

Chapter 2

The International Agenda: Finding Leverage Points and Making Action Possible

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In the field of light weapons control and reduction, countries have been slow to grasp what international co-operation can achieve. Yet, unless they start to concentrate on the proliferation of light weapons, they will never manage to reach agreement on the issue of reducing conventional weapons transfers, because these two matters are directly linked. If conventional arms sales and control of light weapons were seen as part of the same package, then the international community could concentrate on assisting with the control and reduction of light weapons flows across borders, which would encourage regional co-operation, allow for stability and permit development.

Stability and development would, in turn, act as confidence-building measures regionally and military budgets would decrease rather than increase. As long as light weapons are considered a 'light issue', however, the need for investment in major conventional weapons systems will augment, as governments continue to seek to contain the spill-over effect of massive armed disorder across their borders by investing in yet more weapons. The way forward in conceiving and implementing a meaningful, effective plan of action should have a number of variables which, when applied in a concerted way, could reduce the destabilising effect of the light weapons already in existence.

Components for an Effective Plan of Action

An effective plan of action would include the following components

- *International understanding that small arms proliferation has a set number of variables.* This means that more research and discussion must be undertaken at international levels to liberate small arms control

thinking from its supply/demand strait-jacket. For the production and export of new quantities of light weapons, the supply/demand perspective still holds, including its variations on regional and international weapons registers, export controls and national overviews. Since, however, many of the destabilising effects of light weapons today do not refer to new stocks being transferred from one country to another, but to the dynamics of circulation and redistribution of existing stocks by both state and non-state actors, the discussion of supply and demand is not enough. A further category should be designed internationally that would permit talk of *source*, *transit*, and *end-user* countries and regions. This distinction would not penalise countries for fitting into specific categories, but would allow for particular concentration on finding the leverage points for control on a case-by-case basis. Thus, while some countries might not need assistance in managing weapons in existence or in controlling the violent use of weapons, they might develop better techniques to control and reduce the transit of weapons through their territories, ensuring that the licit never become illicit in the process. This is the model proposed in this volume, when implementation of policies for Southern Africa is referred to (see concluding section of this chapter).

- *Focus on regional organisations.* Existing regional and sub-regional fora and mechanisms for co-operation should be examined and enhanced to incorporate the theme of small arms control into their operational structures. Existing regional organisations may or may not have security components. More often than not, those they do possess, fail to identify small arms as a priority item. Thus, any international initiative to control the proliferation of light weapons must include a concerted effort to situate the issue of light weapons control in an institutional framework that will permit co-operation, exchange of information, and the collection of data and statistics needed to map out the problem of weapons flows in that specific region or sub-region. Such sub-regional and regional organisations could also become a non-threatening focal point for discussion of possible initiatives for control. All sub-regional mechanisms for discussion and co-operation must be utilised, whether these be economic, developmental, financial, political or security based; and whether they represent a group of three countries co-operating on one issue, or several countries on many.

- *A mechanism for national co-ordination.* Countries which sympathise with the need to do something about the control of light weapons, including firearms, must prioritise the inter-agency co-operation and co-ordination mechanisms that will permit focused discussion of this issue. More often than not at governmental level, light weapons (particularly small arms) are discussed as part of another problem, not as a problem in themselves. Thus, many countries might have co-ordinating mechanisms and/or national policies on safety and security issues, on the criminal justice system and policing problems, on violent crime, on transnational crime, on the control of smuggling and drug trafficking, on refugee and migrant management and other such issues. Arms, however, are usually seen as an appendix to these wider issues: seldom are they seen as an item on their own. The need to identify small arms as a policy area at national level is of prime importance: it would enhance the inter-agency exchange of information. Thus, governments should create a policy specialisation on small arms and should strive to ensure inter-agency consultation that involves personnel and key officials from the relevant ministries, for example, in defence, foreign affairs, home affairs, safety and security, customs and excise, to name but a few. Local, provincial and national co-ordinating committees for inter-agency exchange of information on the role and impact of arms in their community/area of operation should also be set up.
- *Improved international capacity building.* One area where there is government-to-government assistance and/or assistance to national and regional processes is that of military and civil-military training. This has come about as a result of programmes to improve the processes of democratisation and professionalisation, as well as the capacity of regions to be more active in processes of co-operative conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction. For example, training for peacekeeping support and for restructuring of military bodies is identified by most governments as a foreign aid area. What is not generally understood or known, however, is that a far more important area for co-operation and capacity building lies in policing and information gathering/exchange efforts, as well as under the general rubric of peace-building efforts. The latter should be considered as a mix of adequate policing, improved criminal justice systems, and adequate mechanisms for the control and reduction of weapons flows.

