

Legacies of War in the Company of Peace

Firearms in Nepal

Introduction

When Nepal's civil war ended in 2006, the country had changed fundamentally. Legacies of the war included the end of the monarchy and the accommodation of Maoist rebels (Unified Communist Party of Nepal–Maoist, UCPN-M), who were integrated into the government. A total of 1,462 Maoists (including 71 officers) were selected for integration into the Nepal Army (Pun, 2012). Like many post-conflict societies, Nepal is struggling to

re-establish political stability and cope with post-conflict violence.

Responses to armed violence have not been based on clear information about the scale or distribution of weapons in the country. It is not clear what kinds of firearms are in Nepal or where they are concentrated.

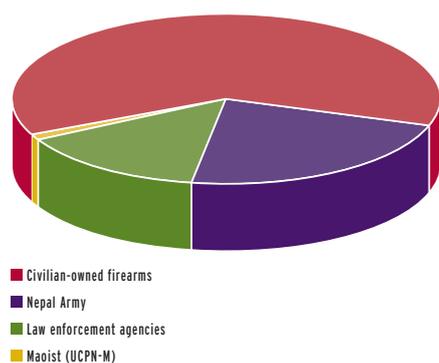
This *Issue Brief* applies published reports and data, as well as estimation techniques, to explore the scale and distribution of firearm ownership in post-conflict Nepal. Its major findings include:

- Private firearms in Nepal are estimated to number 440,000. Roughly one-eighth (55,000) are believed to be legally registered.
- Most privately owned firearms are unregistered craft weapons, referred to as country-made or *katuwas*. There are estimated to be roughly 330,000 of these.
- Despite a decade of warfare, private firearm ownership remains low by global standards. The rate amounts to approximately 1.7 firearms for every 100 residents.



Maoist fighters with SAR rifles at a function to hand over command to the government at the Shaktikhor Maoist cantonment in Chitwan, south-west of Kathmandu, January 2011.
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Figure 1 **Estimated distribution of firearms in Nepal, 2012**



- Public surveys confirm that private firearms are neither commonplace in Nepal nor rare.
- The Nepal Army has about 160,000 small arms, and law enforcement agencies have roughly another 74,000.
- When the peace agreement was signed in 2006, Maoist People's Liberation Army had an estimated 9,500 small arms and light weapons. Of these, 3,475 were handed over. Some 6,000 small arms probably remain with former guerrillas.
- According to UN Comtrade, the United States was the principal exporter of legal firearms to Nepal in the last two decades. Weaknesses in data mean that little is known

about Nepal's illegal small arms trade.

- In 2003, a total of 56,357 antique or obsolescent Nepalese military small arms and light weapons were sold to an American dealer. The arsenal sold provides a unique record of military modernization and insight into the proportion of older weapons in a contemporary arsenal.

This *Issue Brief* examines three main categories of Nepal firearm owners: civilians, state security services, and former guerrillas. It concludes that approximately 710,000 firearms are in the country (see Figure 1 and Table 1). Civilians own two-thirds of firearms, mostly primitive craft guns. By comparison, the Army and law enforcement agencies emerged from the civil war with greatly expanded personnel and modernized weaponry.

Private owners

No previous systematic studies or expert estimates of total private firearm ownership in Nepal were found in the research conducted for this report. The only country estimate published to date is based on statistical comparison with

other countries (Karp, 2007b). Instead, the portrait of ownership assembled in this *Issue Brief* is based on various types of evidence, including registration figures, police confiscations, and public surveys.

Registration

Firearms registration is the most reliable source of information on private ownership of weapons in Nepal. According to media reports, there are 34,468 licensed owners in the country (Sharma, 2012). They reportedly own some 55,000 legally registered small arms, for an average of 1.6 legally declared firearms per owner (Racovita, Murray, and Sharma, 2012, pp. 57–59; *República*, 2009).

Obtaining a gun licence is not easy in Nepal, and measures introduced since democratization in 1990 have made it more difficult. Under the Arms and Ammunition Act of 1963, applications must be approved by the Home Ministry and the applicant's Chief District Officer (Nepal, 1963; Kharel and Shrestha, 2010). No handgun licences are reported to have been issued since 1990 and the basic licence fee was increased in 2010 to NPR 10,000 (USD 140) (Kharel and Shrestha, 2010), further restricting legal ownership. The cost and complexity of the licensing system make it difficult, if not impossible, to legally possess craft (country-made) firearms, thought to be the most numerous. The police are authorized to confiscate such firearms on sight (Nepal, 1963, s. 12; Sharma, 2012).

