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United Kingdom

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Introduction

THIS CHAPTER COVERS THE DISPOSAL of surplus small arms and light weapons (SALW) in the United Kingdom from a military, police and civilian perspective. It begins with a section on the availability of SALW, looking at military and police stocks and the emergence of surplus, and civilian possession. The second section looks at policies governing the disposal of surplus weapons: export or destruction are the main options. This is followed by an analysis of the structures and practices for disposing of surplus weapons. A small section on issues relating to reforms and future policies follows, before concluding remarks.

Stocks and determination of surplus

Armed Forces

One of the salient features of British defence policy in the decades following the end of World War Two was the high rate of innovation in strategic thinking and weaponry.¹ Defence spending took up a considerable proportion of the state budget and a wide swathe of the population was involved in the defence industry. This concern with defence in a 'non-war' situation was a new feature of modern British history. By 1965 the development, firepower and weapons systems of the UK's Armed Forces had changed beyond recognition, and defence spending ranged between six and over ten percent of GNP during this time.² Following the collapse of the USSR and the end of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation, British defence spending, as a share of GDP, declined for much of the 1990s. Although reviews of defence policy have made clear that there is no direct or immediate military threat posed to the UK or its overseas territories, the end of the Cold War has given way to an uncertain security environment. Defence expenditure has decreased steadily from 3.8 percent of GDP in 1992 to 2.5 percent of GDP in 2000.³ The Strategic Defence Review of 1998 concluded that the new and uncertain security environment calls for the UK's Armed Forces to be kept at a high degree of readiness and military effectiveness for conflict prevention, crisis management and combat operations.⁴ The Armed Forces currently number 212,450 personnel, over half of whom are in the Army. The UK also maintains a substantial reserve force, numbering 302,850 at the last count.⁵

1 Edmonds, M, Groom, AJR, 'A Guide to the Sources of British Military History', Higham R (ed), (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), pp 566–590.

2 Ibid.

3 'Armaments, Disarmament and International Security', in *SIPRI (2002) SIPRI Yearbook 2002*, (Oxford, OUP), p 287.

4 'Security Assessment. Western Europe, November 2001–April 2002', *Jane's (2002) Jane's Sentinel*, (Surrey, Jane's Information Group), p 839.

5 Ibid, p 805.

The quantities and types of small arms held by UK Armed Forces is largely not publicly available information. However, it is known that the Army holds the types of infantry weapons and artillery specified in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Types of weapons held by the Army⁶

Type	Role
9mm FN35	Pistol
5.56mm L85A1	Rifle
7.62mm FN-FAL	Rifle
7.62mm L39A1	Rifle
7.62mm L96A1	Rifle
5.56mm L86A1	Machine-gun
7.62 mm FN MAG	General purpose machine-gun
7.62 mm Bren L4	Machine-gun
0.50 Browning M2HB	Machine-gun
81 mm (incl. 105 SP)	Mortar
51 mm light mortar	Mortar

Military expenditure on equipment as a whole fell by 4.6 percent in 2001 and by 2.8 percent in 2000, following rises of 0.3 percent in 1999 and 6.7 percent in 1998.⁷ Military expenditure as a percentage of GDP remained relatively constant during this time, at approximately 2.5 percent.⁸ At present the UK Armed Forces do not have a very large surplus of small arms; military downsizing over recent years contributed to a surplus, but this process is now largely over. The country's military forces hold weapons as required in individual force armouries.

The process of defining weapons surpluses involves a range of personnel, from force armourers through equipment managers, logistics and accounts staff. Factors such as the condition of existing equipment, the emergence of new equipment and future military requirements are considered in light of a "front-line first" policy to calculate weaponry needs and, by extension, surpluses. Weapons stores are calculated in terms of military need on the basis of risk assessments, with any equipment that is not earmarked for a specific future use defined as surplus and disposed of. Surplus holdings are regularly reviewed to prevent the expensive storage of superfluous weapons.

Police service

The UK police service is split into 43 geographically organised forces in England and Wales; Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own police services. Recent figures show that police forces in England and Wales number 180,107 staff (including civilian staff), and 14,810 in Scotland (plus 1,651 Special Constables)⁹. Other police forces such as the British Transport Police, Ministry of Defence Police and Port of London Authority Police are not organised along geographical lines but are responsible for the policing of particular installations.

