



# Supply Chain Risks of Advanced Conventional Weapons' (ACW) Proliferation in Georgia: Improving Compliance with the International Restrictions Regimes



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**Supply Chain Risks of Advanced Conventional Weapons'  
(ACW) Proliferation in Georgia: Improving Compliance  
with the International Restrictions Regimes**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document highlights Western efforts to curb the Kremlin's access to advanced conventional weapons (ACW) through international restrictions regimes during the Ukrainian war, with a specific focus on Georgia, which exemplifies the challenges faced by other countries, as its historical territorial disputes and security issues, combined with its strategic location, make it susceptible to illicit arms transfers. To mitigate these risks, the implementation of robust regulatory measures is imperative.

The policy document introduces an actionable-based model to monitor Russian activities in the ACW industry, encompassing various acquisition methods, such as domestic investments, military-technical agreements, cybertheft, espionage, and covert supply chain networks.

Drawing on international best practices used against counterfeit supply chain networks, hereby document delivers list of actions to counter the illicit arms trade. These actions include establishing customer verification systems, rigorous supply chain monitoring, utilization of authentication technologies, market surveillance, obtaining end-user certificates, implementing screening processes during sales, providing employee training, conducting third-party audits, screening against watchlists, sharing data with authorities, and analyzing passenger-cargo connections.

By adopting such measures, the public and private sectors can enhance their capacity to prevent the spread of advanced conventional weapons' components, thus contributing to regional and global stability. As geopolitical dynamics continue to evolve, international cooperation is essential in curbing the illicit trade of such weaponry and promoting peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms.

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# INTRODUCTION

The Western crackdown on the Kremlin's capabilities in advanced conventional weapons (ACW), which has come in the form of a cascade of restriction regimes during the war in Ukraine, puts post-Soviet countries in the spotlight. The restrictions may lead the Russian Federation to set up multiple and even interconnected covert supply chain operations for its ACW-components' acquisition and trade using the vulnerability of other countries in compliance with the international restrictions related to such weapons. As geopolitical dynamics shift and technological advancements enable the development of sophisticated weaponry, the risk of ACW proliferation becomes a source of increased concern for the international community. The objective of this expert opinion-led document is twofold: a) to analyze the supply chain risks associated with ACW proliferation in Georgia, and b) to explore measures to enhance compliance with the international restrictions regime to mitigate these risks effectively.

"While there is not a significant, if any, market for Russian ACW in Georgia,"<sup>1</sup> the country has historically endured a tumultuous past, grappling with territorial disputes and security challenges. The country's geographic location, nestled between the Black Sea and the Caucasus Mountains, has rendered it susceptible to competing geopolitical interests and power struggles. Such dynamics have created an environment where the illicit transfer of conventional arms, advanced weapons', and their components can take place if the regulatory mechanisms do not sustain their current alertness. **The proliferation of ACW in Georgia not only threatens regional stability but also has the potential to impact international security.** Advanced conventional weapons encompass a wide array of lethal, precision-guided munitions and cutting-edge military technologies capable of causing immense destruction and loss of life. When these weapons come to be possessed by hostile groups, they can fuel armed conflicts, exacerbate tensions, and embolden non-state actors and terrorist organizations.

One of the primary challenges associated with the proliferation of ACW lies in the complex and often opaque supply chain networks that facilitate their components' illicit cross-border trade. These networks involve multiple actors, ranging from manufacturers and suppliers to intermediaries and end-users, operating across international borders and exploiting gaps in regulatory frameworks. As a result, tracking the origins and movements of such weapons becomes an arduous task, impeding efforts to enforce existing restrictions regimes and mitigate risks effectively

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<sup>1</sup> Banks, B. & Saghirashvili, A. (2023). *Preventing Illicit Transactions Related to Russian Advanced Conventional Weapon (ACW) Systems: An Operational Manual*. Georgian Center for Strategy and Development (GCSD). Available at: <https://gcsd.org.ge/en/publications/show/117>.

In response to these growing concerns, the international community has established a web of restrictions and regimes to curb the proliferation of ACW and related items. These restrictions inhibit the transportation of specific military and dual-use goods, limiting access to advanced weapons and their components. However, for such restrictive measures to be truly effective, their implementation must be adhered to by all states and stakeholders involved.

Georgia aligns its practices with international norms and obligations. While the country has taken significant strides toward complying with international restrictions regimes, challenges may persist and even increase in reaction to global and regional tensions and the overall security environment. These include abundant resources needed for monitoring and enforcement, a lack of awareness in the logistics sector, and corrupt networks that seek to profit from the illicit arms trade.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The complexities of the ACW acquisition and the challenges of enforcing the international restrictions regime exacerbate the risks associated with proliferation. To better understand the problem, GCSD has conducted a complementary literature review encompassing an array of academic works and expert analyses. This section provides insights into ACW acquisition and proliferation dynamics, the efficacy of international restrictions, and compliance strategies. Examining each document in detail allows stakeholders to derive valuable information to construct a comprehensive understanding of the challenges posed by ACW proliferation and devise evidence-based recommendations.

GCSD opens the literature review with Parachini and Bauer (2021), who examine the impact of western restrictions regimes targeting Russia's defense sector and explore how these measures may influence Russian behavior in the arms trade. The authors highlight the importance of understanding the potential ripple effects of these restrictions on possible ACW proliferation in post-Soviet countries, given their proximity to Russia and an array of regional dynamics. Their analysis underscores the need for vigilant monitoring of illicit arms transfers and the importance of effective international restrictive regime enforcement to mitigate proliferation risks in the South Caucasus region.<sup>2</sup>

Eremeko and Smith share Parachini's and Bauer's position on vigilant monitoring and present a comprehensive analysis of managing rising restrictions regimes' risks in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. The study's findings offer pertinent information for understanding the complexities of ACW proliferation risks and provide a basis for formulating tailored compliance measures. The authors emphasize the significance of enhancing the country's capacity for monitoring and enforcing international restrictions to ensure a robust response to the evolving challenges of ACW proliferation.<sup>3</sup>

Strict measures are supported by Gauthier-Villars, Steckflow, and Shiffman (2022), who shed light on foreign trade control breaches and how military technology reaches Russia in violation of foreign trade controls. This work underscores the need for stricter enforcement measures to prevent the illicit transfer of military technology, thereby reducing the risk of ACW proliferation in neighboring

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<sup>2</sup> Parachini, J.V., Bauer, R. & Wilson, P.A. (2021). Impact of the U.S. and Allied Sanction Regimes on Russian Arms Sales. RAND Corporation. Available at: [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RRA1341-1.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1341-1.html)

<sup>3</sup> Eremenko, A. & Smith, H. (2022). Managing rising sanctions risks across the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Control Risks. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/bdh42s7t>

countries. The findings highlight the importance of bolstering a given country's trade control capabilities, enhancing cooperation with international partners, and employing technology-focused approaches to address vulnerabilities in the supply chain.<sup>4</sup>

