. The Indonesian government conducts regular destruction events to decrease the number of illicit firearms in circulation, providing transparency and accountability to the public (ASEAN, 2018).

#### 3. Weapon Storage Management

Secure and systematic management of weapon storage is another focus of the PoA. In Indonesia, weapons are strictly stored by security forces to prevent theft or misuse, with the government adopting modern technology for supervision and control of firearm inventory to enhance storage security (UNODC, 2020).

#### 4. Sharing Information

The PoA emphasizes the importance of cross-border information exchange to combat illegal firearms trafficking. Indonesia actively participates in international forums, sharing data on

smuggling networks, modus operandi, and trafficking trends. This collaboration enhances both national and regional capabilities in combating transnational crime (SOMTC, 2023).

#### 5. International Cooperation

International collaboration and joint operations are central to PoA implementation. Indonesia works with other nations and international organizations to conduct joint operations, training sessions, and capacity-building programs aimed at eradicating illegal firearms smuggling. These initiatives promote resource sharing, expertise exchange, and cross-border coordination to effectively tackle transnational crime (UNODC, 2015).

### **Technological Integration for Enhanced Border Security.**

To further strengthen border security, advanced surveillance technologies are essential. The use of AI-driven systems, drones, and maritime tracking technology significantly enhances Indonesia's capacity to detect and monitor illegal activities in real time, especially in the nation's vast archipelagic regions. These technologies support law enforcement efforts by enabling:

- **Real-Time Detection and Monitoring:** Advanced surveillance tools provide real-time data that can be used to detect small boats and concealed compartments, both of which are commonly utilized by smuggling networks;
- **Increased Range of Surveillance:** AI-integrated drones and maritime tracking systems can monitor extended border areas and identify suspicious activities along complex routes, reducing the possibility of illegal firearms entering the country undetected; and
- **Improved Data Collection and Analysis:** AI systems aid in analyzing patterns and identifying potential smuggling routes, facilitating proactive measures in high-risk areas and allowing authorities to allocate resources more efficiently.

Through the integration of advanced surveillance technologies, Indonesia can effectively strengthen its border security against illegal firearms smuggling. By combining legislative measures, international cooperation, and modern technology, the country is better equipped to tackle the complex and evolving threat of transnational arms trafficking.

### **How is the implementation of collaboration between countries in addressing arms smuggling.**

Golose (2023) stated that the ASEAN framework for combating firearms smuggling includes the following strategies: 1) facilitating information exchange on arms smuggling issues, such as trends, best practices, and new techniques and tools; 2) establishing regular contact points for cooperation on arms smuggling; 3) developing training initiatives and building capabilities; 4) identifying key areas for collaboration; 5) exploring possible partnerships with strategic private sector entities; and 6) reinforcing ASEAN's efforts to prevent the cross-border flow of illegal firearms.

#### 1. Collaboration between the United States and Australia

The United States and Australia have conducted numerous joint operations to prevent arms smuggling into Yemen. These operations include maritime interceptions to enforce UN Security Council resolutions prohibiting arms transfers to Yemen. For example, in 2015, US and Australian ships intercepted and seized Iranian-origin anti-tank weapons on the Nassir. This operation required extensive coordination, sophisticated intelligence, and continuous surveillance efforts. Intelligence obtained from the weapons seizure contributed to improvements in subsequent operations, highlighting the importance of ongoing feedback and refinement in joint operations (The Washington Institute, UNODC).

2. **Multilateral Cooperation in Southeast Asia**

ASEAN countries have strengthened collaboration on arms smuggling through regional mechanisms, such as the ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism and ASEANAPOL (ASEAN Chiefs of National Police). This cooperation includes information sharing, joint training, and coordinated cross-border law enforcement activities. ASEANAPOL facilitates coordination among ASEAN police forces to address transnational crimes, including arms smuggling. ASEAN member countries also participate in joint operations to dismantle smuggling networks and confiscate illegal firearms, collaborating with UNODC on training and capacity-building programs (UN News, United Nations Press).

3. **Collaboration between Indonesia, Australia, and the United States**

Indonesia has cooperated with Australia and the United States in maritime law enforcement operations to combat arms smuggling. These joint operations involve maritime patrols, interceptions, and surveillance activities supported by advanced technology and intelligence sharing. For example, in Operation Atalanta in the Indian Ocean, Indonesia collaborated with several countries to counter piracy and arms smuggling in the region (The Washington Institute, UNODC).