It is the blend of these three elements that can produce the security climate needed for development and good governance processes to take hold in emerging societies.

- *Open exchange of information relating to firearms regulations and licensing practices.* Although the discussions on tightening firearms controls are rife with domestic politics in every country, the international thrust should be not on modifying or standardising legislation globally, but on generating an understanding of each individual country's views on this issue. Such an understanding could provide information about the loopholes that allow for cross-border transgressions and make for the fine line between licit and illicit possession. This understanding could, in turn, lead to discussions at sub-regional level, concerning the gaps that need to be bridged to control trans-border movements in the grey area that exists between licit and illicit.
- *The development of statistics and central repositories of information on weapons captured.* This, albeit a difficult proposition, must start at some point. It would be convenient to undertake the task nationally, starting with state-owned weapons and seized stocks in police custody. The resulting national central repository of information could then be made available to sub-regional and regional organisations for their use in the operations of arms control committees. In this sense, some enhancement of the capacity of existing police functions dealing with these activities must be considered, particularly those which relate to Interpol.
- *Development of improved technologies for customs inspections at major entry points.* Land, sea and air entry points need to be better monitored without the movement of goods being inhibited. The same applies to the processing/identification, protection and disarming of large groups of refugees moving from region to region and country to country.
- *NGO participation in the research into the connection between weapons availability and the emergence of a culture of violence.* Since weapons are mostly seen as secondary tools of violence in themselves, nation states and international organisations working towards the

curtailment of small arms proliferation want to see a change in the patterns of violence in societies at large, in order to sustain their efforts. This means that, although regional control mechanisms for reducing the flows of arms across borders are a necessary part of a non-proliferation strategy, they are only as important as national policies for controlling and regulating firearms possession; and as important as the reduction of the culture of violence in societies. It is the tripartite approach of regional, national and local which can make an effective difference to the flow of arms and their use in specific areas. For this reason, research is needed into violence and arms in local populations. This could result in local partnerships for the control of weapons being put in place. Moreover, it could lead to education packages that impact directly to bring about a reversal of the culture of violence in societies, in which all memory of resolving personal and societal disputes, except with a gun, has been lost.

- *International and national campaigns to raise public awareness of small arms as an international security issue.* Although more countries and peoples are now beginning to see weapons as a problem in their own right, they still show reluctance to recognise the small arms issue as a separate one. Nothing can be achieved without this recognition, however. Campaigns such as those envisaged would permit both national and international focus on the issue.
- *Compliance with disarmament agreements, particularly those relating to conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction processes.* The systematic collection and destruction of weapons during peace processes that are well advanced must be worked into all negotiations, prior and subsequent to an internationally brokered peace process. This is particularly important when negotiating the reduction and restructuring of armies and the policies to be applied to demobilised soldiers. This item could be enlarged to cover a peace-building package for post-conflict reconstruction that includes the elements indicated earlier.
- *NGO and governmental studies on the dynamics of transnational criminal organisations and black markets.* These are necessary to understand the patterns and networks utilised in the movement of illicit arms across borders and regions. The tracing of the links between the

increased availability in small arms, the growing strength of transnational criminal organisations and the new competitiveness in black markets form a set of issues that needs to be recognised and researched as soon as possible.

