

**Analyzing the Issue of Curbing the
Unrestricted Availability and Proliferation
of Small Arms and Light Weapons:
Some Implications for the Study of
International Relations and for
Education in Defense and Security**

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses one of the key issues in the international security agenda today: the control of the proliferation and availability of small arms and light weapons. It shows how the topic has become one of concern to the international community. It also indicates who the main actors involved in this process are. In addition, this paper examines the reasons why there is so much availability of small arms in the world today. These reasons are connected to changes in the international arms trade patterns after the Cold War. It seeks to demonstrate some implications of the rise of the issue of small arms into the international agenda, for the study of international relations and for education in defense and security. I am especially interested in the literature on norms and ideas that helps to explain the advancement of normative change. The present paper utilizes transparency as a case study with two aims. First, I want to illustrate how the rise of the norm of transparency sheds light on the study of norms in international relations. Second, I will contend that the rise of the small arms issue has also contributed to fostering the norm of transparency.

INTRODUCTION

This paper addresses an important issue on the international agenda today: controlling the proliferation and availability of small arms and light weapons.¹ The small arms issue has received momentous attention by states and nongovernmental actors especially from 1998 through July 2001. At the end of the 1990s, this issue has, to a great extent, overshadowed the debate on weapons of mass destruction. After the terrorist attacks in the United States in September 2001 and the political events that followed, the debate on controlling weapons of mass destruction became heated again. Small arms, however, are not strategic and therefore do not have any of the strategic importance of nuclear or chemical weapons. They are cheap and largely available virtually everywhere in the world. The ongoing debate on weapons of mass destruction is distracting the international community from the fact that half a million deaths are caused per year by small arms and light weapons in crime and ethnic conflict. The presence of these weapons can amplify violence and crime and also magnify conflict.

Since the mid-1990s, a myriad of regional and international documents have been designed to set standards and norms to deal with the problems associated with small arms proliferation. On an international level, however, there is no broad-scope international legally binding agreement regulating the wide range of issues associated with this class of weapons. The Firearms Protocol is the only international legally binding document not yet enforced addressing small arms; however, its narrow scope includes only commercially traded weapons.

¹ According to the First Report of the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms of 1997, part of the United Nations Resolution A/52/298, August 27 1997, in pursuance of paragraph 1 of General Assembly Resolution 50/70 B of December 12, 1995, small arms are: revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, sub-machine guns, assault rifles, light machine guns; and light weapons are defined as: heavy machine-guns, hand-held underbarrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns and recoilless rifles, portable launchers of anti-tank missile and rocket systems, portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems, mortars of caliber of less than a 100 mm. Ammunition and Explosives: cartridges (rounds) for small arms, shells and missiles for light weapons, anti-personnel and anti-tank grenades, land mines.

Governmental transactions therefore do not fall on the same agreed standards set up by the Protocol.² In July 2001, the first international conference on the illicit trade on small arms was held in New York, under the auspices of the United Nations. A politically binding Plan of Action was issued there, setting up the first internationally agreed set of norms and standards concerning small arms.

From an international relations standpoint, the importance of analyzing the small arms issue mainly lies in the following aspects. First, it sheds light on how coalitions of states and transnational movements of nongovernmental actors manage to influence security policymaking. Second, it is key to understanding how the generation of norm building processes plays a role in redefining the interests of states in the promotion of normative change. Third, the process of advancement of new ideas, measures and norms to form international regimes may serve as an indicator of the pace at which international relations is evolving. New ideas come forth because relevant actors managed to outlast old ones. In this process, these relevant actors have also educated their audience about the necessity of modification of behavior and attitude. Regime formation is usually an indicator of this trend.³ Fourth, the coalition building processes among nongovernmental organizations on the one hand, and between nongovernmental organizations and states on the other hand, stake a compelling claim that international politics and state behavioral change is no longer confined to states as the sole driving force. Rather, civil society through transnational movements has been playing an ever widening role in influencing states to act upon humanitarian and human rights causes as well as in other domains such as the

² United Nations Ad Hoc Committee on the Elaboration of a Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Protocol Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Part and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime”, Vienna, Austria, 2001.

³ The most recent example of such regime formation is the case of the international campaign to ban the production, use, transfer, and stockpiling of land mines. This campaign culminated with the Treaty of Ottawa which bans all aspects of the use of land mines. This treaty mirrors the political environment in which states have agreed to modify behavior and attitude towards the use of land mines, ultimately bringing positive normative change.

environment, disarmament and arms control. Lastly, the importance of addressing the role of ideas and, ultimately, ideational change in international relations is an effort to explain the ongoing and continuing process of civilizing world politics.

The global management of small arms proliferation has implications to education and research in defense and security. In the security policy of states, ideational change is connected to the modification of deeply ingrained practices and beliefs. Therefore, education can play a key role in shaping perceptions of this new disarmament issue. In addition, education is primordial to the adoption of new patterns of transparency on small arms acquisition, transfer, and stockpiling. In addition, the small arms issue has multiple connections between its national, regional, and international dimensions. There are porous borders in many regions of the world through which arms can easily be smuggled. The very international nature of the arms trade itself renders possible that a gun produced in one corner of the world could end up being used for legitimate or illegitimate purposes thousands of miles away. Therefore, this issue has relevance to practitioners, policymakers, and scholars in the national, regional and international levels.