Within the police services, firearms are not routinely carried; the standard weapon carried by all officers is the side-handled baton. However, the growing perception that professional criminals are likely to be carrying firearms has led Chief Officers in urban areas to announce that arms will be carried more often.¹⁰ Only authorised officers, known as Authorised Firearms Officers (AFOs), are eligible to carry firearms, which can be issued when there is reason to suppose that they may, in the course of duty, have to protect themselves or others from someone who is in possession of or has

⁶ Ibid, p 848–9.

⁷ 'Armaments, Disarmament and International Security', in *SIPRI (2002) SIPRI Yearbook 2002*, (Oxford, OUP), p 294.

⁸ Ibid, p 287.

⁹ 'Security Assessment. Western Europe, November 2001–April 2002', *Jane's (2002) Jane's Sentinel*, (Surrey: Jane's Information Group), p 860.

¹⁰ Ibid.

immediate access to a firearm, or is otherwise so dangerous that the officer's use of a firearm may be necessary. Firearms can also be issued for the humane destruction of animals that are dangerous or suffering unnecessarily.¹¹ The Chief Officer of each force determines at what level authorisation for the issue of firearms and specialist munitions is to be granted. In Northern Ireland, the Chief Constable has given standing authority for all officers to be issued with a personal issue handgun, subject to appropriate training.¹² Other than that, certain officers across the UK, such as those working at airports, nuclear sites, on Protection Duties or in Armed Response Vehicles, may be granted standing authority for the issue and carriage of firearms.¹³

Other than the Armed Forces, the police service is the only Government agency authorised to carry firearms. All other agencies rely on the police to provide armed support for operations, where necessary. The Chief Officer may agree to assist other law enforcement agencies such as Customs and Excise, HM Prison Service and the UK Atomic Energy Authority Constabulary in operations where appropriate authority to issue firearms is given. The issue of the transfer of responsibility is to be dealt with in individual cases.¹⁴

Regarding the types of firearms held by police officers, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Manual of Guidance suggests that at short range, revolvers, self-loading pistols and carbines firing handgun ammunition should be sufficient. At longer range, rifles and carbines using rifle ammunition may be appropriate.¹⁵ Taking the Metropolitan Police as an example, weapons have a certain status: weapons in active service are those that are regularly tested and carried by AFOs; weapons in reserve are those that are regularly tested but not carried by AFOs; surplus weapons are those that have been surpassed by new models or whose repair would be too expensive. Information regarding stocks and surpluses is held by individual police constabularies, with force armourers generally in charge of such issues. Figures available for the Scottish Police Service show that 1,437 firearms are currently held by the police, and that 720 officers are currently qualified to hold firearms.¹⁶

Weapons held by the IRA

The UK state has faced the threat of violence from the Irish Republican Army (IRA) for many years in its demands for Northern Ireland's secession from the UK. It is highly armed, and security sources in Ireland estimate that the IRA has sufficient material to equip two battalions, which it imports and also develops indigenously.¹⁷ There have been a number of splits in the IRA over the years, with the formation of the Real IRA, Continuity IRA, Provisional IRA and INLA (Irish National Liberation Army). Although numbers are difficult to estimate, the types of weapon held by the IRA and INLA is largely as in **Table 2**:

¹¹ 'ACPO Manual of Guidance on Police Use of Firearms', < <http://www.westmercia.police.uk/mogpufdefault.htm>>, January 2002.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Mr. Jim Wallace, 28 October 2002, response to parliamentary question S1W-30561, Scottish Parliament

¹⁷ 'Security Assessment. Western Europe, November 2001–April 2002', *Jane's (2002) Jane's Sentinel*, (Surrey, Jane's Information Group), p 861.