Unregistered ownership

The expense and difficulty of acquiring a licence drives people who want firearms, especially handguns, to seek them illegally. Unregistered factory-made firearms include guns illegally imported from China and India, weapons stolen from the Nepalese security services, and some former Maoist guerrilla weapons (see Map). It remains difficult to assess how many factory-made weapons are privately owned, however, because

Table 1 **Estimated distribution of firearms in Nepal, 2012**

Population	Category	Ratio of firearms to population	Estimated firearms	Total firearms
Private residents 26,600,000	Private <i>registered</i> , factory-made		55,000	
	Private <i>unregistered</i> , factory-made		55,000	
	Private craft-made (country-made)		330,000	
	All privately owned firearms	0.017		440,000
Nepal Army 95,000	Nepal Army	1.7	160,000	160,000
Law enforcement 47,000 31,000	Nepal Police	1.0	47,000	
	Armed Police Force	1.8	56,000	
	All law enforcement agencies			103,000
Maoist 9,500	UCPN-M	0.6	6,000	6,000
Total				709,000

Note: Estimates and totals are rounded to two significant digits. The Maoist total is lowered by the transfer of 3,475 weapons to Army control in 2012. Ratios are calculated on population statistics sources from CBS (2001).

Sources: For sources on private firearms, see pp. 3–5; on Nepal Army, p. 7; on Nepal Police and Armed Police, pp. 8–9; and on Maoist firearms, p. 10.



Note: Illegal arms points of origin are cities and villages that host ad-hoc manufacturing and small arms storage facilities, reported as sources of illegal arms in circulation. Source: Racovita, Murray, and Sharma (2013, p. 60)

licence and registration figures are far from comprehensive and police confiscation data and public polling do not provide an exact basis of calculation. This said, illegal handgun ownership does not seem to be exceptional (Sharma, 2012). For this *Issue Brief*, the number of unregistered factory-made firearms is assumed to equal the number that are legally owned. On this assumption, a total of approximately 110,000 registered and unregistered factory-made handguns, rifles, and shotguns are privately owned.

In Nepal, however, factory-made firearms probably represent a small proportion of privately owned guns. Given their price and the cost and difficulty of registration, there appears to be a widespread demand for the cheaper craft handguns or *katuwas* and improvised rifles, *bharuwas* (RAOnline, n.d.). Craft guns typically are very simple, usually single-shot handguns fashioned from scrap metal, and are much less accurate and reliable than factory-made firearms (Modi, Nigam, and Kumar, 1984).

One source of supply is the well-established—yet completely illegal—

industry that fabricates black-market handguns in the adjacent Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (RAOnline, n.d.; Racovita, Murray, and Sharma, 2012, p. 64). The predominance of country-made firearms is suggested by a survey that found the majority of guns in private ownership to be very cheap, costing NPR 1,000–10,000 (USD 14–140) (Hazen et al., 2011, p. 27).

Post-conflict dynamics seen elsewhere in the world also appear to have affected Nepalese gun culture and crime. No comprehensive estimate is available of the gun ownership before the country's civil war started in 1996, but analysts agree that the conflict created new norms and expectations. Private ownership, including that of country-made weapons, increased (IRIN, 2012). Sources that provided weapons to Maoist guerrillas before 2006 now supply them to violent criminal groups (Rauniyar, 2011). Given the simplicity of craft weapons, it is very likely that some are produced locally in Nepal too.

Police seizure data and household surveys offer quantitative insights into the distribution of privately owned

firearms, including illicitly owned guns, both factory- and country-made.

Police seizures and country-made firearms

Police reports of seizures of illicitly owned firearms and firearms used in crimes show a three-to-one ratio of country-made craft guns to factory-made firearms. A 2011 police report

Table 2 Handguns seized by Nepal Police, July 2006–November 2010¹

Type	Total seized
Country-made handguns (<i>katuwas</i>)	458
Factory-made handguns	139
Factory-made by type	
7.65 mm pistols	5
9 mm pistols	25
Sixer pistols	28
Indian pistol	1
Revolvers (type unknown)	37
Italian pistols	13
US pistols	30

Source: Fuyal, n.d.

states that 597 handguns were seized in the previous four years, of which 458 were country-made and the remainder factory-made (see Table 2). In the most recent four-year period, police reported seizing 261 factory-made pistols and revolvers, and 716 country-made guns—a similar ratio of 1 to 2.7 (Kharel, 2012).

How meaningful is this three-to-one distribution? Because virtually all *katuwas* are illegal and factory-made guns are more likely to be legally registered, the seizure rate may not accurately reflect distribution. In the absence of further data, however, this report assumes that the ratio of *katuwas* to factory-made guns is three-to-one, based on police seizure data. On that basis, if Nepalese civilians own some 110,000 factory-made firearms, approximately 330,000 country-made guns also exist among private owners.

Household surveys

Asking people about their gun ownership poses certain difficulties. Especially in a country emerging from a decade of warfare, questions on the subject can be sensitive and generate unpredict-

able responses. One survey specifically reported that ‘although people do own arms at home for protection, no one reveals that they have arms’ and that ‘even those respondents who admitted to having a firearm in the household were reluctant to provide additional details about the firearms’ (Hazen et al., 2011, pp. 41, 27).

Although surveys of gun ownership may not be wholly reliable, they are uniquely comprehensive and limited mostly by the nature of the questions and the sample of respondents. Five surveys have recently investigated firearm ownership. All were undertaken by NGOs investigating broader aspects of post-conflict armed violence and conflict resolution. None are fully comparable; they asked different questions, employed different sampling methods, and targeted different regions.

