Between 1997 and 2006, the Central African Republic (CAR) hosted four international peacekeeping operations and witnessed conflicts in neighbouring states that have routinely made international headlines. Yet relatively little literature exists on the country. This study has relevance far beyond the troubled, landlocked nation that is its subject. It challenges many widely held assumptions about security sector reform (SSR) that have continental and global implications. The study also provides a richer context for understanding the continuing threats to peace in CAR.

CAR—a country spanning 623,000 square km (somewhat larger than Portugal and Spain combined)—has a troublesome and landlocked nation that is among the poorest in the world. There have been four coups d’état (and many more attempted coups), the latest on March 2003, overthrowing elected President Ange-Félix Patassé. Bozizé succeeded in overthrowing Patassé in March 2003.

This book comprises four parts. The first examines small arms availability and distribution with respect to state and non-state actors in CAR. The second looks at small arms flows and trafficking, both direct transfers from states and indirect transfers from states and armed groups. The third assesses the impacts of small arms use and availability. The fourth analyses the various disarmament efforts undertaken in CAR in recent years. An Epilogue (by Louisa N. Lombard) covers events through the beginning of 2007.

Below are the main findings.

- Armed elements in CAR seriously outgun government forces (with the exception of the presidential
guard), which are not prepared to counter them.

The government, which in October 2003 claimed that around 50,000 small arms were circulating nationally beyond its control, may have been underestimating the scale of the problem.

Long-standing arms stockpile multipliers for the Central African Armed Forces are extremely small. Consequently, past calculations of government small arms holdings throughout Africa may be well below present estimates.

Galil and M-16 assault rifles are not in broad use due to the scarcity of 5.56 mm ammunition they require.

Peacekeeping operations have not been a significant source of weapons.

While regional states have supplied weapons to government forces and to rebels seeking to acquire power, the type of hardware has been relatively limited and has not included surface-to-air missiles.

Non-state actors not only receive matériel and other kinds of support from governments, but they can also play a crucial role in providing military aid to governments.

While rates of firearms-related deaths and injuries in CAR may be lower than in other conflict zones in the region, the country suffers greatly from the economic and psychological effects of small arms use and availability.

Arms recovery programmes in CAR have been poorly designed and badly implemented. In addition, they have been considerably less successful than touted, and arguably have undermined national security.

The safari hunting industry can play a positive role in countering the deleterious socioeconomic effects of poaching.

While small arms proliferation has historically not been a problem in CAR, it continues to increase.

CAR today is a tinderbox for both the country and the region. Within the country, armed men commit frequent acts of banditry. The continuing conflicts in Darfur and Chad provide additional sources of arms and demand for additional weaponry.

It is hoped that the study’s findings will aid policymakers in devising new security sector reform and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programmes—both in CAR and elsewhere. For the challenges that the Central African Republic faces—a weak central government, regional conflicts, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, to name but a few—are not unique to CAR.