Table 2: Types of weapons held by the IRA and INLA¹⁸

Held by	Type	Role
IRA	Webley	Revolver
	Various	Sub-machine-guns
	7.62mm AK-47, AKM	Assault rifle
	5.56mm AR-15/M16	Assault rifle
	7.62mm FN MAG	General purpose machine-gun
	12.7mm DShK	Heavy machine-gun
	RPG-7	Rocket launcher
	Strela-2 (SA-7)	Man-portable Surface to Air Missile (SAM)
INLA	Various	Pistols
	9mm Uzi	Sub-machine-gun
	7.65mm Skorpion	Sub-machine-gun
	7.62mm AK-47	Assault Rifle

Civilian possession

Civilian possession of firearms in the UK has been a hotly disputed topic, with the tragedies of mass killings in Hungerford (1987) and Dunblane (1996) looming large in public consciousness. Legislative changes over recent years have been driven by the logic that prohibiting firearms means there are fewer legally held weapons at risk of theft and being used in crime.¹⁹ Civilian possession of firearms in England, Scotland and Wales is governed by the Firearms Act of 1968, which has been amended several times between 1982 and 1997. Section B4 of Schedule 5 of the 1998 Scotland Act states that the subject matter of the Firearms Acts 1968 to 1997 remains reserved, that is, it remains under the remit of Westminster. The Firearms (NI) Order 1981 covers civilian possession in Northern Ireland. The UK now has some of the most restrictive controls on firearm ownership in the world.²⁰ However, despite this, the incidence of gun crime has continued to grow since the last legislative change in 1997.²¹

The 1968 Firearms Act prohibits weapons such as machine-guns and most self-loading rifles; other weapons such as hunting and target rifles, long-barrelled pump-action shotguns and muzzle-loading pistols must be held on a Firearms Certificate issued by the local police constabulary. Shotguns can only be held with a Shotgun Certificate issued by the local police constabulary. Low-powered airguns are not subject to certificate control, although there are controls on their use by young people. One problem with the 1968 Act was that local Chief Constables exercised ultimate authority over its interpretation; although local conditions and problems varied across the country, the implementation of the law was not uniform, which meant that legitimate holders of firearms such as sporting shooters were treated differently depending on where they lived.²²

In 1982 a new Act extended some restrictions to include imitation firearms. Following the Hungerford massacre of August 1987, when Michael Ryan shot 16 people dead and injured 14 others before killing himself with an AK-47 semi-automatic rifle, an Amendment Act was passed in 1988 that widened the class of prohibited weapons to include most semi-automatic rifles, as well as self-loading or pump-action shotguns. In 1992 British and European firearms laws had to be harmonised, which took place under the Firearms Acts (Amendment) Regulation 1992. This meant that agreed European standards of control provided the lowest degree of restriction, but states could increase controls if they wished.

¹⁸ Ibid, p 862.

¹⁹ Wilkinson, F, *Those Entrusted with Arms. The Police, Post, Customs and Private Use of Weapons in Britain*, (London, Greenhill Books, 2002), p 227.

²⁰ Small Arms Survey, *Small Arms Survey 2002: Counting the Human Cost* (Oxford, OUP).

²¹ Wilkinson, F, *Those Entrusted with Arms. The Police, Post, Customs and Private Use of Weapons in Britain*, (London, Greenhill Books, 2002), p 227.

²² Ibid, p 239.

In March 1996 16 schoolchildren and their teacher were murdered by a gunman at a school in Dunblane. Public outrage put the shooting community in a difficult position and made justification of their sport hard. The Government announced an inquiry, to be headed by Lord Cullen, but new legislation was introduced in 1997 before his report was published. This banned most handguns and required the rest (.22 calibre or less) to be stored at gun clubs. When the Labour Party came into power later on in 1997, it banned private ownership of all handguns, with only a few exceptions. The categories of weapon exempted by legislation include air weapons, muzzle-loading guns, signalling apparatus and so on, and some categories of weapon such as starting pistols are still authorised to be held. Deactivated and imitation weapons can also be held without a licence. Deactivation was not a new phenomenon at this time, but it had not been previously recognised under law. Airguns are freely available and can often be converted to fire real ammunition.

At the end of 2000, 296,849 firearms and 1,320,883 shotguns were held on certificates in England and Wales (see **Table 3** and **4**). The planned National Firearms Certificate Holders Register, which was proposed in the 1997 legislation, was delayed again in late 2002 and will not be active until at least 2004, seven years after it was proposed.