The surveys reviewed here show that firearm ownership is not commonplace in Nepal; most respondents reported that ownership is unusual. One survey by a domestic NGO, Friends for Peace, polled residents in regions along Nepal–India border regions believed to serve as transit routes for

illegal firearms. It found that ‘62 per cent of the respondents said less than 10 per cent of the residents of those areas (surveyed) possess small arms, 24 per cent of the respondents said ten to twenty per cent of the dwellers have such arms and 15 per cent of respondents said more than 20 per cent of the residents had small arms’ (Shrestha, 2006, p. 81). The survey appears to be informal and lacking a scientifically selected sample. Its findings should be regarded as suggestive, but not necessarily reproducible.

Two more systematic surveys, sponsored by the London-based NGO, Saferworld, each involved some 3,000 respondents from across Nepal. They found that 84 to 92 per cent of respondents had never see anyone, other than police and soldiers, carrying guns. One survey found significant regional variation, however. Firearms sightings were most common in the Terai (lowlands) and least common in mountainous regions (Gordon et al., 2010, p. 29). Of the respondents, 96 per cent said that they did not possess a small arm. Among respondents who said that they did, roughly half (nine out of 19)



Nepal Army soldiers with Sten guns, an older type of sub-machine gun, confront demonstrators in Kathmandu, April 2006. © Danish Ismail/Reuters

said they possessed a licence (Gordon et al., 2010, p. 30).

Another survey of 2,000 respondents, sponsored by Saferworld and the Small Arms Survey, focused exclusively on the Terai, the southern lowland region that is home to about half the country's population. Terai is widely believed to have the country's worst small arms and violence problems. The survey found: 'Less than two percent of respondents reported that someone in their household possessed a firearm. Thus out of 2,000 respondents, only 31 people reported having firearms in the household' (Hazen et al., 2011, pp. 25–26). In response to a question about household security, six per cent of respondents said they kept firearms at home (Hazen et al., 2011, p. 53). This survey, which suggests that firearms are neither ubiquitous nor absent, offers the strongest basis for extrapolation (Hazen et al., 2011, p. x). Its findings are consistent with the estimate in this *Issue Brief* that there are approximately 1.7 firearms per 100 people in Nepal.

The most recent survey, sponsored by Interdisciplinary Analysts and the Small Arms Survey, surveyed a national sample of 3,048 respondents (Racovita, Murray, and Sharma, 2012, pp. 13, 59). Its findings were similar. More than 1.3 per cent of respondents reported that they owned a firearm. The rate varied from region to region. When asked to estimate ownership in their region, respondents suggested that weapons were owned by 2.1 per cent of people in Hill districts and 5.3 per cent in Terai.

Read together, these surveys show that a small but not negligible proportion of the country's population possesses guns. Their findings provide an alternative basis for estimating the level of private gun ownership. As is often the case, surveys produce a lower estimate than other techniques. Their findings are nevertheless generally consistent with the estimates that emerge from extrapolations based on registration and police confiscation data.

Total firearms in private possession

This *Issue Brief* estimates that a total of 440,000 weapons are owned by civilians in Nepal, an average of 1.7 firearms for every 100 residents. Of this number, approximately one in eight (55,000) is believed to be legally registered. Of the remainder, roughly 330,000 are estimated to be unregistered craft weapons. This total is higher than a previous country estimate by the Small Arms Survey which suggested, on the basis of statistical correlation, that the Nepalese owned 205,000 small arms (Karp, 2007b). Even the higher rate, however, is low by global standards (Karp, 2007a).

The Nepal Army

To date, the Nepal Army has not made public its inventory of small arms. The basis for estimation is the number of uniformed personnel, which was 95,753 in 2012 (IISS, 2012, p. 269). Applying the norm of 1.8 weapons per soldier in a constabulary (internal security) army, like Nepal's, one would expect the Nepal Army to have a total of

approximately 172,000 small arms (Small Arms Survey, 2006, p. 51).² This ratio would make it possible to equip every soldier with a rifle and allow a normal supplementary distribution of pistols, light and medium machine guns, and other small arms. The estimate does not include light weapons, such as heavy machine guns, mortars, and rocket launchers, which are more difficult to estimate.

A questionable and exaggerated assessment of the number of small arms held by the Nepalese military is presented in a Wikipedia report that suggests the Nepal Army controls 240,000 firearms (Wikipedia, n.d.). This figure includes large numbers of weapons that do not appear to be widely issued by the Nepal Army, such as Kalashnikov rifles, and overestimates certain other weapons. For example, it lists 40,000 INSAS rifles, compared to the 23,000 that are reported elsewhere to have been transferred by India (*Asia News Agency*, 2005).

