

SMALL ARMS SURVEY 2001

Profiling the Problem

About the Small Arms Survey

The Small Arms Survey is an independent research project located at the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, Switzerland. Established in 1999 with the generous financial support of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, it currently receives additional funding from Belgium, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

The objectives of the Survey are: to be the principal source of public information on all aspects of small arms; to serve as a resource centre for governments; policy makers, researchers, and activists; to monitor national and international initiatives (governmental and non-governmental) on small arms; and to act as a clearing house for the sharing of information and the dissemination of best practices. The Survey also sponsors field research and information-gathering efforts, especially in affected states and regions.

The project has an international staff with expertise in security studies, political science, law, economics, development studies and sociology who work closely with a worldwide network of researchers and partner institutions.

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Keith Krause
Programme Director
Small Arms Survey

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Introduction

At least 500,000 people are killed each year by small arms and light weapons. They die in an astonishingly diverse number of ways: as combatants in internal and inter-state wars; as participants in gang fights and criminal battles; as casualties of government-sponsored or condoned violence and terror; as innocent civilians trapped in deadly wars and social conflicts; and as victims of suicide, homicide, or random acts of violence.

The causes of the violence behind these deaths are complex and multi-faceted, and the easy availability and misuse of small arms and light weapons is only one part of the story. Still, this statistic—half a million deaths each year—ought to catch our eye. After all, it is higher than the number of deaths in almost all recent wars. Thus, it is no exaggeration to call small arms and light weapons ‘the real weapons of mass destruction’. While they may not devastate entire cities or populations within a space of a few seconds, they are implicated in more than 1,300 deaths each day.

Aside from their direct role in armed conflicts and violence, small arms and light weapons are also widely used in ‘peacetime’ situations to terrorize individuals, to control or subdue groups and communities, to influence politics, to profit and amass personal gain, and to undergird and maintain power. Throughout the world—in both poor countries and rich ones—socially marginalized or desperately impoverished people may resort to violence in order to survive or to gain a tenuous foothold in society. At the same time, others—driven by power or greed—may use weapons to consolidate and build their positions. Over time, the result is a pervasive sense of social danger, insecurity, and anxiety, exacerbated by self-perpetuating cycles and cultures of violence. In worst-case scenarios, the end result is a totally corrupt or collapsed state. Only more effective national, regional, and international measures to regulate various aspects of the small arms and light weapons problem can help break this vicious circle.

Small arms and light weapons are the real weapons of mass destruction, taking well over a thousand lives each day, more than half a million lives each year.

Concerted international action

Against this backdrop, governmental and non-governmental efforts have been galvanized to counter the proliferation and destabilizing accumulation of small arms and light weapons in recent years. Yet effective long-term policy requires reliable and comprehensive information and analysis on all aspects of the problem—something that has been relatively rare to date. The Survey is intended to fill this gap.

Such a contribution is sorely needed since several characteristics of small arms and light weapons make them an uncommonly difficult and politically contentious issue for the international community to address. These include:

- The nature of the weapons—lethal, easy to use and transport, difficult to track, and relatively simple to maintain in circulation for a long time;
- The large number of producing companies and countries, which makes supply-side control a difficult logistical challenge;
- The legitimate use of these weapons for national and/or individual security and defence, and the acquisition or retention of such weapons when governments fail to guarantee the physical safety of their citizens;
- The ‘grey’ and ‘black’ markets in such weapons, which are often linked to transnational crime and drug trafficking, and to the activities of non-state actors;
- The relationship between light weapons flows, situations of economic insecurity and deprivation, and the ensuing social and political conflicts;

The Survey’s primary goal is to fill the small arms information and analysis gap.

- The disarmament requirements of post-conflict settings, including the demobilization and re-integration of ex-combatants; and
- The differing national norms for firearms possession, use, and reporting.