Table 3: Civilian possession of firearms in England and Wales 1995–2000²³

Year	Firearm certificates on issue at 31 December	Number of firearms covered by certificates on issue at 31 December
1995	141,700	413,600
1996	141,900	418,300
1997	133,600	305,000
1998	131,900	295,000
1999	132,300	296,400
2000	125,400	296,800

Table 4: Civilian possession of shotguns in England and Wales 1995–2000

Year	Shotgun certificates on issue at 31 December	Number of shotguns covered by certificates on issue at 31 December
1995	653,800	1,325,800
1996	638,000	1,335,000
1997	623,100	1,343,900
1998	627,600	1,343,100
1999	625,700	1,327,800
2000	600,700	1,320,900

In January 2003, further changes in UK gun laws have been confirmed. The new gun laws – a result of the sharp increase in ‘flagrant gun use’²⁴ – will see a mandatory jail sentence of five years for gun possession.

Policies

Exports of surplus military SALW

UK Government policy is to encourage strategic exports wherever compatible with its political, strategic and security interests. The Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 prohibits the export of certain goods without a licence, a principle that will remain with the entry into force of the 2002 Export Control Act. Licence applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis taking into account the eight Consolidated EU and

²³ Jenner, J, Grey, A, *Firearm Certificates England and Wales, 1999 & 2000* (London, Home Office, 2001) available online at <www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/hosb1101.pdf>

²⁴ Statement made by Home Secretary David Blunkett, BBC News, 6 January 2002.

National Arms Export Licensing Criteria. As part of this process the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) circulates all relevant licence applications to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Ministry of Defence (MoD) and Department for International Development (DfID) for comment. The FCO has responsibility for ensuring that recommendations on export licences are consistent with FCO policy on defence exports and the UK's international commitments and obligations; this includes the commitments made in the 2000 OSCE Document on Small Arms. However, the OSCE Document states that surplus small arms "should, by preference, be destroyed."²⁵ Thus, although thousands of small arms were destroyed by the MoD in 2000 and 2001, it is still possible for small arms to be exported, as long as this does not contravene any of the eight criteria governing UK arms exports.

The policy for the export of surplus small arms is set out in Written Answer 1138W of October 2001, which reiterates Written Answer 242W of June 2000. This asserts that small arms declared surplus by the MoD (other than automatic weapons, which are routinely destroyed) are "made available only to Governments, for use by acceptable military, paramilitary and police organisations, either directly or through duly licensed entities authorised to procure weapons." Whilst this is a positive step on the road to tighter control of exports, it remains difficult to scrutinise the Government's record. Surplus weapons are sold by the Disposal Services Agency (DSA), which is a subsidiary of the Defence Export Services Organisation (DESO), within the MoD. As an agency it has considerable autonomy over its finances and planning. The DSA "normally requires overseas governments which purchase surplus MOD equipment to obtain a UK export licence before collection of equipment from the UK."²⁶ In cases where a licence is required, disposal sales or transfers will be reported on in the Annual Report on Strategic Exports, although it is not possible to tell which sales were specifically of surplus weapons. Additionally, it is unclear when a licence would not be required. In a positive step, the Annual Reports since 1999 give details of government-to-government transfers of surplus major equipment and small arms; however, these tables only seem to give details of the largest deals and are not comprehensive enough to allow detailed scrutiny. The only deals to be captured in these tables are the 1999 and 2000 transfers of self-loading rifles to Sierra Leone.

All applications for the purchase of surplus MoD equipment such as small arms go through the Form 680 process, regardless of whether a licence is required or not by the DSA. The Form 680 process functions as an informal pre-licensing mechanism: the MoD heads a predominantly 'paper' (ie operating by correspondence) interdepartmental committee, the Arms Working Party, from which companies may seek prior clearance for potential exports. The advice provided by the Government on proposals for marketing or promoting products overseas does not constitute an export licence, and the existence or otherwise of a Form 680 approval is not a factor which is taken into account in the licensing decision.²⁷ The Government has also made procedural changes to the Form 680 process recently. For example, the Department for International Development is now directly involved in commenting on Form 680 applications, rather than commenting through the FCO as in the past. The process of approving exports of surplus small arms remains somewhat opaque to the independent observer: the Form 680 process is designed to provide advice to industry, however surplus sales are of MoD equipment. It is therefore unclear why this process is used to assess applications for the export of such goods.