4. **ASEANAPOL Initiative and Regional Mechanism**

As a member of ASEAN, Indonesia actively participates in ASEANAPOL, which facilitates cooperation among ASEAN police forces. Through ASEANAPOL, Indonesia can exchange information, engage in joint training, and conduct coordinated cross-border law enforcement operations with neighboring countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand to combat arms smuggling (UN News, United Nations Press).

### **Recommendations for Strengthening Collaboration and Knowledge Transfer in Indonesia**

To improve Indonesia's efforts in combating firearms smuggling, the following recommendations focus on enhancing intelligence, collaboration, and knowledge transfer:

1. **Strengthening Intelligence Cooperation**



Enhance intelligence exchange with partner countries to monitor and identify arms trafficking networks. Utilizing advanced technology and integrated intelligence systems will allow for faster, more effective responses to smuggling threats (Ward, 2024; Mademlis et al., 2023)

2. Joint Operations

Conduct joint operations involving maritime and land patrols with support from partner countries. These operations should focus on close surveillance and decisive action against arms smuggling at sea and land borders (Fantinato, 2021; Larsson & Widen, 2024).

3. Joint Training and Knowledge Transfer

Conduct joint training facilitated by UNODC or other international agencies to improve the capacity of Indonesian law enforcement. This training should include investigative techniques, the use of surveillance technology, and handling arms smuggling cases. Examples of training may include data analysis and intelligence software usage, as well as cross-border surveillance methods (USAID Reducing Demand for Wildlife).

4. Community Engagement in Border Regions

Local communities in border areas can play a critical role in anti-smuggling efforts by reporting suspicious activities and supporting border control initiatives. Specific community engagement programs, such as workshops and incentives for reporting smuggling incidents, can strengthen the intelligence network, especially in remote areas (Blair et al., 2021). By involving local communities, law enforcement agencies can make it harder for smuggling networks to operate undetected.

5. Strong Legal Framework

Adopt and implement international resolutions such as the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime to ensure that Indonesia's legal frameworks align with international standards (Haider, 2024). This alignment will facilitate legal cooperation and the extradition of transnational criminals.

6. Public Awareness Campaign

Develop a public awareness campaign to educate the public about the dangers of arms trafficking and the importance of international cooperation (De Vries, 2021). This campaign should also promote community participation by encouraging citizens to report suspicious activities.

7. Corruption Mitigation Strategies

Corruption within law enforcement and border control agencies can significantly impact anti-smuggling efforts. Implement targeted anti-corruption measures, such as regular audits, transparent accountability protocols, and strict oversight mechanisms, to minimize corruption risks (Kullish et al., 2021). These strategies will ensure that policy enforcement remains strong and uncompromised, especially in high-risk regions.

By implementing these strategies, Indonesia can strengthen its international collaboration efforts and improve law enforcement effectiveness in tackling firearms smuggling. Such measures will not only enhance national security but also contribute to regional stability.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Illegal firearms smuggling into Indonesia poses a severe threat to national security and social stability. This phenomenon not only leads to crimes such as robbery and murder but also fuels communal conflicts that hinder economic development. A comprehensive and effective policy strategy is essential to address this pressing issue.

By applying VUCA theory, we understand that uncertainty, ambiguity, complexity, and confusion are the primary factors influencing illegal firearms smuggling. To address these challenges, the Indonesian government must reinforce legislation, enhance inter-agency collaboration, adopt advanced technologies for detection and enforcement, and strengthen international cooperation. Additionally, programs for the destruction of illegal weapons and safe management of weapons storage should be prioritized to prevent illicit firearms from re-entering circulation.

The implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA) is a crucial step that Indonesia has undertaken. As a UN member, Indonesia is obliged to ratify and apply these guidelines at national, regional, and international levels. Through such implementation, Indonesia can strengthen its law enforcement and preventive efforts against the illegal firearms smuggling, contributing to national stability and security.

To further support policy enforcement, corruption mitigation strategies are also necessary. Corruption within law enforcement and border control agencies can severely impact anti-smuggling efforts. Targeted anti-corruption measures, including regular audits, transparent accountability protocols, and strict oversight mechanisms, are essential to reduce corrupt practices and ensure policy implementation remains uncompromised, especially in high-risk regions.

Through comprehensive policy strategies and strong synergy among various stakeholders, it is anticipated that illegal firearms circulation can be significantly reduced, thereby preserving national security and stability. Close collaboration among the government, law enforcement, and local communities is essential to foster a secure and conducive environment for sustainable development. By involving these elements, Indonesia can create a robust foundation for long-term success in combating illegal firearms smuggling.

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