This paper has several objectives. First, I aim to identify the many actors involved in the global movement against small arms. The goal is to see who is promoting new policy proposals that elevate the issue of curbing the illicit trade on small arms and light weapons in the international agenda. Second, to define the implications, if any, for research and education in defense and security, deriving from the consolidation of the issue of small arms in the international security agenda. The idea is not to present a comprehensive overview of this complex and broad issue. Rather, the aim is to choose one topic within the area of research and education in defense and security, and here we chose, transparency, and to draw some few implications resulting from the establishment of the issue of small arms in the international

security agenda. We will contend that the consolidation of the issue of small arms in the international agenda is one more element enhancing transparency among states.

THE RISE OF THE SMALL ARMS ISSUE INTO THE INTERNATIONAL AGENDA

The end of Cold War bipolarity created the opportunity for researching possibilities of curbing the unrestricted availability of small arms that especially fuels illicit trafficking and enhances criminality and conflict. These arms are not strategic and do not require a large amount of investment in maintenance, production, and stockpiling, as do weapons of mass destruction.

The increasingly unrestricted availability of small arms and light weapons constitutes a trend which bears upon the changed nature of contemporary conflicts following the end of the Cold War. It is well known that conflicts arise inside state borders and that the recurrent trend is to resort to small weapons. Weapons of mass destruction, once a priority for the international arms control community during the Cold War, are now overshadowed by the weapons “in vogue” of contemporary warfare, varying from machetes and hand guns to sub-machine guns and shoulder fired anti-aircraft missiles.

Although small arms and light weapons are legitimate tools for the self defense of states and individuals, the current pace of unaccountable transfers and the weapons already in existence call for urgent measures. The accumulation of small arms may contribute to destabilizing internal situations leading either to the exacerbation of crime (as in most parts of Latin America, in the United States and in South Africa) or to a blurring of the distinction between crime and warfare (as in the Horn of Africa, West Africa, and other parts of the world).

In the predominant type of post-Cold War conflict, the weapons of choice are primarily small arms because they are cheap, readily available, easy to transport, and require little or no maintenance. Small arms control has become an issue, among other reasons, because their unrestricted availability of these arms contributes to weakening peace accords, as well as to undermining peace-building efforts ultimately hindering social and economic development. In addition, small arms have become an issue because of the particular characteristics of the post-Cold War international arms trade. These made it possible for small arms to become so widespread.

The issue of small arms control has been rising as a topic of concern in the international agenda since mid-1990s. There were some defining moments advancing the issue as topic of international concern to the international community, such as the United Nations mission to Mali. This was when the former president of Mali, Alpha Oumar Konaré, asked the United Nations Secretary General to send a mission to Mali, in 1994, to account for the destabilizing situation exacerbated by the large presence of weapons in the society. The United Nations mission concluded that action should be taken in the following four areas: establishment of national commissions in all states wishing to join a possible initiative of disarmament; revision and harmonization of national legislation regarding light weapons; creation of regional arms registers and information networks on arms circulation; and enforcement of the security forces.⁴ From this moment on, a growing international awareness was formed regarding the necessity of creating practical and legislative measures to curb the misuse of small arms in West Africa.⁵ There was a further impetus to attract attention to the western Africa situation: the “Timbuktu

⁴ Alpha Oumar Konaré, “Introduction au Moratoire par le Président du Mali”, President’s speech in Oslo, April 1998.

⁵ At the time President Konaré made this speech (in April 1998), there were 7 to 8 million illicit arms circulating just in West Africa.

Flame of Peace,” a symbolic act that also took place in Mali in March 1996 where approximately 3,000 arms were burned.⁶

Then, in January 1995, there was the publication of the Supplement to an Agenda for Peace by the United Nations Secretary-General, Boutros-Boutros Ghali.

“...I wish to concentrate on what might be called “micro-disarmament”.

By this I mean practical disarmament in the context of the conflicts the United Nations is actually dealing with and of the weapons, most of them light weapons, that are actually killing people in the hundreds of thousands.”⁷

These words became imbued in the subsequent efforts developed by the international community, especially within the United Nations. Most of the early literature dealing with small arms makes reference to this call. The interest in seizing this invitation to reflect on and search for solutions to this problem lies in the fact that the Secretary-General’s statement was the decisive international institutional declaration regarding the problem that needed to be tackled by the international community.⁸ The Secretary-General issued this statement, among other reasons, because the death toll caused by those weapons is unprecedented to the point of obstructing the work of the United Nations and other organizations in regions of conflict, undermining peace agreements, complicating peace-building, and impeding political, economic, and social

⁶ Poulton, Robin-Edward and Youssouf, Ibrahim ag, *A Peace of Timbuktu - Democratic Governance, Development and African Peacemaking*, United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 1998, p. 77-83.