Cautious accounting—based on known totals of major weapon types and purchases and taking account of the Army's minimum requirements—

Table 3 Major small arms of the Nepal Army, 2012

Weapon	Type	Supplier	Total	Sources
M4	Automatic carbine	United States	1,070	MoD (2011); Watters (2012d)
AKM (Type 56)	Automatic rifle	China	300	MoD (2011)
AR15/M16	Automatic rifle	United States	2,000	MoD (2011)
Galil	Automatic rifle	Israel	2,000	MoD (2011)
INSAS	Automatic rifle	India	23,000	<i>Asia News Agency</i> (2005)
M16A2/A4	Automatic rifle	United States	15,000	Watters (2012a, 2012b, 2012c)
Lee-Enfield	Bolt-action rifle	UK or India	30,000	Walter (2005, pp. 94-95)
Bren L4	Light machine gun	Belgium	200	Ezell (1988, p. 274)
M249	Light machine gun	United States	300	MoD (2011)
FN Minimi	Medium machine gun	Belgium	5,500	Crivellaro (2002)
9 mm FN or HP	Semi-automatic pistol	India	15,000	Ezell (1988, p. 274)
SAR (FAL or L1A1)	Semi-automatic rifle	India	30,000	Eger (2006); Ezell (1988, p. 274)
MSG90	Sniper rifle	Germany	100	MoD (2011)
Sterling	Sub-machine gun	United Kingdom	25,000	MoD (2011)
MP-5	Sub-machine gun	Germany	200	MoD (2011)

Note: Totals in italics are estimates by the author. Totals are not intended to include decommissioned weapons or weapons transferred to other government agencies.

suggests that the Nepal Army is likely to control some 160,000 firearms, slightly fewer than might normally be expected. Most of these weapons are rifles (see Table 3). The inventory includes large numbers of older weapons whose status is not known, such as Lee-Enfield bolt-action rifles and Sterling sub-machine guns, probably procured in the 1960s and 1970s from India, and Indian-made versions of the Belgian FAL semi-automatic rifle (the SAR), probably acquired in the 1970s or 1980s.

The estimate of older weapons in Table 3 is based on the Army's highest personnel figure before the civil war started in 1996. This figure of 30,000 was reached in 1986 (IISS, 1986, p. 164). Superseded by modern equipment acquired after 2000, the Nepal Army's older weapons are probably held in reserve or may have been decommissioned or transferred to other government agencies, including the police. It is presumed that a small number of AKM rifles were acquired when former combatants of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the military wing of the Maoist UCPN-M, were enlisted in the Nepal Army. Much larger purchases of Chinese AKM rifles have been rumoured, but cannot be confirmed (Amnesty International, 2006, p. 10).

As the Maoist insurgency escalated in the late 1990s, the monarchy was pressed to modernize military inventories. Published memoirs by former officials of the royal court and government say that palace arguments over rearmament, particularly the choice of a new infantry rifle, were crucial in events that led to the massacre of the royal family on 1 June 2001. Reportedly, the final catalyst was King Birendra's refusal to approve the purchase of 50,000 Heckler and Koch G36 rifles, a gun that had become the personal passion of Prince Dipendra (Dahal, 2011c; IBNLive, 2009).

In the months following the massacre, the government signed a series of arms contracts. These agreements, made public by exporting governments, provide some of the best information

available about Army inventories. They included a major contract with India for 23,000 INSAS rifles, purchased with the aid of a 70 per cent subsidy from New Delhi (*Asia News Agency*, 2005; PTI, 2005; Sharma, 2009). The Army also received M16 rifles and M4 carbines from the United States.³ Because of the war, these deals were highly controversial for some sellers. The United States suspended but later resumed transfers of M16s (Yogi, 2005). In 2002, the Belgian government resisted pressure from domestic arms sale opponents to reverse a sale of light machine guns (Crivellaro, 2002).

Virtually all Nepal Army small arms acquisitions have generated controversy on economic, political, or human rights grounds. Those contracts that were not contested by suppliers seem to have aroused resentment within Nepal. The Nepalese military expressed unhappiness with the fragility and unreliability of Indian-supplied INSAS rifles (*Asia News Agency*, 2005). Though Indian Ordnance Factories and the Indian Army challenged the criticism, the Indian Army is planning to replace the INSAS in its own inventories (Bedi, 2011).

Police firearms

Because the arms acquisitions of the Nepal Police receive less media coverage, its imports and inventory are more difficult to estimate than those of the Army. When on duty, Nepal police officers typically carry a handgun (a Chinese- or Indian-made pistol), while constables customarily are armed with a one-metre wooden truncheon (a *laathi*) or a Lee-Enfield rifle (Military Photos, 2008). Special units are believed to be armed with more modern weapons, including automatic rifles. Given the complement of 47,000 officers in the Nepal Police (IISS, 2011, p. 270), and assuming one firearm per officer, it may be concluded that the police control approximately 47,000 firearms.⁴

In 2001, Nepal also created a gendarmerie (or heavy police force), for

counter-insurgency and counter-terrorist operations. Information on the personnel and armament of the Armed Police Force (APF) is poor, and much reporting is speculative. The IISS suggests that the APF has 15,000 personnel, but this number may be out of date (IISS, 2012, p. 270). An internal report by the People's Armed Police (PAP) suggests that the APF has a complement of 31,000 officers and constables (PAP, n.d.).⁵ Based on the normal ratio of 1.8 firearms for every member of a paramilitary or gendarme force, an APF force of 31,000 would have some 56,000 firearms (Karp, 2006, p. 51).