- *An internationally sponsored study on the patterns of the mushrooming activities of private security companies, and the operations of transnational companies and other groupings that require arms for self-defence and for the pursuit of their activities.* This focus is important, as two areas, in particular, are responsible for the movement of weapons. The first is where arms are used to protect mining or mineral areas. The second relates to the protection of individuals and groups in countries where state law and order mechanisms are deficient.
- *Interaction and co-ordination between regional initiatives on arms control for the exchange of information on lessons learnt and possible regional connections affecting the flow of weapons from region to region.* Cross-regional meetings and discussion groups to exchange information and views are a requirement that cannot always be met by larger international organisations, such as the UN. A meeting on small arms should be held between regional and sub-regional initiators of initiatives on arms control. Thus, the OAS could be matched with the OAU and EU. By the same token, smaller co-operative structures, such as SADC, could be paired with MERCOSUR. The idea is to generate a forum for discussion similar to that of the initial talks on the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE). At national level, to pursue an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) approach to this issue, might prove interesting. Rather than using the existing OECD framework, however, it would be preferable to take one step backward, using the approach of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) that assisted European integration processes in the 1980s. This would be particularly useful in the discussion about making national firearm legislation and processes compatible between neighbours.
- *Destruction of surplus stocks of light weapons in national armouries and in post-conflict reconstruction situations.* This is not only applicable at national levels, but is particularly necessary in countries and regions that are considering upgrading their weaponry in the near

future and that will, as a result, have large amounts of obsolete stock. The flooding of developing countries with surplus from both the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact countries that took place in the early 1990s must never be repeated. In this context, particular attention must be given to the destruction of stocks in those countries that are part of the Partnership for Peace Process in Europe. When eventually they are admitted to NATO, they will have to upgrade their systems to match its own. And what will happen to their existing stocks? Destruction must become a policy if we hope to prevent the next proliferation of light and small weapons in the south.

- *Assistance in reducing the manufacture of light weapons in producer countries.* This would mean a tightening of regulations governing quotas for production, and further, assistance in converting part of the production to other uses. This would also imply looking at the micro-enterprise of home made weapons and ammunition and the creation of development and economic assistance programmes to convert micro-enterprises in survival economies, from guns and ammunition to other less lethal products.
- *Encouragement for the responsible management of existing weapons rather than outright disarmament and destruction.* This response would be particularly useful in the area of controlling weapons in use by rebel and insurgent groups operating in different areas and regions. The need to engage in three types of simultaneous tasks to control the spread of weapons, i.e., proliferation prevention, proliferation management and proliferation resolution, would put this item in perspective, as is explained in the next section of this chapter.
- *Encouragement for international relief agencies to undertake field studies of the impact of small arms on their operations.* In this sense, the successful public awareness campaign on the victims of landmines could be emulated internationally by the collection of information and statistics related to the impact of weapons and weapons flows through communities, as witnessed by international humanitarian relief and developmental operators in the field.
- *Focusing international efforts on the control of ammunition.* Although the UN has now initiated a project for analysing the problems associated with ammunition and explosives as part of the light weapons

issue, individual programmes for research and action in this area must be implemented at national, regional and NGO level elsewhere.

- *Constructing of guidelines for the funding of practical disarmament and arms control projects by governments and NGOs.* A clear policy for funding support to international projects by both NGOs and governments on the issue of small arms control should be designed for application by those governments that have assistance mandates. Frequently, governments that wish to support practical and applied disarmament projects cannot do so because they have not defined their programmes on the relationship between development and security, or between small arms and violence. Perhaps increased discussion between governments on standardising the concept relating to these connections might expedite more effectively and in a more co-ordinated manner the funding of packages to be utilised by governments. This could be a central theme for a major UN mandated conference, such as was originally recommended in the final report of the UN Panel of Experts on Small Arms in 1997.

Irrespective of the general recommendations mentioned here, the international community should devise a ‘formula for engagement’ that, in its perception of the seriousness of the problem of light weapons, cuts across divides and asymmetries. This formula should provide for multiple North-South commitments to the issue of control and reduction of small arms proliferation. Such a formula should be based on two tenets: *process* and *ownership*.

A Working International Process

Several vital elements are included in the international process advocated here:

- *Understanding the problem.* This entails the collation of verifiable statistics, country studies and mapping of the situation in source, transit and end-user countries. These activities are best undertaken by NGOs, international relief agencies and international humanitarian agencies.
- *Making solutions thinkable.* This involves defusing the politics of the discussion by focusing on regional *vis-à-vis* international and national levels for action.