Hutchins (2020), focuses on the compliance with international restrictions regimes as the best preventive tool to "avoid" international restrictions and provide valuable insights into Russia's trade in advanced conventional weapons and the associated restrictions. The work delves into the regional dynamics that could enable the flow of ACW to the Western-invested regions, emphasizing the importance of targeted measures and enforcement strategies to curtail proliferation risks. The findings stress the necessity for countries to collaborate with international partners in bolstering their compliance with the international restrictions regime to prevent the diversion of advanced weaponry to illicit actors.<sup>5</sup>

The ability of the Russian Federation to procure ACW components through the establishment of discreet supply chain operations in various countries, which constitutes a significant aspect of regional dynamics, has been substantiated by a collaborative investigative report. This report, titled "The Orlan Complex: Tracking the Supply Chains of Russia's Most Successful UAV," is a result of the joint efforts of the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), Reuters, and iStories. The authors of this report, namely James Byrne, Dr. Jack Watling, Professor Justin Bronk, Gary Somerville, Joe Byrne, Jack Crawford, and Jane Baker, employ the example of the Orlan-10 unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) to illustrate the covert supply chains that remain operational even amid the conflict in Ukraine. In their analysis, the authors advocate for the implementation of stringent monitoring measures and the imposition of targeted personal restrictions as proactive strategies to counteract the Russian Federation's acquisition of ACW components.<sup>6</sup>

Walentek, Skrzypczyńskab, Pospieszna and Portela share Hutchins' thoughts on compliance being the best practice in preventing the imposition of restrictive measures. The case study on the European Union's arms embargo targeting Russia, offering pertinent lessons for designing effective restrictions regimes and compliance mechanisms for non-member countries that neighbor Russia.

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<sup>4</sup> Gauthier-Villars, D., Steckflow, S. & Shiffman, J. (2022). Special Report-How military technology reaches Russia in breach of U.S. export controls. Available at: <https://www.euronews.com/2022/04/30/us-ukraine-crisis-russia-sanctions>

<sup>5</sup> Hutchins, D. (2020). Russia's Advanced Conventional Weapons Trade and Associated Sanctions. Global Risk Intel. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/3c3sd93c>

<sup>6</sup> Byrne, G., Watling, J., Bronk J., Somerville, G., Byrne, J., Crawford, J. & Baker, J. (2022). The Orlan Complex: Tracking the Supply Chains of Russia's Most Successful UAV. RUSI, Reuters & iStories. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/t7xejx6t>

The study emphasizes the significance of aligning national legislation with international restrictions regimes and strengthening enforcement capabilities to prevent the distribution of ACW.<sup>7</sup>

Another school of thought shares their insights on the importance of intersectoral cooperation when trying to prevent ACW proliferation and improve compliance with international restrictions regimes. Ullah and Turner (2022) offer a principled guide to restrictions regimes compliance programs, serving as a valuable resource for governments to enhance their regulatory frameworks and enforcement capabilities. By adopting best practices, Georgia can strengthen its compliance measures, leading to a more effective prevention of ACW proliferation. The authors highlight the importance of a holistic approach, which includes internal capacity-building, robust due diligence processes, and transparent communication with international partners to ensure effective compliance.<sup>8</sup>

The authors and their works highlighted above extensively address topics like compliance with international restrictive measures, the acquisition of advanced conventional weapons, proliferation, and the measures to prevent such actions. To apply this knowledge effectively in the Georgian context, the authors of the presented documents must take into account the insights provided by Banks and Saghirashvili in their recent report (2023), where the authors emphasize the importance of implementing ACW-specific international restrictions compliance programs and conducting thorough risk assessments. By incorporating these findings, the understanding and handling of such issues in Georgia can be enhanced.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Walentek, D., Skrzypczyńska, J., Pospiecha, P. & Portela, C. (2020). Consensus against all odds: explaining the persistence of EU sanctions on Russia. Available at:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07036337.2020.1803854>

<sup>8</sup> Ullah, Z. & Turner, V. (2022). The Guide to Sanctions. Global Investigation Review. Available at:

<https://globalinvestigationsreview.com/guide/the-guide-sanctions/second-edition>

<sup>9</sup> ^ *ibid.*<sup>3</sup>

# WESTERN RESTRICTIVE MEASURES TARGETING RUSSIA'S ACW ACQUISITION DURING THE UKRAINE WAR

The war in Ukraine and Russia's persistent attempts to pursue ACW (and its components') acquisition have raised significant concerns for international security and stability. To address the challenges posed by the spread of ACW, the West has devised and employed restrictive regimes as a tool to deter, limit, and control the transfer of these sophisticated military technologies. At present, the United States and the European Union maintain a shared catalog comprising 38 distinct item categories subject to export restrictions when destined for Russia. U.S. authorities have emphasized that out of these 38 categories, the utmost priority is placed on restricting nine of them, primarily focusing on microelectronics essential for the operation of missiles and drones. Moreover, U.S. and European officials have been collaborating with their financial institutions to create a notification system aimed at informing governments about potential breaches of restrictions. Up to September 13 (2023), American banks have notified the U.S. government about 400 transactions that raised suspicions. Thus far, the U.S. Commerce Department has already incorporated one-third of these reports of suspicious activities into its ongoing investigations.<sup>10</sup> The mutual and general objectives of said restrictive measures is to:

- Prevent the establishment or operation of illicit procurement networks from exploiting your company and engaging in possible illegal activity;
- Prevent the illicit transfer of ACW to rogue states, non-state actors, and other entities that pose threats to regional and global security;
- Avoid the reputational and secondary sanctions risks from engaging with or facilitating transactions on behalf of high-risk or sanctioned entities;
- Deter potential conflicts and arms races in regions where ACW proliferation could escalate tensions and destabilize the geopolitical landscape;
- Complement arms control treaties and non-proliferation initiatives, reinforcing norms against the spread of ACW;
- Address human rights violations by targeting individuals or entities involved in the production, sale, or use of ACW in ways that violate international laws.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Barnes, J.E., Schmitt, E. & Neff, G. T. (2023). Russia Overcomes Sanctions to Expand Missile Production, Officials Say. The New York Times. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/3uxu6x7v>

<sup>11</sup> Berman, N. & Siripurapu, A. (2023). One Year of War in Ukraine: Are Sanctions Against Russia Making a Difference? Council on Foreign Relations. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/5yyxht9j>

After Russia invaded and illegally annexed the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, the United States took the lead in imposing restrictive measures on Russia. These measures were implemented through the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) and targeted specific sectors. They included restrictions on transactions with designated individuals and entities, as well as bans on investments and the import/export of goods related to Crimea.