Armed groups

It is especially difficult to estimate how many small arms are in the possession of Nepal's numerous armed groups. Highly diverse, these groups include ethnic and caste militias, politically motivated insurgencies, urban gangs, and organized crime networks. The number and size of Nepal's armed groups are poorly understood and little information is available about their weapons (Bogati, Carapic, and Muggah, 2013). The largest and most violent, however, was the Maoist uprising of the 1990s and early 2000s. Although recently, contemporary armed groups have become more active or destructive, the Maoist arsenal warrants special consideration.

Maoist weapons

The small arms arsenal of the UCPN-M is the most politically sensitive small arms issue in Nepal today. When fighting against the government ended under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed on 21 November 2006, the Maoists agreed to place soldiers of the PLA in cantonments or holding camps and to surrender their weapons to international control, under a Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programme. In exchange, the UCPN-M received legal recognition, including the right to par-

ticipate in elections. It was also agreed that PLA troops would be integrated into the Nepal Army (Rynn, Greene, and Bogati, 2008). The agreement generated several controversies, including disputes about the number of both PLA cadres (guerrillas) and their firearms. The Maoists turned in some weapons in 2007, but they have not fully declared their inventory, leaving much unknown.

Because total insurgent small arms usually are calculated as a proportion of combatants, personnel numbers are instrumental to estimating their arsenals. All DDR programmes need to address the unintentional incentives for demobilizing forces to exaggerate their size to improve their bargaining position and maximize payouts to supporters. In Liberia, for example, 25,000 combatants were expected to register in 2003. Instead 103,000 people were registered as combatants, although just 28,314 weapons were received, including parts (Daboh, 2010, p. 9).

Nepal's DDR also appears to have been affected by this tendency. Inspectors from the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) initially registered 30,852 PLA personnel (Rynn, Greene, and Bogati, 2008, p. 12). This number was later reduced to 19,600 verified former Maoist guerrillas, consolidated in regional cantonments (Kaphle, 2010). The number was further reduced in May 2009, after a video was made public in which the Maoist leader, Puspa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda), who later became Prime Minister, acknowledged that the PLA had 7,000 to 8,000 combatants (IISS, 2011). After negotiations, it was finally recognized that 9,507 guerrillas were eligible for integration into the Nepal Army, of which the government agreed to accept 6,500 (Jha, 2012; Shrestha, 2012).

In 2007, the PLA submitted 3,475 weapons to UN control. These were stored in sealed shipping containers at two locations (Zhi, 2011). After further negotiations, these weapons were turned over to the Nepal Army on 21 April 2012. Some weapons, notably

Chinese-made Kalashnikovs, are reportedly carried by former guerrillas enlisted in the army (MoD, 2011).

While the 3,475 PLA small arms that were handed over have been verified, the size and types of weapons in the PLA's total arsenal, including weapons presumed to exist but not surrendered, remains uncertain. To estimate its size, two general rules are relevant. First, in lieu of other information, it generally is assumed that insurgent fighters average 1.6 small arms or light weapons each (Karp, 2010, p. 120). This allocation permits each combatant a personal firearm, usually a rifle, while some also carry an additional light weapon or side arm. Second, DDR experience shows that groups typically surrender to outside authorities roughly one-third of their small arms and light weapons when they demobilize (Karp, 2009, pp. 183–87; IRIN, 2012).

If these rules hold for Nepal's PLA, the PLA's 9,507 recognized guerrillas possessed roughly 15,000 small arms and light weapons before the 2006 peace agreement. This estimate may be high. Photographs of Maoists taken before 2006, showing unarmed guerrillas, substantiate the impression that PLA guerrillas were not generously equipped (Nepali Perspectives, 2006). Allowing for this, it may be sensible to assume a ratio of one weapon for each guerrilla, which would imply that the PLA controlled some 9,500 small arms and light weapons. Consistent with the one-third experience of other DDR programmes, and knowing that 3,475 weapons were surrendered in 2006, some 6,000 PLA small arms probably remained outside United Nations' control as the DDR programme took shape in 2006. Whether the Maoists acquired additional weapons after 2006 is a matter of speculation.

Photographs show Maoists with an eclectic variety of firearms, suggesting they relied on opportunism to provision themselves, rather than a formal or predominant supplier. Their arsenal included Lee-Enfield bolt-action and

M16A2 automatic rifles, probably looted or extorted from government security services, and Chinese Kalashnikovs, probably imported through black market connections (Nepali Perspectives, 2006). Photographs and videos of the weapons turned over in April 2012 showed many bolt-action Lee-Enfield rifles and some INSAS and Kalashnikov rifles (*Himalayan Times*, 2012). The weapons photographed appeared to be in working condition. Whether the PLA was able to acquire ammunition for its diverse armoury is not known.