- *Enhancing existing co-operation mechanisms.* This implies creating adequate operational structures for information exchange and discussion of the small arms issue.
- *Raising international awareness on the issue of light weapons and their connection with violence.* This includes packaging the issue of light weapons as one that threatens good governance and regional governance processes world-wide.
- *Choosing co-operative resourcing methodologies for training, action, structures and verification.* This relates to creating channels of communication that permit comparable experiences to be discussed across borders, regions and organisations.
- *Co-ordinating international and national initiatives for the control of small arms.* This involves the discussion on standardisation of priority on small arms, the results of which will form a natural mechanism for co-ordination that facilitates eventual action. Ideally this process will be both national and international
- *Creating distance between intent and existence of arms.* This is important, as it reduces the politics and the political linkage in the discussion of small arms. The best way to do this is to start talking of improving management processes in the field of small arms (i.e., of demining management, disarmament management and light weapons management programmes, for example). The idea of management appeals to all, as it is seen as a technical issue. Both state and non-state actors – criminal organisations excluded – wish to present an image of compliance with the responsible management of weapons. This should be the key to the discussions leading to control.

A Working Ownership Formula

Regardless of whether a set of international and NGO actors agrees to co-operate by giving input into an international process for the containment and reduction of light weapons proliferation, the capacity to implement and the priority afforded such an implementation process will depend on how the value system of each of the participating actors affects individual perceptions of the threat posed by light weapons proliferation. Repeatedly the international community succeeds in securing the political commitment of individual countries to ‘lead’ or endorse an item on the international agenda; yet, when the time comes for implementation, several loopholes

emerge to thwart the end result. Although there are many explanations for this and the process, in fact, is considered part of international politics, there are certain procedures that can be followed to allow each participant in an international initiative to feel that its interests and requirements are being met by the initiative itself. What needs to happen at international level, therefore, is to build in a 'formula for ownership', whereby each country can manage its own agenda for action according to its own – and no other country's – priorities, while at the same time input into other countries' priority needs is permitted.

In the field of light weapons control, such a 'formula for ownership' could consist of a three-tiered approach that must be co-ordinated equally at the level of authority and priority in each member state. This approach would include looking at the flow of light weapons and small arms from the perspectives of *prevention, management, and resolution*. Priorities and needs for individual and common action then emerge in a format both conceivable and able to be implemented. Thus, a model for building ownership would consist of assigning specific light weapons dimensions to one of three universal categories:

Category A: The prevention of small arms proliferation;

Category B: The management of existing small arms;

Category C: The final resolution of the small arms proliferation problem.

The approach put forward here is region-centred, which means that each region and/or sub-region constructs its own set of items, placing them under one of the three universal categories. The sub-region of Southern Africa will be used here as an example of the working model.

Category A: The Prevention of Future Flows

This first category relates to consistent and concerted measures designed for application in the long term, in order to reduce and control the problem before it impacts on the Southern African region. Thus, for preventing future flows of uncontrolled material, member states of SADC should undertake joint work on:

- revising and tightening the criteria for arms transfers from producer countries into and out of the region;

- codes of conduct for transfers;
- concentration on harmonising legislation related to firearm licensing in each sub-region;
- the generation of registries for regional transparency on arms imports and exports;
- the study of supply and demand dynamics for the light weapons market in the region;
- long term strategies to reverse the culture of violence that has emerged in the region through strategic education and socio-economic development projects in communities which are today dependent on the arms traffic, or whose survival is based on their access to and/or use of small arms;
- tightening controls on and production of indigenous small arms and ammunition manufacturing and, where possible, engaging in conversion programmes for key industries.

This category would concentrate all the politically charged issues into one long-term priority listing that requests member states to take concerted action for eventual change in the patterns that could lead to fresh flows of weapons into the region of concern. By concentrating on supply and demand variables here, solutions can be found that are politically acceptable because they undertake a long-term process of implementation. By uniting sub-regional efforts to face an anticipated threat, long-term policy co-ordination, as well as education to reduce demand, can be made thinkable and eventually implemented through enhanced mechanisms for joint action.