In 2017, the Countering American Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) was enacted. One of its key provisions, Section 231, falls under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of State. This section focuses on transactions involving the Russian intelligence and defense sectors. As a result, the United States gained the authority to take action against any individual or entity engaged in the manufacturing, selling, or delivering of Russian advanced conventional weapons. Unlike other restrictive regimes, CAATSA has a distinctive feature that grants the United States the authority to impose penalties on any entity, regardless of whether they are American or not, if they engage in dealings with illicit entities. Currently, there are more than 700 Russian individuals, companies, and other entities listed for international restrictions, and further additions are announced periodically.<sup>12</sup>

The main objective of these restriction regimes is to curtail the size and sophistication of Russia's economy, its ongoing military modernization efforts, and to limit the funding for domestic arms production. Given that a degree of difficulty faced by the U.S. government lies within the Russian demand in commoditized chips, which can be employed in various applications beyond just guided missiles,<sup>13</sup> said restrictions include an expanded ban on dual-use items, which serve both civilian and military purposes, and they significantly tighten the foreign trade control regime. As a result, Russian end-users face severe limitations in acquiring dual-use products or technologies.<sup>14</sup>

The Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) under the U.S. Department of Commerce is responsible for overseeing licenses for controlled items. Recently, the Bureau issued a new rule that drastically restricts Russia's access to specific goods, including microelectronics, telecommunications items, sensors, navigation equipment, avionics, marine equipment, and aircraft components (after undergoing a review under a policy of denial).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> ^ *ibid.*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>13</sup> ^ *ibid.*<sup>10</sup>

<sup>14</sup> ^ *ibid.*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>15</sup> ^ *ibid.*<sup>3</sup>

European Union member countries initiated restrictive regimes against Russia following its recognition of Ukraine's Donbas region's independence. With the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine by air, land and sea on February 24, 2022, a considerable number of countries joined the effort in applying restrictive measures with the intent of severely impacting the Russian economy. These restrictions covered a broad spectrum, targeting individuals, banks, businesses, monetary exchanges, bank transfers, exports, and imports. The European Union has implemented eleven rounds (packages) of restrictive measures against the Russian Federation, including 7 that are referent (but not limited to) ACW-acquisition:

- **Second Package** – Additional restrictions in the technology sector, imposing further restrictions on the export of dual-use goods and technology, as well as certain goods and technology that could enhance Russia's defense and security sector.
- **Fifth Package** – Introduces targeted export bans, specifically on quantum computing, advanced semiconductors, sensitive machinery, transportation, and chemicals.
- **Sixth Package** – The list of advanced technology items banned from export to Russia has been expanded, including additional chemicals that could be used in manufacturing chemical weapons. The package also extends the list of individuals, legal entities, or organizations associated with Russia's military-industrial complex. These entities operate in various sectors such as electronics, communications, weapons, shipyards, engineering, and scientific research, aligning the EU with measures pursued by the United States.
- **Maintenance and Alignment Package** – Strengthens targeted export bans by extending the list of items that could contribute to Russia's military and technological advancements or the development of their defense and security sector.
- **Eighth Package** – Introduces new export restrictions to limit Russia's access to military, industrial, and technological items, as well as its capability to develop its defense and security sector.
- **Ninth Package** – Implements additional EU export bans on sensitive dual-use and advanced technologies that enhance Russia's military capabilities. These include drone engines, camouflage gear, additional chemical/biological equipment, riot control agents, and electronic components used in Russian military systems on the battlefield.
- **Tenth Package** – Implements further EU export bans on sensitive dual-use and advanced technologies contributing to Russia's military capabilities and technological advancement. The decision is made based on information received from Ukraine, EU Member States, and partners. The package includes additional electronic components used in Russian weapons systems (drones, missiles, helicopters, etc.), bans on specific rare earths, and thermal cameras with military applications. Additionally, 96 more entities associated with Russia's military-industrial complex are listed, bringing the

total of military end-users on the list to 506. For the first time, seven Iranian entities using EU components and providing Russia with military "Shahed" drones for attacks on civilian infrastructure in Ukraine are included. Moreover, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and Norway are added to the list of partner countries.

- **Eleventh Package** – Introduces a new "anti-circumvention" tool, allowing the EU to restrict the sale, supply, transfer, or export of specified sanctioned goods and technology to certain third countries with a high risk of circumvention. This measure will be a last resort when other individual measures and outreach to concerned third countries have been insufficient in preventing circumvention.<sup>16</sup>

The war in Ukraine has raised awareness about the risks and threats posed by ACW proliferation on a global scale. In an almost unprecedented move, Singapore adopted unilateral restriction regimes against the Russia Federation in February 2022, thus becoming the first South-East Asian country to censure a foreign country without the United Nations Security Council backing. These measures impose restrictions on the banking system and, in its March 5 announcement, Singapore listed technology devices and related equipment that could be used against Ukraine in the war.<sup>17</sup> Despite this, the novel nature of ACW still leaves some nations puzzled, and there is yet to be a unified convention on the prohibition of ACW proliferation by a multinational coordinator (UN/OSCE/EU). The countries may remain reluctant to join the restrictive regimes about ACW proliferation, due to:

- **Diplomatic Tensions:** Restrictions can strain diplomatic relations between imposing countries and the targeted entities, leading to diplomatic conflicts.
- **Economic Impact:** Restrictions can have economic consequences for both the imposing countries and the targets, affecting trade, investment, and financial systems.
- **Regional Stability:** The imposition of restrictions may impact regional stability, depending on the context and effectiveness of the measures.
- **Arms Race and Defense Innovation:** In response to restrictions, some countries may develop indigenous defense capabilities, triggering arms races or encouraging the development of alternative military technologies

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<sup>16</sup>European Council, Council of the European Union (2023). EU sanctions in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/32wf5ypb>

<sup>17</sup>Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore (2022). Sanctions and Restrictions Against Russia in Response to its Invasion of Ukraine. Available at: <https://www.mfa.gov.sg/Newsroom/Press-Statements-Transcripts-and-Photos/2022/03/20220305-sanctions>

Therefore, the universal and concerted implementation of ACW-related restrictions regimes largely depends on reaching a global consensus among countries regarding the risks and threats posed by ACW proliferation. It also requires robust enforcement by an international body, careful and transparent study of ACW as a phenomenon for target identification, and the establishment of strong compliance measures supported by the development of monitoring instruments.

## THE GEORGIAN CONTEXT

As noted in the introduction, despite the lack of significant avenues for Russian advanced conventional weapons (ACW) proliferation across the Georgian market, the South Caucasus country's geographic location and its post-Soviet ties to the Russian Federation increase its susceptibility to competing geopolitical interests. The growing risks associated with the proliferation of such weapons in Georgia pose a direct threat to the overall stability of the Black Sea and the South Caucasus regions, while also exposing international security to these vulnerabilities.

The importance of considering Georgia as a country at risk, as highlighted earlier, has been significantly amplified by the geopolitical developments following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The imposition of Western restrictive measures on Russian entities, including companies, firms, and individuals, has raised the possibility of these actors under restrictive measures attempting to establish new supply chain operations using alternative routes, including through Georgia.

In the first year following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the West through restrictive regimes directly targeted approximately 2,500 Russian firms, government officials, oligarchs, and their respective families.<sup>18</sup> These regimes have restricted access to Western-based bank accounts and financial markets for these entities. Consequently, the likelihood of Georgia becoming a haven for Russian restriction regime evasion has increased, with the risks arising from Western-restricted Russian individuals using Georgian companies and banks as intermediaries for their operations.