Two major aims of the DSA are to secure the best financial return for the MoD from the sale of surplus equipment, and to promote British business in opening markets for further agreements. As such, there is a tension between the principles governing the disposal of surplus small arms and the basic aim of the DSA. In late 2002 the DSA advertised upgraded surplus SA80s for sale at an arms fair in South Africa, in an

²⁵ OSCE (2000) Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons, section IV, part three; emphasis added.

²⁶ Annual Report on Strategic Exports 2001, p 368.

²⁷ Government News Network, <<http://www.nds.col.gov.uk>>

example that highlights the tensions within UK policy. Although surplus small arms will only be sold to Governments, in light of the eight criteria governing UK arms exports and in light of the international commitments made by the UK to combat weapon proliferation in Southern Africa – such as its role in the EU-SADC dialogue on small arms, which has been ongoing since December 1998 – it is disappointing that the weapons were made available for sale in Africa at all.

Storage and destruction of surplus small arms

Of those small arms declared surplus by the MoD, only automatic weapons are routinely destroyed. The rules for the storage and management of Government stockpiles are for internal use only; however, the UK has also contributed to the chapter on best practice in stockpile management and security for the OSCE Handbook of Best Practices on SALW.

Surplus police service weapons are destroyed; the policy for this is set out in the 2000 document, *Destruction of Surplus Police Firearms*, which is a confidential document. The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) *Manual of Guidance* states that police weapons not being used for operational purposes will normally be stored in force armouries, although there are occasions when, due to operational need, they will be stored elsewhere.²⁸

Firearms collected or confiscated from the population are also to be destroyed. None of the surrendered weapons are to be sold within the UK or abroad, although a small number may be kept for training purposes or by museums for display.²⁹ There are only two exceptions to the policy of destroying all seized firearms: if a weapon is of particular historical interest it is sent to the Pattern Room, which is owned by the MoD and houses a collection of 22,000 weapons; alternatively, if a weapon is particularly unusual it is sent to the Forensic Science Service for testing. HM Customs also have the power to seize illicit firearms and ammunition and have their own arrangements for disposal, but these mirror police practices.

Structures and practices

Having looked at the policy framework governing the disposal of surplus small arms and light weapons, it is possible to identify further details as to the structures and practices for the execution of policy.

Armed Forces surplus stocks

There is no centralised programme for the disposal of surplus military SALW. Force armourers calculate the surplus from their holdings, and this information passes up the chain of command through equipment, logistics and accounts personnel and the surplus can then officially be declared. Surplus weapons for destruction are sent to specified locations where they are destroyed by MoD staff. Between 1992 and 1995, 93,000 small arms were destroyed, with a prediction of 90,000 small arms being available for destruction per annum in the next five years.³⁰ The *Annual Report on Strategic Export Controls* gives details of surplus small arms destroyed; however, only information for 2000 and 2001 is available. In 2000, 6,793 weapons were destroyed, and in 2001 28,641 were destroyed:

²⁸ 'ACPO Manual of Guidance on Police Use of Firearms', <<http://www.westmercia.police.uk/mogpufdefault.htm>>, January 2002.

²⁹ House of Commons Written Answer, 17 November 1997, <www.parliament.the-stationary-office.co.uk>

³⁰ Davis, I, Schofield, S, *Upgrades and Surplus Weapons: Lessons from the UK Disposal Sales Agency*, (BICC paper 11, 1997) <www.bicc.de>

Table 5: Destruction of surplus small arms in 2000 and 2001³¹

2000		2001	
Description	Quantity	Description	Quantity
Rifle 7.62 mm	5,514	Pistol 9 mm	62
Machine-gun 7.62 mm	109	Pistol pyro 1 in	51
Machine-gun MP5K 9 mm	1	Pistol pyro 1.5 in	1,360
Rifle .22 in	177	Rifle 5.56 mm	33
Rifle 5.56 mm	157	Rifle .22 in	50
Pistol pyro 1.5 in	64	Rifle 7.62 mm	24,706
Shotgun 12 BORE	3	Rifle .303 in	202
Riot gun 1.5 in	79	Rifle no 4	100
Mortar 51 mm	1	Riot gun 1.5 in	725
Pistol 9 mm	153	Machine-gun 7.62 mm	65
Riot gun 37 mm	6	Launcher 40 mm	98
Pistol pyro 1 in	33	Injector	23
Rifle .303 in	495	Discharger	790
Launcher 40 mm	1	Ordnance 81 mm	283
		NIV assorted weapons	93
TOTAL	6,793	TOTAL	28,641