Small arms constitute a relatively new issue on the international agenda. So it is not surprising that there is still little agreement on the precise contours of the problem. It has been variously defined as an arms control and disarmament issue, a human rights and humanitarian law issue, a public health or economic development issue, a problem of post-conflict disarmament, or as an issue of terrorism and criminality. In the absence of a broad overview, each perspective focuses a different lens on the problem and advocates different solutions. There is also no agreement on which weapons are of greatest concern: pistols and revolvers, which are most numerous; military assault rifles, which are widely used in conflict situations; or hand grenades and high-tech portable military equipment, which cascade into civilian hands.

Whatever the perspective, three issues are clear:

First, controlling small arms and light weapons—which are responsible for most of the deaths and injuries, especially of civilian non-combatants, in recent wars—is of vital importance to the contemporary international security agenda. Precisely because small arms are so ubiquitous and have legitimate military and civilian uses, efforts to regulate and control them must be carefully crafted.

Second, as much of the work in the Survey shows, small arms and light weapons are more than just an arms control and disarmament issue. In his Millennium Report (2000), UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan pointed out that:

Small arms proliferation is not merely a security issue; it is also an issue of human rights and of development. The proliferation of small arms sustains and exacerbates armed conflicts. It endangers peacekeepers and humanitarian workers. It undermines respect for international humanitarian law. It threatens legitimate but weak governments and it benefits terrorists, as well as the perpetrators of organized crime.

Finally, small arms and light weapons do not proliferate by themselves. Rather, they are designed, produced, and procured in response to demand by governments and/or civilians. They are sold, re-sold, perhaps stolen, diverted, and maybe legally or illegally transferred several more times. Ultimately they are used and re-used, during or after conflicts. At each juncture in this complex chain of legal and illicit transfers, people—brokers, insurgents, criminals, government officials, and/or organized groups—are active participants in the process. Regulation and control of small arms and light weapons must proceed from this simple fact.

Small arms and light weapons do not proliferate by themselves.

Goals and objectives of the *Small Arms Survey*

The primary goal of the Small Arms Survey is to provide reliable information and analysis on all aspects of the problem of small arms and light weapons proliferation. Persuaded that transparency is a cornerstone of national and international accountability—as well as an indispensable element in effective policy-making—the Survey is an independent transparency mechanism that serves many audiences. Our work is based on the conviction that greater transparency for all small arms and light weapons issues will improve international, regional, national, and human security.

Yet the task will not be easy. Until recently, such an initiative would have been considered virtually impossible. Even today, the available data are far from complete. Still, enough information exists with which to sketch an outline of the situation and to provide a ‘roadmap’ showing the way forward.

The Survey is committed to collecting and analyzing the best available open-source data, and to sponsoring primary and field research that will generate new data. The Survey also carefully assesses and verifies the reliability of data before using it in its publications, and our research work is governed by four principles:

- **Using a multidisciplinary approach:** The problem of small arms and light weapons must be approached from a broad, multidisciplinary perspective. Proliferation and misuse are not purely an arms control and disarmament issue. Equally important (and context-specific) are the crime control, humanitarian law, economic development, and public health perspectives.
- **Studying the multiple societal effects:** Far greater attention must be paid to the economic, social, and human costs and consequences of small arms and light weapons proliferation and use. Only when the costs in terms of lost growth, stalled development, and distorted allocation of government or household investment are quantified will the opportunity cost of inaction become irrefutably clear, and the benefits of even simple regulatory measures evident.
- **Examining different levels of the problem:** Small arms proliferation is not exclusively an international issue. It is also one with important regional, national, and local dimensions.
- **Engaging multiple actors:** Small arms proliferation and control is no longer simply an issue for governments. Increasingly, non-governmental actors, including researchers and advocates, have a crucial role to play in shaping and developing policies in this area. Indeed, they are often the essential actors in the grassroots implementation of various global, regional, or local measures.