Furthermore, in the aftermath of the conflict in Ukraine, there has been a noticeable upsurge in the number of new limited liability companies (LLCs) and businesses within the borders of Georgia. While certain entities may be legitimate and help Russians with expatriate life, the growing presence of such LLCs also increases vulnerability. The potential risk lies in the possible exploitation of these recently incorporated entities by Russian shell companies, which actively seek dual-use goods to enhance the arsenal of Russian advanced conventional weapons. This scenario presents a circumstance that may undermine the security of Georgia.<sup>19</sup> Given the surge in business registrations, a meticulous approach from Georgian authorities becomes imperative. The necessity for robust screening mechanisms and regulatory oversight is crucial to discern between genuine entrepre

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<sup>18</sup> Lexology (2022). Sanctions Year in Review 2022 - Part II: Russia. Available at: <https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=63c7f90d-83df-421f-8e00-3cdf104c50fc>

<sup>19</sup> Menabde, G. (2023). *During Past 15 Months, Russians Register Over 21,000 Enterprises in Georgia*. The Jamestown Foundation: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 20 Issue: 129. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/3dpschtu>

neurial undertakings and those susceptible to being manipulated for concealed objectives. Striking this balance between promoting economic endeavors and safeguarding against covert ulterior motives remains a priority for Georgia.

In response to Western restrictions, there has been an increase in Russian economic and business presence in Georgia, taking advantage of the country's access to the Georgian market. According to preliminary data from Georgia's National Statistics Office (Geostat) for the first half of 2023, Russia has emerged as Georgia's second-largest trading partner through increased imports and ranks as the third-largest trading partner in terms of exports.<sup>20</sup>

The increasing trade flows between Russia and Georgia have led to calls from the European Union and allied nations, particularly the United States, to either encourage Georgia and other countries in the region to impose restrictive measures on Russia or to potentially consider secondary restrictions. While the Georgian government maintains vigilance in its trade relations with Russia, a distinct apprehension revolves around the Eurasian Economic Union and its unimpeded trade arrangement encompassing Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia. This free trade protocol curtails Georgia's capacity to effectively oversee the transit of dual-use goods to these member nations (excluding Russia). Of significant concern is the potential scenario where these goods, once within these countries, could subsequently be procured by Russia, further augmenting its arsenal of advanced military weaponry.

The necessity to remain alert towards trading with countries that may re-export to the Russian Federation is not limited to the Eurasian Economic Union only. The case of the U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) sanctioning three Georgia-registered companies (2021) - Gensis Engineering, ROV Solutions and SAEROS Safety ERO, "over Iran links due to their acting contrary to the foreign policy or national security interests of the United States", in light of growing bilateral trade between Iran and Russia and the latter pushing for regional free trade pact that will include Iran in Eurasian Economic Union, highlights the necessity for private and public sectors to not limit their vision but instead, maintain three-hundred-sixty alertness.<sup>21</sup>

Several other countries, including G7 member states, such as the United Kingdom, Japan, and Australia, have also taken similar measures against the Russian Federation. For instance, the UK has hindered the Russian defense sector's access to critical technologies. Japan's measures have

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<sup>20</sup>National Statistics Office of Georgia (GEOSTAT) (2023). *External Merchandise Trade in Georgia. January-June 2023 (Preliminary Results)*. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/5faf879r>

<sup>21</sup>Euractiv & Reuters (2023). *Russia to Attach Iran to its Eurasian Economic Union*. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/nrttv28v>

primarily focused on restricting payments and capital transactions with specific entities operating within or closely affiliated with the defense sector. Japan's restrictive measures have also targeted exports of controlled items and other dual-use goods, including but not limited to semiconductors. On the other hand, Australia's restrictive regimes have primarily centered on prohibiting the sale of any goods or services related to Russian arms or heavy military equipment.<sup>22</sup>

The current Western restrictions packages primarily aim to prevent Russia's ability to import critical system components and high-performance machine tools, thereby hindering the country's capacity to manufacture advanced conventional weapons. However, Russia has worked alongside its allies to create sophisticated networks that help relevant and frequently directly restricted entities acquire weapons and components. This enables them to continue manufacturing in their defense industrial complex despite the international restrictive regimes.

As a neighboring country sharing its border with the Russian Federation and one that has, to varying degrees, maintained strong business relationships with Moscow, Georgia has been indirectly impacted by the increase in Western restrictions against Russian businesses and the private sector following the onset of the war. As a result, the implications of these developments have become relevant not only for the government of Georgia but also increasingly for private sector entities in the country.

Despite the possibility of Georgian businesses encountering transactions associated with currently restricted Russian firms, there is a higher likelihood that ACW-related transactions would be conducted through shell companies or networks involving legitimate companies with direct or indirect ties to Russian military end users.

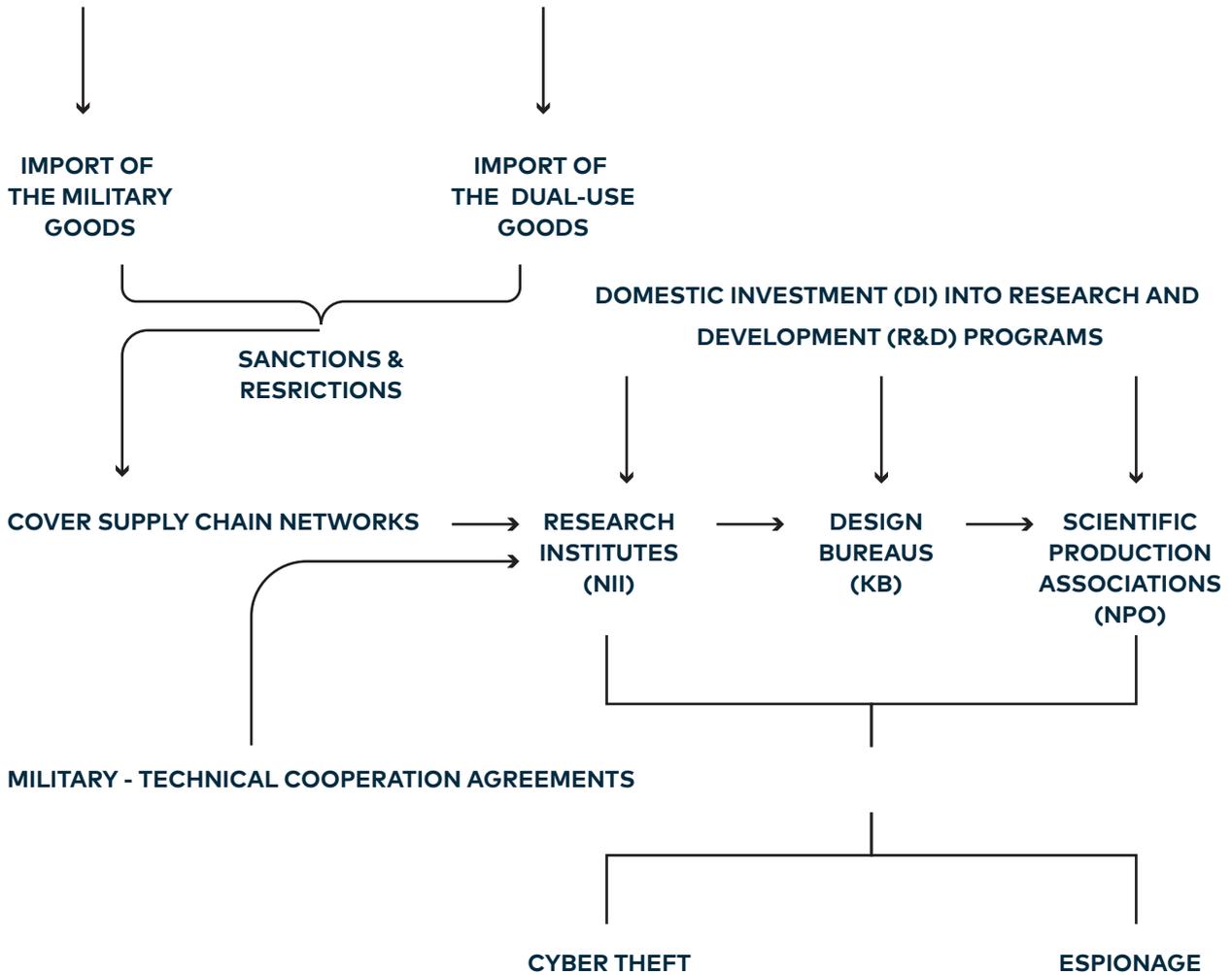
Amid increasing media allegations and growing concerns among Western backers that Russian private entities or companies under international restrictive regimes might be using the Georgian financial system, such as banks and relevant firms to process transactions and evade restrictions, as well as potentially transferring technologies through Georgian territory, these claims lack considerable substantiation or tangible evidence. Nevertheless, the assumption that Georgia could serve as a desirable hub or transit country for Russia, to engage in such activities is a legitimate concern. Therefore, exercising significant vigilance is of critical importance for Georgian financial, logistical, and private sector companies.