Legal arms transfers

The most systematic data source on the legal flow of small arms in and out of Nepal is the UN reporting system on international trade, Comtrade. This system only records formally declared commercial transfers. Although unsurpassed for its systematic coverage, Comtrade is neither comprehensive nor easy to use. It misses much of the military and law enforcement trade, which is not consistently reported to customs authorities, as well as small scale, undeclared imports by individuals. Similarly, it is not designed to capture illicit imports or trade in craft guns, which are almost certainly the largest by volume in Nepal.

Comtrade data also suffer from sloppiness in its reporting. It is not uncommon for military purchases to be entered in civilian categories and vice versa (Marsh, 2005). It has long been suspected that some major exporters, notably China, fail to report politically sensitive contracts, possibly including small arms shipments to the Nepal Army or Maoist guerrillas (Amnesty International, 2006, p. 9). Nevertheless, though some major military assistance shipments may be missing and the cumulative effect of small scale imports by individuals can be considerable, the system provides a general sense of scale.

The information provided here is assembled from individual export and import entries declared in four major

Table 4 Comtrade: declared firearms imports to Nepal, 1992-2010

Comtrade category		Total imports in USD*	Percentage
930190	Military firearms	6,827,638	0.46
930200	Pistols and revolvers	381,768	0.03
930320	Sport shotguns	5,901,532	0.40
930330	Sport rifles	1,738,687	0.12

Note: *This total is cumulated from then-year USD.

Source: UN Comtrade (n.d.)

Table 5 Comtrade: declared firearms imports to Nepal, 1992-2010, by exporter

	Total exports in USD*	Percentage
United States	7,995,803	0.54
Belgium	3,043,481	0.20
China	2,241,658	0.15
India	563,001	0.04
Czech Republic	397,550	0.03
Italy	308,364	0.02
Singapore	166,228	0.01
United Kingdom	81,158	0.01
Germany	29,204	<0.01
Hong Kong	5,170	<0.01
Israel	4,093	<0.01
Austria	2,876	<0.01
Sweden	2,696	<0.01
Australia	1,734	<0.01
unspecified	1,407	<0.01
Switzerland	1,015	<0.01
New Zealand	1,008	<0.01
Thailand	948	<0.01
Turkey	100	<0.01
Total	14,847,494	1.00

Notes: *These totals are cumulated from then-year USD.

Source: UN Comtrade (n.d.)

Table 6 Declared firearms exports from Nepal, 1992-2010

Year	Recipient	Comtrade category		Declared value, USD*
1994	Unspecified	930200	Pistols and revolvers	243
2004	Germany	930320	Sport shotguns	1,000
2007	Poland	930190	Military firearms	312
2008	United States	930190	Military firearms	5,869
2009	France	930330	Sport rifles	12,916
2009	United States	930330	Sport rifles	181
2009	United Kingdom	930330	Sport rifles	181
Total				20,702

Note: *These values are cumulated from then-year USD.

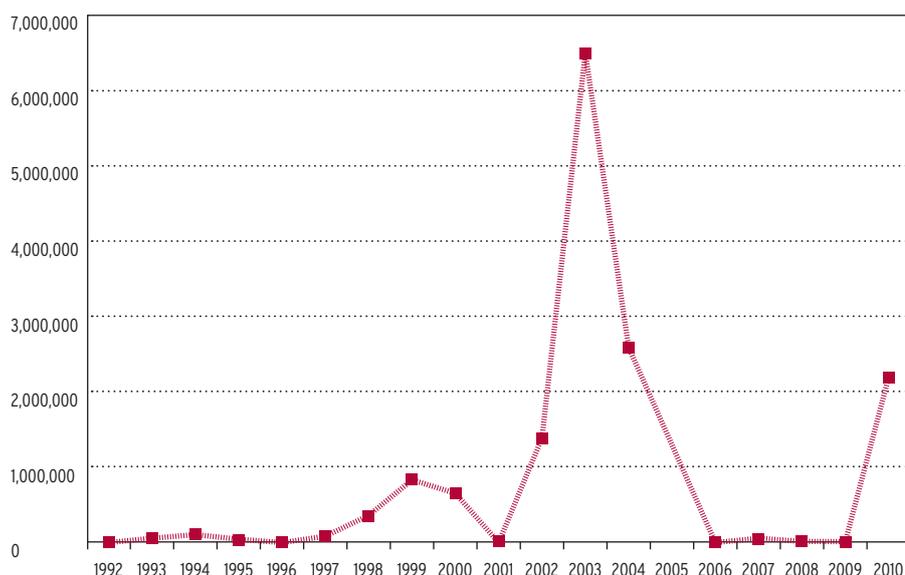
Source: UN Comtrade (n.d.)

categories for reporting firearms exports (see Table 4). The figures presented do not include other commonly used categories, such as military weapons, which often mix transfers of major weapons systems and smaller ordnance. Comtrade reports indicate that, between 1992 (when the current reporting categories were established) and 2010, Nepal imported firearms with a total declared value of USD 14.85 million. Imports surged in the 1990s, in response to increased fighting between the government and Maoists. They peaked in 2003, when major shipments were received from Belgium and the United States, and again in 2010, when a large transfer arrived from China (see Figure 2).