Between 1992 and 1995, 40,000 small arms, rifles and handguns were sold to firearms dealers for overseas orders and 700 rifles were sold on a government-to-government basis.³² Although a large proportion of surplus small arms used to be sold for scrap,³³ the Government announced in June 2000 that surplus small arms (excluding automatic weapons) would be made available for export to Governments, as outlined above. The UK Annual Report on Strategic Export Controls of 1999 and 2000 give details of major transfers of surplus small arms: 10,000 self-loading rifles were transferred to Sierra Leone in 1999 and 4,550 were transferred in 2000.

The UK is also involved in international initiatives to eliminate surplus weapons. At the UN Conference on Small Arms in New York (July 2001), the UK announced its Small Arms and Light Weapons Reduction Programme, part of a Small Arms Strategy under the Global Conflict Prevention Pool mechanism. Between 2001 and 2004 the FCO, MoD and DfID will make US\$30.5 million available to help address the proliferation and misuse of SALW.³⁴ The UK has also been involved in programmes such as the UNDP Weapons for Development project in Gramsh, Albania; other projects that have small arms initiatives under their remit include the EU-Cambodia project, the NATO Partnership for Peace and the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.

Police surplus stocks

Surplus police weapons are destroyed, usually by each individual police constabulary; force armourers are in charge of the disposal of weapons. A document from 2000, *Destruction of Surplus Police Firearms*, published by the Working Group on Police Use of Firearms, outlines the rules governing the issue. These guidelines broadly state that all surplus police weapons and all seized firearms are to be destroyed: none are to be made available to the second-hand market.

Weapons recovered from the civilian population

In relation to weapons recovered from the civilian population, under the surrender and compensation arrangements of the 1997 firearms legislation, the vast majority of these weapons are destroyed under local arrangements in each police force area, which

³¹ MoD, FCO, DfID, *Annual Report on Strategic Export Controls 2000*, (London, The Stationary Office, 2001) and MoD, FCO, DfID, *Annual Report on Strategic Export Controls 2001*, (London, The Stationary Office, 2002).

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ FCO, *Human Rights Annual Report 2001*, (London, The Stationary Office, 2001).

usually entails destruction by the force armoury. In 1992 the Metropolitan Police appointed a group of Firearm Enquiry Officers to deal with all firearms enquiries in one police area. This was designed to build up expertise and generate trust between the police and firearms users; previously, enquiries had been dealt with by any police officer available at the time. The idea was later spread to the rest of the Metropolitan area and now all of London's Firearms Enquiry Teams are under the control of the Force Firearms Unit (known as SO19).³⁵ Other forces have also adopted the idea.

The June 1997 large-calibre handgun compensation scheme and small-calibre pistol compensation scheme and surrender arrangements, agreed under the 1997 legislation, set out the practices to be followed in disposing of firearms collected from the population. They state that once surrendered, guns and ancillary equipment are to be stored securely by the police until a disposal instruction is issued by the Home Office Firearm Compensation Section (FCS). Once this is received, the property will be disposed of at the discretion of the Secretary of State. However, ammunition, primers and propellant powders may, for safety reasons, be disposed of without the need for a specific instruction from the FCS.

No central record is kept of actual destruction. As individual constabularies are responsible for destroying weapons and keeping records, it is difficult to estimate the number of weapons collected or confiscated from the population. Under the June 1996 amnesty, 23,000 illegally-held firearms were handed in. Over 162,000 handguns were surrendered to police in England, Scotland and Wales in two subsequent hand-in periods: July–September 1997 (large-calibre handguns) and February 1998 (small-calibre handguns).

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) gives details of firearms finds, with between 88 and 134 found every year since 1996.³⁶

Reforms

The MoD does not envisage any changes in policy or internal reviews as to Government policy on surplus small arms. UK officials have worked on a chapter on best practice in stockpile management and security for the OSCE handbook. However, in terms of OSCE information-sharing processes, it is hoped that the Home Office and police will be more involved in this cross-departmental issue in future. The UK Government fully intends to continue its role in international co-operation and assistance programmes with regard to the elimination of SALW.