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<sup>22</sup>Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford (2023). *The International Working Group on Russian Sanctions*. Available at: <https://fsi.stanford.edu/working-group-sanctions>

Figure 1. Russian Methods for ACW-Acquisition. Source: **Tinatin Japaridze, Beka Parsadanishvili**

**ACQUISITION THROUGH DIRECT INVESTMENTS ABROAD**



# RUSSIAN METHODS FOR ACW-ACQUISITION AMID INTERNATIONAL RESTRICTIONS REGIMES

Advanced Conventional Weapons (ACW) constitute a category of cutting-edge military technologies designed to deliver precise and lethal capabilities in modern warfare. These weapons have undergone significant evolution, integrating advancements in sensors, guidance systems, propulsion, and materials. An increasing number of countries are acquiring advanced and sophisticated weapons systems by combining ACW hardware with emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, machine learning, and robotics to enhance their potency. While the hardware, including equipment, materials, and components (e.g., Maneuverable Reentry Vehicles (MaRVs)), can be produced domestically or imported, gaining access to and obtaining ACW-related emerging technologies (e.g., hypersonic glide vehicles) presents a more formidable challenge.

To comprehend the risks associated with the proliferation of advanced conventional weapons (ACWs) in Georgia, particularly in light of Russia's war in Ukraine, presented policy document deems it necessary to examine the Kremlin's strategies for ACW acquisition, which will enable the readers to better identify vulnerabilities in Georgia. Monitoring Russian activities concerning its advanced conventional weapons industry has prompted the authors to devise an observation-based model of the Kremlin's ACW acquisition methods (please, refer to Figure 1).

## Domestic Investment (DI) into Research and Development (R&D)

Russia's military research and development (R&D) infrastructure has a rich historical background and comprises three primary types of organizations: research institutes,<sup>23</sup> design bureaus,<sup>24</sup> and scientific production associations.<sup>25</sup> Research institutes conduct applied research for the defense industry, whereas design bureaus concentrate on creating prototypes. Scientific production associations seamlessly integrate R&D facilities with their production factories. Russia houses approximately 600 military R&D organizations, including 300 research institutes, nearly 130 design bureaus, and 170 scientific production organizations.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>(Ru. "nauchno-issledovatel'skie institute", NII),

<sup>24</sup>(Ru. "konstruktorskoe byuro", KB),

<sup>25</sup>(Ru. "nauchno-proizvodstvennoe obedinenie", NPO).

<sup>26</sup>Engvall, J. (2021). Russia's Military R&D Infrastructure: A Primer. Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI). Available at: <https://foi.se/rest-api/report/FOI-R--5124--SE>

Geographically, these R&D organizations cluster in scientific industrial centers, tightly integrating scientific research and production. Around half of Russia's R&D entities operate in and around Moscow, with nearly one-fifth of them based in St. Petersburg<sup>27</sup> Russia classifies its military R&D into seven main branches: aviation, space technology, shipbuilding, conventional arms, radio electronics and communication systems, ammunition and special chemicals, and nuclear technology (please, refer to Figure 2).

Figure 2. *Branches of Russian Defence Industry.* Source: [Swedish Defence Research Agency](#)

Branches of defence industry	Research institutes	Design bureaus	Scientific production associations	R&D entities in total
Aviation	20	37	33	<b>90</b>
Space technology	19	10	27	<b>56</b>
Electronics	23	6	17	<b>46</b>
Radio	43	19	29	<b>91</b>
Communications	28	6	17	<b>51</b>
Shipbuilding	12	16	7	<b>35</b>
Ammunition&special chemicals	17	1	13	<b>31</b>
Conventional arms	17	13	12	<b>42</b>
Nuclear technology	20	2	3	<b>25</b>
Others	100	18	10	<b>128</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>299</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>595</b>

The government-run R&D programs in Russia serve as the focal point of the Kremlin's ACW-acquisition efforts. Whether through direct domestic investments, covert or legal imports of dual-use goods, or assistance obtained via bilateral technical-military cooperation, cybertheft, or espionage, research institutes, design bureaus, and scientific production associations are ultimately responsible for utilizing both legitimate and illicit contributions to develop advanced conventional weapons.

<sup>27</sup> ^ ibid.

## ■ Military-Technical Cooperation Agreements (e.g., with China and Iran)

The proliferation of ACW is influenced by geopolitical interests and regional security dynamics. Nations may engage in arms transfers to strengthen strategic alliances, exert influence in regional dynamics, or support proxy conflicts. Furthermore, emerging powers may seek to bolster their military capabilities by acquiring ACW, thus reshaping the balance of power in their favor.

While conventional arms sales have become less prominent in recent bilateral military cooperation between Russia and China, joint technology projects have gained further importance. The two countries have initiated high-tech projects with potential military applications in areas like artificial intelligence and space systems. Notably, Russian assistance in developing a Chinese missile launch early warning system signifies the expansion of cooperation into strategic defense.

However, in terms of purely military technology development, the partnership has been somewhat one-sided, with little evidence of technology transfer from China to Russia. Russia has sought China's help to replace key Ukrainian and Western dual-use components, particularly in areas such as optics and electronics, but these projects have been limited by restrictive measures to some extent. Nevertheless, the shift from arms sales to joint projects with technology transfers indicates an increase in defense industry integration, with higher levels of mutual dependence and institutional coordination. Overall, Russian-Chinese military-technical cooperation remains at a high level, though there is potential for further growth if both sides can address concerns related to reverse engineering, competition in global arms markets, reluctance to share sensitive technologies, and the persistent preference for maintaining self-sufficiency in defense production.