What role might the newly launched Small Arms Survey play? A significant one, we hope. But this publication is only the most visible product of the activities of the Small Arms Survey project as a whole. Since its establishment in 1999, our Geneva-based resource centre has served as a node in the network of small arms research-based activities that includes field projects, occasional papers, conferences, workshops, and other outreach activities. Our overall aim is to become a well-utilized international centre of excellence and expertise on all small arms and light weapons issues.

Introducing the *Small Arms Survey 2001: Profiling the Problem*

The seven chapters in this year's Survey address many of the most prominent small arms and light weapons issues. In this first edition, subtitled 'Profiling the Problem', we have chosen to present a broad overview of the state of the world's knowledge and awareness on different aspects of these wide-ranging issues.

In many cases, through a combination of comprehensive data collection, careful estimation techniques, and best judgement where sources conflict or are unclear, we have sought to fill a few large gaps in our collective knowledge. Such a global overview is the first step in identifying more specific problem areas, topics for future research, and additional 'missing links' that can be supplied in future editions.

Chapter One (*Products, Producers*) concentrates on production, identifying more than 600 firms in at least 95 countries that produce small arms, light weapons, and/or associated ammunition and parts. These figures are significantly higher than previous estimates. The major producers include: Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Great Britain, Israel, Italy, the Russian Federation, Switzerland, the United States and—although hard data are difficult to come by—probably China. Although an estimate of the global value of annual production is still premature, available information suggests that, despite an increase in the types of small arms being produced, the market itself is not expanding. It may, in fact, be shrinking as a result of the recent downsizing of global armed forces and consolidation of defence industries. Nevertheless, the re-circulation of existing small arms and light weapons, and their longevity, suggests that global stockpiles continue to grow.

The Survey is an independent transparency mechanism.

The Survey's overall aim is to become a respected and well-utilized international centre of excellence and expertise on small arms issues.

Small arms production may be shrinking but global stockpiles continue to grow.

Chapter Two (Stockpiles) seeks to estimate global stockpiles of small arms and light weapons. It focuses on individual-use firearms, including military-style weapons belonging to armed forces, handguns and sidearms used by national police forces, and guns in civilian possession. Based on extrapolations from limited existing data, it concludes that, worldwide, there are at least 550 million small arms and light weapons, not including illicit civilian weapons. About 41 per cent of these —226 million weapons—are in the arsenals of national armed forces, while 56 per cent—some 305 million weapons—are in legal civilian possession. Only three per cent are held by the world's police forces, and most surprisingly, less than one per cent of such weapons are in the hands of insurgent groups.

Chapter Three (Brokers) highlights the crucial role played by arms brokers, dealers, transport agents, and their associated networks in transferring small arms and light weapons. In the past, most brokers operated under the tacit or explicit aegis of state security apparatuses. Today they have increasingly taken on the role of independent private actors who exploit loopholes in laws and regulations, and sidestep the weak regulatory capacities of some states, to provide arms to conflict zones. The lack of harmonized national or international legal instruments, in addition to the absence of information-sharing arrangements between states, makes it particularly difficult to catch brokers directly engaged in illegal activities since transactions are carefully designed to circumvent, bend, or break the fewest laws. The Survey's research does suggest, however, that the number of people engaged in arms brokering and shipping is actually quite small, and that they often operate in complex, fluid, and opaque networks.

Worldwide, there are more than 550 million small arms and light weapons.

Chapters Four and Five (Legal and Illicit Transfers) present an overview of the legal, grey, and black markets in small arms and light weapons. The Survey estimates the annual value of the legal small arms trade at between US\$ 4-6 billion. The top exporters for which reliable information is available are: the United States, the Russian Federation, Germany, and Brazil. Other less transparent states that are likely to be major players include Bulgaria, China, and Israel, for whom reliable information is not yet available. In all, more than 60 states are involved in the legal export of small arms while almost all the world's countries are importers of varying quantities of small arms and light weapons.

The illicit trade in small arms—transfers that engender 'crime, conflict and corruption'—while far more difficult to assess, appears to comprise less than 20 per cent of the total trade. The so-called 'grey market'—covert transfers conducted by governments or government-sponsored entities—appears significantly larger than the wholly illegal 'black market'.

