US - New Rules On Small Arms

Why in news?

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US administration has decided to shift the authority of oversight of the sale of American-manufactured small arms.

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What is the new policy?

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- Weapons like assault rifles and handguns are shifted from State Department’s tightly-restricted Munitions list to the Commerce Control Lists.
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- Commercial gun exports would no longer be given the same scrutiny as missile and fighter jet sales that require Congressional approval.
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- The changes are primarily to reduce the bureaucratic red tape governing the export of non-military grade weapons and ammunition.
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- The aim is to enable US weapons manufacturers to sell their products overseas more easier and faster.
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What are the concerns?

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- Unconventional conflicts within a sovereign state’s territory, such as the current war in Syria, are being witnessed more.
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- The semi-automatic weapons which can be used with little military training are mostly being used in these confrontations.
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- The cheaper cost is particularly advantageous for guerilla armies.
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- Also, these can now easily find their way to a conflict zone through smuggling and diversion.
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- Thus, loosening the inter-agency guidelines on use of these has the risk of fuelling the civil wars.
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- E.g. The military aid that helped drive Gaddafi from power in Libya, ultimately fuelled the civil war still ravaging Libya.
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- Also, relaxing the rules on small arms exports is counterproductive to the US objective of de-escalating these conflicts.
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- In all, the monetary benefits that US aims from this are expected to be lower than the cost of likely instability and violence.
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Source: BusinessLine

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