Given that Russia's military cooperation with Iran has been underscored by recent statements from Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, and in light of Iran's geographical proximity to Georgia, while not the main focus of this paper, it is nevertheless crucial that it does not overlook the Iranian aspect. In response to Washington's request for Tehran to cease drone sales to Moscow, Ryabkov emphasized, "Our collaboration with Iran remains unchanged."<sup>29</sup> During discussions with Iran's Ground Forces Commander Kiumars Heydari, the Russian Deputy Defense Minister Alexander

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<sup>28</sup> Gorenburg, D., Wishnick, E., Schwartz, P. & Waidelich, B. (2023). *How Advanced Is Russian-Chinese Military Cooperation? War on the Rocks*. Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2023/06/29000/>

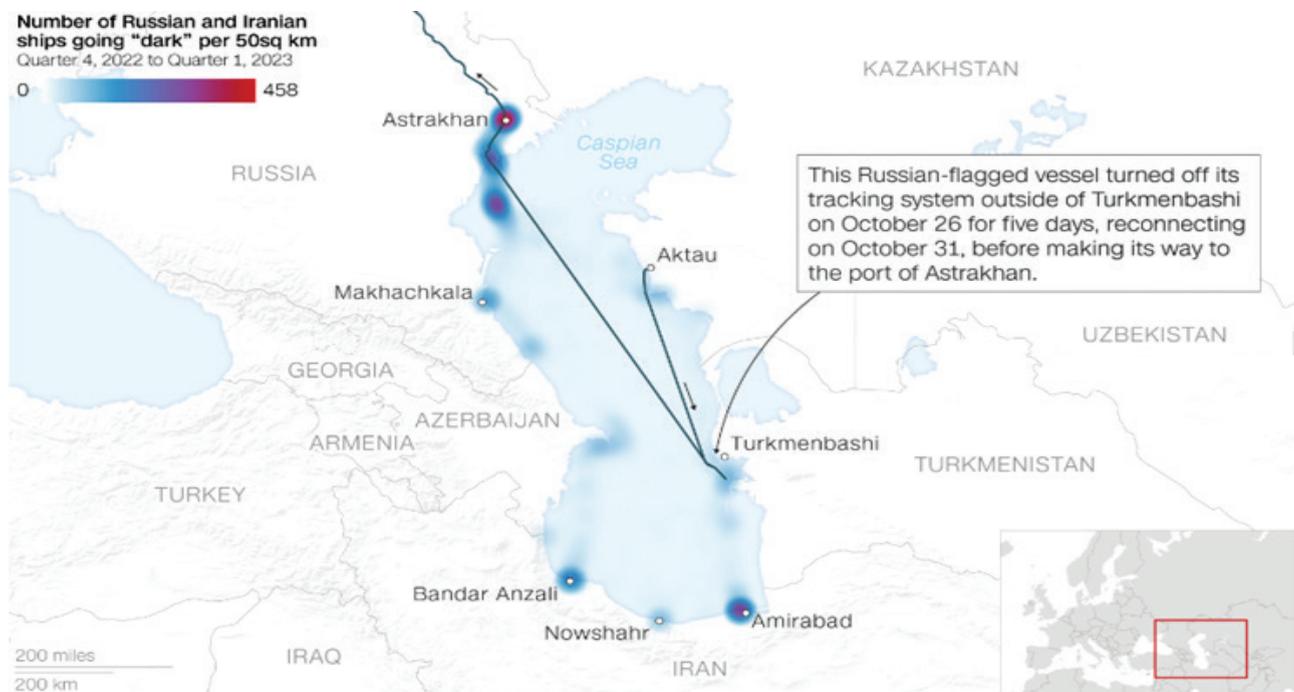
<sup>29</sup> Reuters (2023). *Russia's Military Ties with Iran Will Withstand Geopolitical Pressure, RIA Reports*. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/kfejpdx8>

Fomin also confirmed the bilateral intent to enhance cooperation, possibly encompassing Advanced Conventional Weapons (ACW) and their components.<sup>30</sup>

Iran has already furnished Russia with drones, specifically the Shahed-136 and the Mohajer-6 drone designed for both reconnaissance and offensive operations. In 2022, following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russia began utilizing these drones against Ukrainian military sites, residential communities, power installations, bridges, leisure spaces, sewage treatment facilities, and other critical infrastructure, resulting in civilian casualties.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, this policy document advocates for vigilance regarding trade routes involving Iran, extending beyond their military aspects. The increase in the number of vessels traveling between Iran and Russia through the Caspian Sea that deactivate their tracking systems deserves thorough attention. While the Amirabad-Astrakhan route circumvents Georgia, it is nonetheless noteworthy that ships docking and making stops in Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan also play a significant role (please, refer to Figure 3).

Figure 3. *Russian and Iranian Ships Going Dark in the Caspian Sea*. Source: Lloyd's List Intelligence, Marine Traffic and Natural Earth. Graphic: **Lou Robinson, CNN**



<sup>30</sup> Reuters (2023). *Russia's Military Ties with Iran Will Withstand Geopolitical Pressure*, RIA Reports. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/kfejpdx8>

<sup>31</sup> United States Institute of Peace (2023). *Iran's Deepening Strategic Alliance with Russia*. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/2eh78hra>

It is also worth considering that in October 2015, Iran and Bulgaria signing a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding to open a transit corridor through Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, and the Black Sea<sup>32</sup> created a potential gap for Russia to exploit vulnerabilities and acquire dual-use or semi-finished goods. These items may include chemicals (e.g., explosive materials used in gunpowder), polymers (those used in the development of printed circuit boards), and ceramics (utilized for body armor), which could be transported from Bulgaria and delivered via the Black Sea region.

## ■ Acquisition Through Direct Investments Abroad

The proliferation of advanced conventional weapons (ACWs) is also influenced by commercial interests, as countries engaged in arms exportation aim to expand their defense industry markets and secure lucrative contracts. The concerning aspect is the acquisition through direct investments abroad, where the acquired technologies may have applications in the context of ACWs. In many instances, the technologies acquired by Russian entities may appear to have only civilian uses, but they indeed possess military applications as well. For instance, foreign acquisitions in automotive industries, specifically technologies like remote occupant sensing or human-machine interface technologies, warrant scrutiny due to their potential military uses (e.g., enhancing human-machine interaction in a military setting). Even sectors with evident defense connections, such as aerospace, or emerging technology companies in fields such as emotional analytics or gesture control, may involve sensitive technologies being acquired without adequate review procedures through direct investments.