Military firearms transfers to Nepal reported in Comtrade only include shipments from the United States. Military transfers from other sources are absent or, as in the case of the transfer of 23,000 INSAS rifles from India, may be submerged in other reported deliveries and cannot be readily disaggregated. Misreporting also affects the data. A 2003 transfer worth over USD 3 million, reported in Comtrade as sport shotguns from Belgium, may in fact have been the delivery of a controversial order for 5,000 machine guns (Crivellaro, 2002).

Comtrade indicates that the dominant exporter of firearms to Nepal for most of the past two decades was the United States (see Table 5 and Figure 2). American exports, which peaked from 2002 to 2004, were probably mostly commercial transfers of M16 rifles. Exports from other countries are highly erratic, dominated by individual transactions rather than bilateral relationships. Prominent examples include the delivery in 2003 by India of sporting rifles with a declared value of USD 548,974, and the delivery in 2010 from China of handguns worth USD 2,179,717. For both countries, these transfers constituted over 97 per cent of their declared firearms exports to Nepal during the period, in the given categories.

Figure 2 Comtrade: declared firearms imports to Nepal in USD per year, 1992-2010



Source: UN Comtrade (n.d.)

Comtrade also shows that Nepal exports arms, albeit occasionally and on a very small scale (see Table 6). Comtrade does not record some much larger exports from Nepal, however, notably the shipment of 56,357 antique and obsolescent firearms in 2003, discussed in ‘Nepal’s lost antique arsenal’, below. Many of those weapons were fully functional and relatively modern. Their absence reveals further weaknesses in Comtrade reporting.

Nepal’s lost antique arsenal

Some of the most significant Nepalese weapons, especially for historical or analytical purposes, are no longer in the country. As noted above, a large volume of antique and obsolescent firearms was sold for USD 3.3 million in 2003 to a US-based antiques dealer. They included 31,213 operational, antique, and obsolescent military firearms and 25,144 unserviceable firearms, in addition to other military equipment (Dahal, 2011b). The deal, which appears to have been intended to raise money for the purchase of modern weaponry, may have been associated with the severe argument in the royal court over rearming the army to fight the Maoists (Dahal, 2011c).

The sale was essentially a private transaction by the royal court and

was not publicly announced at the time. It became widely known when the antiques were offered for public sale in the United States (James, 2004). Eight years passed before the sale provoked a public scandal in Nepal over the loss of historic artefacts, although their cultural value is debatable (Shimkhada, 2011). A case can be made that the equipment, especially the unique Nepalese designs, constitute lost national patrimony. The most persuasive evidence in support of this view comes not from the erstwhile owners, but from buyers. An article in the American trade press referred to the Nepalese arsenal as ‘treasure’, ‘rare artifacts’, and, most revealing, ‘the loot’. The same writer compared the transfer to ‘the dream of finding buried chests of Spanish doubloons or an undiscovered Rembrandt’ (James, 2004). Now for commercial sale, the most expensive items are Nepalese-designed machine guns, offered to collectors for USD 27,500 each (Dahal, 2011a).

As royal property, the forgotten weapons had been stored in a cache referred to in the trade press as the Langan Silekhana Palace (James, 2004). Apparently this is the armoury (*silekhana*) in the Kathmandu neighbourhood of Langan, the old prime ministerial residence of Bhimsen Thapa Durbar (Bell, 2011).

The Lagan Silekhana was less an arsenal than a dump, where unwanted equipment was abandoned, if only to prevent others from misusing it. It was filled with military firearms produced between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries (Cranmer, 2004, p. 95). The collection shows that, between the 1840s and 1930, Nepal re-equipped the army roughly six times with new military rifles, acquiring 2,000–5,000 each time at intervals of 10–15 years. Most were gifts from the British East India Company and later from the imperial government of India, intended to strengthen Nepal against China. At least one model of rifle appears to have been manufactured in Nepal. The last such gift appears to have been made in 1930, when Britain transferred some 2,000 Lee-Enfield rifles (Walter, 2005, pp. 94–95).

From confusion or because they were deliberately decommissioned, some weapons acquired by the Nepal Army after 1945 also were deposited in the casemates of Lagan Silekhana and another site, Tumu. Most were Sten Guns and M3 sub-machine guns (Cranmer, 2004, p. 95). Only aggregated stock totals have been provided for the Lagan arms dump, but it is feasible that other rifles and weapons were left there. Reports state that few handguns were found at Lagan (Walter, 2005, pp. 80–85). Other weapons may have been pilfered, destroyed, or sold at an earlier date.