Category B: Management of Existing Small Arms Flows and Associated Problems

Strategic decisions and joint work on preventive supply and demand would ensure a reduction of flows in the future, but it would not be of much help in controlling the present diffusion of arms throughout the region. Thus, for the second category of regional measures to be undertaken, those that impact on the management of the small arms problem in the region, the following items could be addressed:

- creating and training of complementary and combined border police units to monitor trans-border movements of arms trafficking;

- creating an early warning information system for sharing information on criminal groups, illicit networks and other relevant crime/weapons related issues between member states;
- creating a central repository for statistics on captured illicit weapons;
- improving the technical capabilities and financial resources for investigating goods in transit at major entry points;
- improving national co-ordination at interagency level for information and action relating to weapons control;
- improving and/or creating regional interactions through committees and point agencies for the exchange of information and the management of joint operations to condition, and ultimately reduce, the extent of the illicit flows;
- surveying the status of licensing laws on a comparative basis so as to determine the loopholes that would facilitate illicit trafficking through borders in the region;
- undertaking community involvement by raising public awareness and assisting in the construct of effective co-operation between community leaders and local authorities for the reduction of demand and increase of control and recovery of weapons affecting the different communities;
- focusing on money laundering and brokering activities related to illicit weapons flows and closing the loopholes associated with their operations;
- improving controls over state armouries and stocks of captured weapons in police stations.

Obviously, a crisis-management orientation for this category would be heavily biased towards the control of illicit small arms trafficking as seen in association with political and ideological conflict, the rise of vigilantism, the private security trade, the trade in illegal weapons – itself undertaken by transnational criminal organisations – and the increase in armed crime in urban and rural communities. Because this is already perceived as a critical situation, short term action can speedily be agreed upon when illicit small arms trafficking is spotlighted, leaving the correction areas for licit weapons as part of another category.

Category C: Resolution of Small Arms Proliferation in the Region

This would entail items associated with:

- weapons collection programmes;
- destruction of both surplus and captured stocks;
- review and correction of demobilisation and disarmament programmes already underway;
- undertaking a ‘mapping’ exercise of those communities most affected by weapons flows in order to produce education, development and control packages to reduce the demand for weapons in key localities;
- undertaking joint and combined operations for weapons removal and destruction across borders;
- undertaking peace-building strategies that will tie small arms control to the review of criminal justice systems and sustainable development at local levels;
- tightening the licensing laws and enforcing them effectively.

What the ownership formula would do for light weapons control initiatives and for the implementation of agreed measures would be to allow each set of countries to prioritise the resources and actions for controlling its area of most urgent concern, while providing a frame of reference for co-ordination and discussion of common actions on areas that, though not necessarily of immediate concern to all, are clearly to some.

The possible combination of region-to-region initiatives for control and implementation is enhanced by a universal approach. This allows for co-ordination of actions that does not contradict other regions’ priorities or needs. Thus, it is feasible to suggest that, today, Southern Africa, as a region, is more interested in controlling the flows of illicit weapons and in reversing the violence related to these than in the past. This being the case, the likelihood of the region’s being willing to co-ordinate its actions with those of other regions supporting the same goals is strong. It is not a coincidence that the EU initiative and that of the OAS on the control of illicit small arms trafficking and related issues coincide as a priority in Southern Africa; whereas, in the short term, the more European and international agendas focusing on supply, demand and arms transfer aspects of the licit trade do not enjoy the same level of popularity. When the international community comes to understand the differences between short and long term priorities for each region, a point of connection can be made that will reinforce the needs of both. While Europe, for example, concentrates joint action with Southern Africa on illicit arms trafficking in

the short term, Southern African countries can commence to interact with more pressing European needs related to improving arms-transfer mechanisms and codes, so that in the long term the positions between the regions can be consolidated.

In undertaking a revision of both the process and the ownership of the light weapons proliferation issue, international initiatives will be able to find a point of entry that allows them to undertake ambitious projects over a long period, while at the same time respecting the point of view, interests and needs of each individual member of such an initiative, irrespective of whether it is a developed or a developing nation.