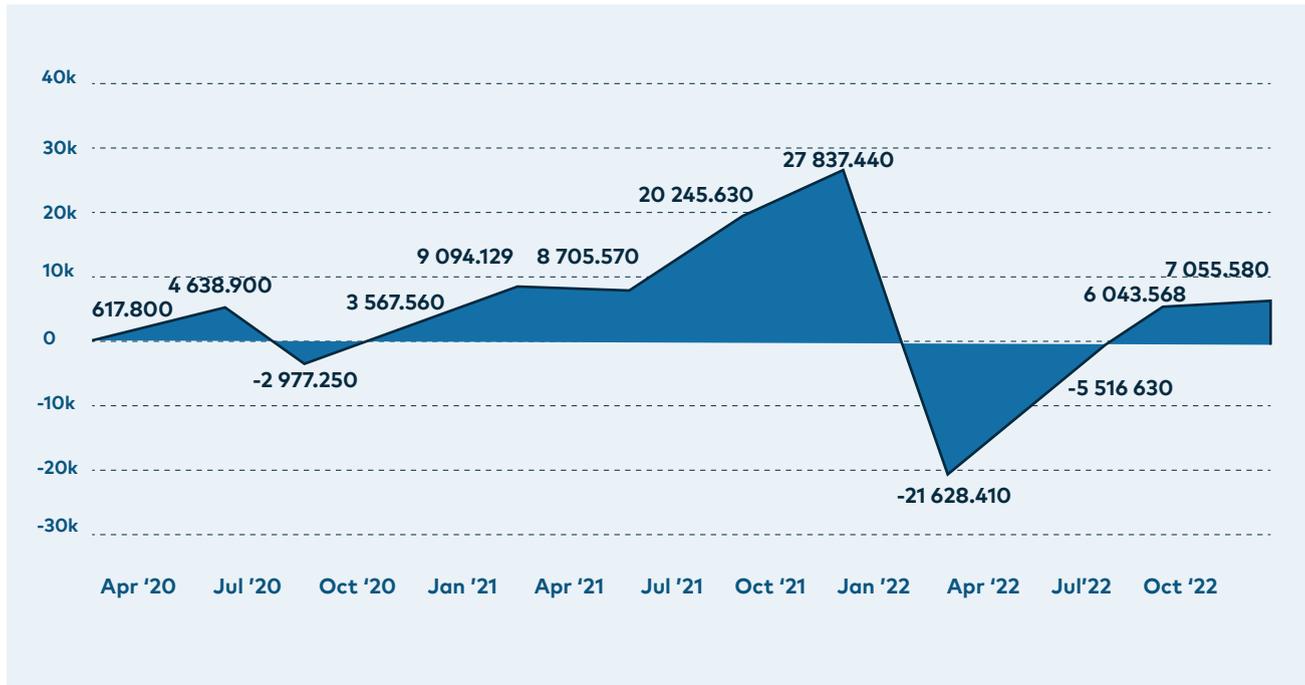
The war in Ukraine and related Western restrictive regimes, which aim to hinder the Kremlin's ability to purchase dual-use goods through direct investments abroad, have taken a heavy toll on Russia's capacity to acquire military goods. However, since the Western restrictions regimes specifically target the prohibition of exporting dual-use goods or military products to Russia, Moscow has sought to procure these items for ACW from other sources. According to the Global Economic Data, Indicators, Charts & Forecasts, by July 2022, the Russian Federation will have demonstrated substantial foreign direct investments in regions other than Europe (please, refer to Figure 4).

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<sup>32</sup> Papidze, M. (2016). *Will Georgia Play Viral Transit Role Connecting Iran to Europe? Russia, Iran and Azerbaijan Compete to Supply Georgia with Natural Gas*. Available at: <https://agenda.ge/en/article/2016/5>

Figure 4. Russia's Direct Investment Abroad from Mar 1994 to Dec 2022.

Source: [Global Economic Data, Indicators, Charts & Forecasts](#)

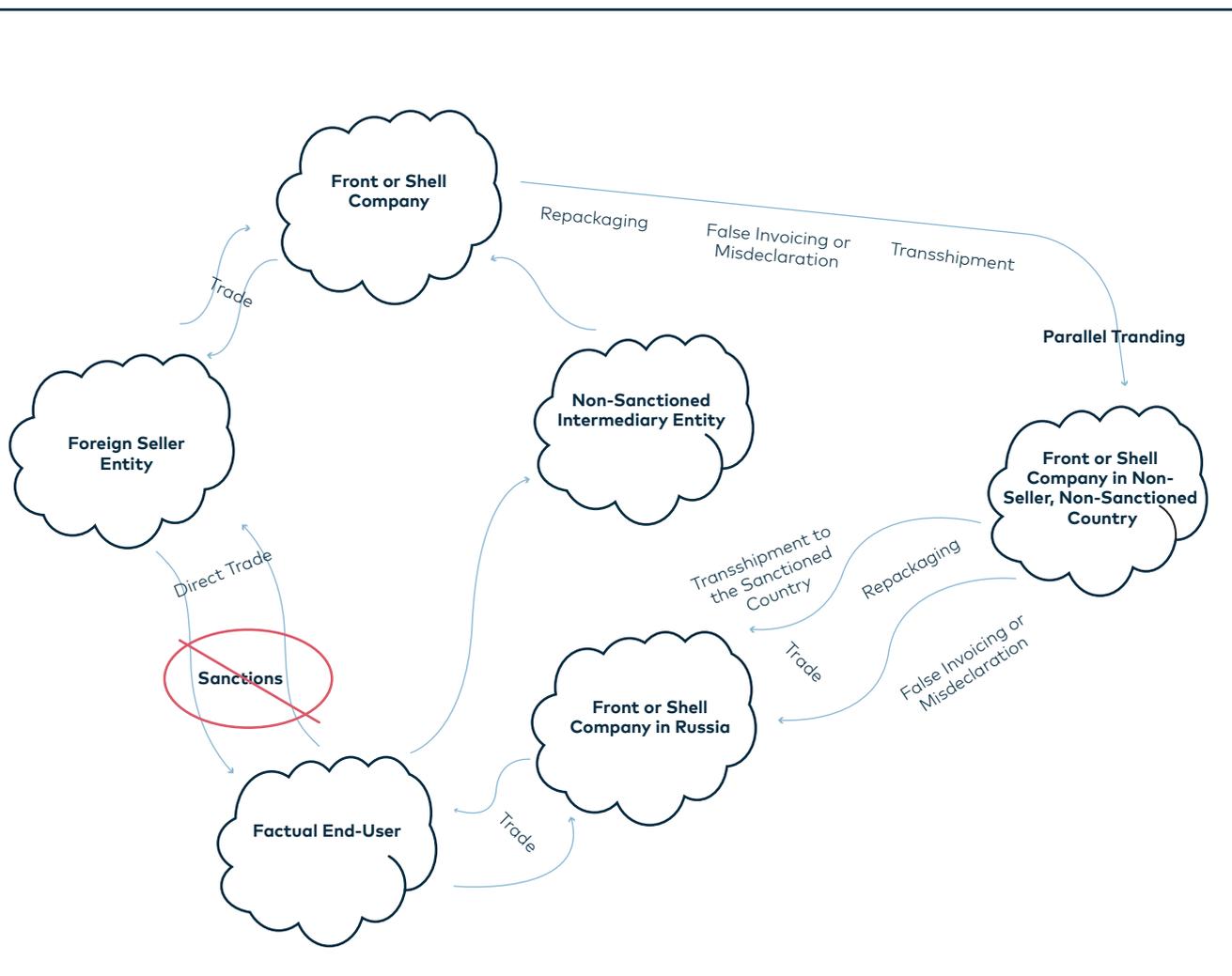


## Acquisition Through Covert Supply Chain Networks

Due to the aforementioned international restrictions regimes aimed at hindering the Kremlin's ability to acquire advanced conventional weapons (ACW), the Russian Federation is increasingly relying on a complex network of defense industries, including manufacturers, suppliers, and research institutions. These industries collaborate to fabricate components and subsystems that are integrated into the final weapons platform. The production process often spans multiple countries and involves intricate supply chains, necessitating strict foreign trade controls and cooperation among international partners. The case of Arthur Petrov confirms the complexity of the Russian ACW-acquisition. On August 31, 2023 the U.S. Commerce Department alleged the involvement of three individuals in an unlawful Russian procurement network. Among these individuals, Petrov, a Russian-German dual national, was apprehended and subsequently charged by the U.S. Justice Department for violating export controls. Arthur Petrov stands accused of procuring microelectronics from exporters located in the United States with the intention of dispatching them to Cyprus,