The weapons in Lagan Silkhana offer a unique picture of older firearms in contemporary arsenals. Even if the stock was a partial set, the Nepalese cache provided the most complete record of the modernization of a country’s military small arms, revealing not only the types but also the quantities of weapons that Nepal acquired. Weapons from the same period probably take up space in many countries’ arsenals. Much larger obsolescent inventories are believed to exist. Brazil has 823,000 bolt-action rifles assigned to army reserve units (Dreyfus, 2010, p. 124). India is believed to have an even larger

number of bolt-action rifles deployed with its army, paramilitaries, and police (Karp and Rajagopalan, 2013, p. 15). However, the former Nepal arsenal is unusually well documented.

While most of these weapons have limited use in contemporary armed conflict, it is important to identify and quantify antiquarian arsenals, in order to separate them from inventories of modern weapons. Previous country estimates by the Small Arms Survey, for example, ignored pre-1950s small arms, not because the weapons were useless, but because researchers were unable to estimate their number systematically. Nepal's lost arsenal, although transferred to private owners, offers a unique window into the types and quantities of older weapons in country stocks.

The size of obsolescent stockpiles in other countries cannot be extrapolated from the single example of the Lagan Silekhana cache. In the absence of other examples, country firearm estimates will continue to favour conventional practice, which is to exclude obsolescent military and law enforcement firearms such as bolt-action rifles. If more examples like Nepal's can be found, however, researchers may be able to reconstruct average obsolescent totals, and add or subtract them from country arms totals, as appropriate.

Conclusion

Small arms are an important factor in post-conflict environments. This is true of Nepal, even though its problems of post-conflict violence are less serious and possibly easier to resolve than those of many countries in Africa, Central America, or the Middle East. Small arms policy will play an important role in shaping the country's future. So far, however, reform has been limited. Modest changes have been made to civilian firearm regulations and some former guerrilla weapons have been placed under government control.

More comprehensive policy would benefit from better understanding of

the country's unique situation. This *Issue Brief* shows that sources such as police reports, public surveys, and UN Comtrade can throw light on the distribution of firearms in the country. However imperfect, these tools confirm the impression that, by international standards, gun availability in Nepal is moderate. As the country wrestles with post-conflict violence and democratization, it is not burdened by massive arsenals of weapons. Even the hidden inventories of former Maoist guerrillas probably do not number more than a few thousand small arms.

Some of the problems revealed in these findings could be addressed. Weaknesses in the licensing and registration regime and the high proportion of illicit craft guns undermine the credibility of the law and arms policy. Aggressive enforcement, community policing, and the introduction of strategies to encourage legal compliance could reduce concealed firearms ownership in Nepal and elsewhere in South Asia (Verma, 2012). Promising approaches include lowering barriers to licensing and the cost of registration, and encouraging voluntary and non-punitive weapon surrenders, possibly including financial incentives.

While this *Issue Brief* has discussed the distribution of small arms in Nepal, there remain large areas of uncertainty. To improve the effectiveness of policy and to facilitate evaluation and reform, it is vital to obtain better information about private and state small arms holdings. Priorities for further investigation include:

- regional variations in private firearms ownership and use, between the Kathmandu Valley, Terai, and the rest of Nepal;
- the scale and pattern of the illegal trade in craft guns from north India;
- legal and illegal importation of weapons from China to civilians, armed groups, and state security services in Nepal;
- the small arms and light weapon inventories of state security agencies; and

- the small arms inventories of armed groups and former guerrilla.

If progress is made on these matters, Nepal, its neighbours, and the international community will be able to reduce the dangers posed by small arms in post-conflict Nepal more effectively. ■

Notes

- 1 This corresponds to the years 2063–67 in the Nepalese calendar.
- 2 The 1.8 firearms per soldier rule for constabulary militaries is explained in Karp (2006).
- 3 See Watters (2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d).
- 4 By comparison, law enforcement agencies are normally assumed to be armed at a rate of 1.3 firearms per officer (Karp, 2012).
- 5 Wikipedia reports that the Nepal APF controls 142,000 rifles, sub-machine guns, and machine guns (Wikipedia, n.d.).

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About the Nepal Armed Violence Assessment

The Nepal Armed Violence Assessment (NAVA) is a project of the Small Arms Survey. It serves as an independent research resource for Nepalese officials, civil society groups, and international partners. The NAVA combines primary and secondary data sources, but focuses on generating original data and analysis through field research. Methods include in-depth interviews with key informants, archival media research, focus groups, and population-based surveys.

The NAVA explores the following key themes:

- Small arms transfers, trafficking, availability, and control;
- The types and characteristics of armed actors;
- The distribution and scale of armed violence and victimization;
- Perceptions of armed violence and their economic impacts;
- Media depictions; and representations of armed violence.

NAVA publications, which include Working Papers and Issue Briefs, summarize research findings and insight into issues related to violence, its impact, perpetrators and victims, and strategies for prevention and reduction.

NAVA publications are available in English and Nepali.

They can be downloaded at <http://www.nepal-ava.org/>.

Print copies are available from the Small Arms Survey.

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