Following the surrender and compensation schemes of the late 1990s there were several lessons to be learned with regard to collection of firearms from the civilian population. The cost of the schemes was approximately US\$148.6 million, but they did not achieve the wider aim of removing guns from the risk of theft and being used in crime.³⁷ This is not to say that firearms control should not be pursued, but that criminal use of firearms has not been adequately addressed by controls on legal possession. The national firearms register proposed in 1997 is still not functional, and it remains difficult to gain an accurate census of firearm possession across the country. No central records are kept of weapons collected and destroyed by police constabularies, which also hampers the collation of a national picture. The Home Office was criticised for failing to develop a timely strategy for the receipt, storage and disposal of ammunition under the surrender and compensation schemes.³⁸ The police had expected most

³⁵ Wilkinson, F, *Those Entrusted with Arms. The Police, Post, Customs and Private Use of Weapons in Britain*, (London, Greenhill Books, 2002) p 239.

³⁶ <www.psnl.police.uk/stats/data/findscy.doc>

³⁷ Wilkinson, F, *Those Entrusted with Arms. The Police, Post, Customs and Private Use of Weapons in Britain*, (London, Greenhill Books, 2002), p 229 gives the figure from a report issued by the Comptroller and Auditor General on Handgun Surrender and Compensation, 28 February 1999.

³⁸ Select Committee on Public Accounts (1999) 'Public Accounts: Twentieth Report', <www.parliament.the-stationary-office.co.uk>

ammunition to be used up, but close to the start of the surrender it became clear that substantial quantities would be handed in, and there were no contingency plans in place to cover this. As such, police forces had to employ contractors at short notice to dispose of large quantities of ammunition. Although the National Audit Office found no evidence that surrendered ammunition had been resubmitted for compensation or sold on, it was unable to gain assurance that forces' arrangements for disposal would ensure the destruction of all ammunition.³⁹ However, although individual police constabularies may make changes, there has not been a change in Home Office policy, nor have any reforms been implemented specifically in relation to the OSCE Document.

Concluding remarks

The OSCE Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons of November 2000 has not in itself triggered any changes in UK policy concerning the disposal of surplus SALW from a military, police or civilian perspective. However, in keeping with the growing international consensus that small arms play a disproportionate role in conflict, small arms have become subject to increased control. Disposal of weapons collected or confiscated from the civilian population usually involves destruction, with a few exceptions made for rare types of firearm. Problems over the years have included varying interpretations of the law according to police force area, and the problematic relationship between gun control and criminal use of firearms. Organisational problems concerning the regulation and disposal of firearms also dog efforts to remove firearms from society.

Disposal of surplus police service firearms is also achieved through destruction. Since the introduction of the ACPO guidelines in 2000, police policy seems to have become more uniform and in keeping with the spirit of the OSCE Document. However, the absence of centralised data means that a complete and accurate picture is difficult to obtain. The size of police surpluses appears to be small though, and the number of destructions low.

Disposal of surplus military small arms is achieved through destruction or export. The lack of transparency surrounding the reporting of arms exports and export controls, on the part of the Ministry of Defence in particular, does nothing to allay the worries of the independent observer. Thus, it is impossible to tell if the advertising for sale of upgraded surplus SA-80 rifles at an arms fair in South Africa in late 2002, for example, was an unfortunate one-off incident or an example of how the policy to export strategic goods wherever possible introduces tensions within Government policy in relation to international commitments and initiatives undertaken by the Department for International Development and Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Although the UK remains a leading actor in the export controls debate and has stricter control mechanisms than most states, there is still much room for tighter control.

This chapter is part of a wider research study entitled *Disposal of surplus small arms* which examines the policies and practices of ten Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) countries concerning surplus small arms. The report's ten case studies focus on stocks and determination of surpluses, as well as policies on exports, stockpile management and destruction. The report was initiated and co-ordinated by the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) and carried out in close co-operation with the British American Security Information Council (BASIC), Saferworld and the Small Arms Survey.

To obtain a copy of the complete report contact bicc@bicc.de, basicuk@basicint.org, general@saferworld.org.uk or smallarm@hei.unige.ch

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