Latvia, or Tajikistan. Subsequently, other enterprises aided in forwarding these components, ultimately facilitating their transit to Russia.<sup>33</sup> The monitoring of Russia-affiliated entities' attempts to acquire dual-use goods has led the authors to conclude that the applied illicit supply chain network includes activities that span different countries (please refer to Figure 5).

Figure 5. *Covert Supply Chain Network Used by Russia for ACW component acquisition.* Source: **Tinatin Japaridze, Beka Parsadanishvili**



<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*<sup>10</sup>

Bypassing export restrictions using shell and front companies involves deceptive and illicit practices aimed at disguising the true origin and destination of goods to evade the restrictions imposed by trade control regulations. The observation of Russian activities to acquire the components for ACW may include the following activities:

- **False Invoicing:** The shell or front company can create fake invoices that misrepresent the nature of the goods being exported or undervalue them to avoid triggering the trade control thresholds.
- **Transshipment:** Goods can be routed through multiple intermediate locations or countries using shell companies to hide the true origin or final destination, making it difficult for authorities to track the actual movement of the goods.
- **Change of Ownership:** The shell or front company may transfer ownership of the goods to another entity located in a country not subject to export restrictions before forwarding them to the final destination.
- **Repackaging:** The goods can be repackaged or relabeled to hide their true identity or country of origin.
- **Misdeclaration:** The shell or front company can intentionally misdeclare the goods in customs documents, providing false information about their contents or destination.
- **Parallel Trade:** Parallel trade involves legal goods being sold to intermediaries in a country not subject to restrictions and then redirected to the embargoed country through a shell or front company.
- **Use of Middlemen:** Shell or front companies can use intermediaries or agents to handle the logistics, further distancing themselves from the actual export transaction.
- **Barrage Procurement:** Illicit entities submit numerous requests for information or pricing to companies from the same industry and producing/selling similar goods. (e.g., machine tools, etc.)

## Cybertheft & Espionage

More obvious examples of ACW acquisition by the Russian Federation, include cybertheft or espionage, but in many cases, academic and student exchanges and interactions are exploited to reach proliferation objectives. Because these typologies are less straightforward compared to the acquisition of tangible goods, less resources are generally available within national systems to mitigate and counteract them.

# INTERNATIONAL-BEST-PRACTICE (IBP)-BASED ACTIONS FOR PRIVATE SECTOR ENTITIES ENGAGED IN SUPPLY CHAIN

It is important to note that bypassing export restrictions is illegal and can lead to severe legal consequences. The supply chain in Georgia must continuously work to detect and prevent these practices, thereby maintaining the integrity of trade control regimes and ensuring compliance with international law. This chapter comprises a collection of actions for private sector entities based on international best practices:

- **Engage in market surveillance** - Monitor online marketplaces, trade shows, and retail outlets to identify and report sellers or distributors of counterfeit goods.
- **Capacity building of employees and partners** - Educate your staff and partners about counterfeit risks and how to spot potential counterfeit products. Encourage a culture of vigilance and reporting suspicious activities.
- **Conduct periodic risk assessments** - Regularly assess the vulnerability of your supply chain to counterfeiting and update your strategies accordingly.
- **Supply Chain Visibility:** Maintain transparency within your supply chain. Work closely with your suppliers to ensure they are aware of and adhere to your policies against selling to unauthorized entities.
- **Collaborate with authorities and the public (public-private partnerships)** - Establish relationships with law enforcement agencies and relevant authorities to report and investigate counterfeit activities. Participate in industry associations and initiatives combating counterfeiting.
- **Crowd-Sourced Counterfeit Detection:** Establish a platform or mobile app that allows customers, retailers, and supply chain partners to report and verify potential counterfeit products. By crowdsourcing the detection process, you can tap into a broader network of eyes and ears, making it easier to identify counterfeit items across different regions and markets.
- **Establish Customer Verification Protocol** - Conduct thorough due diligence before trading with customers. Verify their credentials, reputation, and track record.
- **End-User Certificates (EUC):** Require end-user certificates from customers, especially if you deal with high-tech products that have potential military applications. An EUC is a legally binding document in which the customer declares the intended use and ensures compliance with the terms and conditions of the purchase.
- **Screening and Red Flags:** Develop a system to identify red flags during the sales process that may indicate potential diversion to military use. These flags could include unusual order quantities, shipping destinations, or vague product specifications.

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- **Analyzing Passenger-Cargo Connections:** Passenger (API/PNR) data can be used to analyze connections between passengers and cargo shipments. This can help identify if the same individuals or entities are involved in both passenger travel and the transportation of your high-tech products.
- **Utilize authentication technologies** - Implement security features such as holograms, barcodes, or tamper-evident seals on products to help consumers and retailers identify genuine items.

## CONCLUSION

This document has highlighted the Western crackdown on the Kremlin's capabilities in advanced conventional weapons (ACW) through a series of restrictions regimes during the Ukrainian war, which has brought post-Soviet countries into focus. As the international community becomes increasingly concerned about the risks of ACW proliferation due to geopolitical shifts and technological advancements, the vulnerability of post-Soviet countries becomes a critical factor.

The case of Georgia exemplifies the potential challenges these countries face. Despite the absence of a significant market for Russian ACW, Georgia's historical struggles with territorial disputes and security challenges, coupled with its strategic location between the Black Sea and the Caucasus Mountains, make it susceptible to illicit arms transfers. To mitigate these risks, regulatory mechanisms need to remain vigilant.

This policy document proposes an observation-based model that monitors Russian activities in the ACW industry, which includes various methods of acquisition, such as domestic investments, military-technical cooperation agreements, cybertheft, espionage, and covert supply chain networks.

Drawing on international best practices against counterfeit supply chain networks, the authors have offered actions to strengthen defenses against illicit arms trade. These measures involve establishing customer verification systems, vigilant supply chain monitoring, the use of authentication technologies, engaging in market surveillance, obtaining end-user certificates, implementing screening processes during sales, providing employee training and awareness, conducting third-party audits, screening against watchlists, sharing data with authorities, and analyzing passenger-cargo connections.

By adopting and implementing these actions, countries can bolster their capacity to safeguard against the proliferation of advanced conventional weapons and contribute to regional and global stability. As geopolitical dynamics continue to evolve, it remains crucial for the international community writ-large to coordinate efforts in curbing the illicit trade of such weaponry and fostering peaceful resolution mechanisms to address conflicts and security challenges.

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