The annual value of the legal trade in small arms is estimated at US\$ 4-6 billion.

Chapter Six (Effects) focuses on the social and economic impacts of small arms and light weapons proliferation and availability 'after the smoke clears'. It documents the relationship between availability and use, and highlights the similarities and differences between the direct and indirect effects of small arms use in the North and the South. The chapter also documents a broad array of indirect effects, including increasing insecurity for humanitarian relief workers and operations, the privatization of violence, strains on public health systems, increased violent criminal activity, and reduced economic activity and socio-economic development. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) estimated the direct and indirect costs of violence at US\$ 140-170 billion a year for Latin America alone. Such a figure clearly indicates the pressing need for further research on the effects of small arms and light weapons' use and availability.

Chapter Seven (Measures) surveys the wide array of proposed or partially implemented multilateral measures at the global, regional, and sub-regional level to 'tackle the small arms problem'. The aim is not to present a comprehensive analysis of all existing measures and initiatives, but to provide an introduction and overview of major efforts, to guide readers to other sources, and to lay a foundation for further in-depth studies. This chapter focuses especially on the recent development of regional instruments in the Americas, Africa, and Europe, as well as specific multilateral efforts within

such bodies as the OSCE, NATO, and the UN (e.g. the Firearms Protocol being negotiated within the Crime Commission of the ECOSOC). It also sets out the major issues identified for the July 2001 UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects.

The challenges ahead

This first edition of the Small Arms Survey raises as many questions as it answers. Future issues will be devoted to addressing them. They will not present annual 'snapshots' detailing changes over the previous calendar year since the available data and nature of the problem make such a year-to-year survey inappropriate. Instead, the Survey will focus on particular issues and regions; refine the analysis and estimates of stockpiles and transfers; follow the development of regional and global initiatives; and highlight problem areas that warrant greater policy attention. Two important issues the Survey will focus on in future editions are the humanitarian and developmental impacts of small arms and light weapons proliferation and use.

In addition to refining our estimates of global weapons stockpiles, future editions will provide regional and sub-regional breakdowns to highlight areas of concern. We will also broaden the scope to include stocks and flows of other small arms and light weapons, including larger, more sophisticated weapons that are not in wide circulation, but nevertheless pose grave security risks. Efforts to track transfers will also focus on specific regions and sub-regions, especially those most seriously affected by conflicts and instability.

As an increasing number of states become able and willing to furnish reliable information on their transfers of small arms and light weapons, there will be an urgent need to present these data in the clearest, most comprehensive, and most harmonized fashion. Future editions of the Survey will analyze the strengths and weaknesses of existing national reporting practices and present suggestions for common definitions and standards to increase the utility and comparability of information. The Survey will also treat the growing problem of weapons brokering, and the link to other lucrative activities (e.g. trade in diamonds, drugs, tropical timber, and other 'conflict goods'), analyzing case studies, as well as providing details on the activities of prominent arms brokers.

Activities undertaken in the context of the July 2001 United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects will also be examined in next year's Survey, especially since this groundbreaking conference is likely to shape policy initiatives and priorities for years to come. Finally, such issues as marking and traceability, stockpile management and security measures, plus newer issues, such as the relevance of international instruments covering the transport of dangerous goods and the tracing of domestic production chains, will be covered in subsequent issues of the Survey.

Ultimately, the concerted efforts of all actors in this important disarmament arena will be successful only if the use of such weapons in peacetime, conflicts, wars, and post-conflict struggles abates, and if individuals and communities can live their lives in greater safety and security. The role of the Small Arms Survey will be to monitor and report on these efforts, to raise awareness of their relevance, and to provide policy benchmarks in the years ahead.

For Latin America alone, the direct and indirect costs of violence amount to between US\$ 140-170 billion a year.

International small arms control efforts will be successful only if individuals and communities can live in greater safety and security.