⁷ Supplement to An Agenda for Peace, A/50/60, S/1995/1, paragraph 60, 3 January 1995. Micro-disarmament is, as mentioned by the Secretary-General, the withdrawal of the excess of arms circulating in a country after a civil war. The Secretary-General’s call for micro-disarmament emphasizes the humanitarian devastation caused by small arms and addresses the misdirection of funds that could be used for development instead of the weapons procurement by the poorest countries in the world.

⁸ Ibid., the Secretary-General says: “Progress since 1992 in the area of weapons of mass destruction and major weapons systems must be followed by parallel progress in conventional arms, particularly with respect to light weapons. It will take a long time to find effective solutions. I believe strongly that the search should begin now.”

development. It was the first time that a United Nations document clearly stated that attention needed to be shifted from weapons of mass destruction to light weapons.

Other phenomena, such as a steep rise in criminality in many parts of the world and a change in perceptions of the notions of security, in the post-Cold War, have led several governmental and nongovernmental actors to take action to put some control in the availability of small arms and light weapons. The difficulty lies in the fact that these weapons are legitimate tools of self-defense to states and individuals.

There are several reasons for the massive availability of small arms nowadays. Since the end of the Cold War, large amounts of American and Soviet (ex-Warsaw Pact) arms were made available with the end of the requirements of high levels of preparedness and readiness of armies and arsenals. With the shrinkage of armies, many weapons became obsolete. This happened likewise with the requirement of updating arsenals for countries to acquire NATO membership. Gradually, a perception evolved that large amounts of weapons, left unchecked in circulation from conflicts during the Cold War, were a means of fuelling crime and violence, heightening the illicit trafficking of arms, especially in post-conflict zones. Related to this, there was a remarkable growth of the black market and private gun dealers. This phenomenon had started by the end of the 1970s and slowly unfolded until the end of the Cold War. Therefore, basically what happened was the disintegration of the supply side control that redefined how many suppliers and how many recipients there were in the international arms trade. Finally, the changed nature of conflicts in the post-Cold War with the intensification of communal conflicts brought a new face to waging war.

There are several explanations for the overflow of weapons, which took place especially after the Cold War. The very characteristics of the post-Cold War international arms trade have

made it possible for small arms and light weapons to become so widespread. This has contributed to an increase in the arms black market as well as an expansion of gunrunners and private arms dealers who work closely with private military and security companies.⁹ There are five particular noteworthy reasons for this.¹⁰ First, after the end of the Cold War, large amounts of American or Soviet and ex-Warsaw Pact arms were made available with the end of the Cold War requirements of high levels of military preparedness. In addition, the expansion of NATO membership has placed great demands on new member States to update their military capacities. Thus, the old and surplus arsenals are accessible at cheap prices or as grants to developing countries.

The history of the rise of the parallel market provides part of the explanation for the abundance of small arms and light weapons throughout the world. It can be traced back to the 1970s, when few events were as important as the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the breakdown of the Warsaw Pact.¹¹ This was perhaps the most important episode that led to the “disintegration of the supply-side control” over the weapons.¹² There were several attributes of the Soviet “Military-Industrial Complex” that had resulted in devastating effects at both regional and international levels. Since 1989, Russia’s deep economic crisis caused its economy to diminish by half. However, most significant for the present analysis is the fact that there was a total economic rupture between Russia and other former Soviet Republics, and the Military-Industrial Complex was not equipped to deal with the sudden conversion to a market economy.

⁹ AirScan has also been reportedly involved in arms trafficking from Uganda to the southern Sudan to support the Sudanese People’s Liberation Army there. See Kevin O’Brien, “Military-Advisory Groups and African Security: Privatized Peacekeeping?” In *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 5, Number 3 (autumn 1998), p. 95.

¹⁰ Garcia, Denise, “World Politics of Restraint - Curbing the Unrestricted Availability and Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Current International Relations,” *Mémoire* presented at the Graduate Institute of International Studies, October 1999, p. 20-26.

¹¹ Naylor, R.T., “The Rise of the Modern Arms Black Market and the Fall of Supply Side Control” in Virginia Gamba, ed., *Society Under Siege: Crime, Violence, and Illegal Weapons*, September 1997, p.55.

¹² This is an standard term in the literature on the black market regarding the replacement of a “controlled black market” to a totally unregulated illicit traffic done mostly by private individuals.

Previously, the Military-Industrial Complex consumed 15-25% of the economy, compared with all major Western countries where it occupied 3-6%.¹³ In the first forty years following World War II, a vast amount of capital was consumed by Soviet military production. The sheer size, therefore, of the post-1989 uncontrolled arsenal in the former Soviet Union meant that the arms trade was overwhelmed. As a result, the arms trade at both the regional and the international levels, proved unable to handle the burden and these arms became the epicenter of the black market.

What is more troublesome nowadays are private gunrunners who feed the arms black market. Nonetheless, private gunrunners and brokers can hamper efforts to control the international proliferation of small arms. They profit from weak or nonexistent legal controls to conduct business worldwide. The Rwandan genocide that was not only committed with “machetes,” as is often claimed, but with all sorts of small arms and light weapons, was possible thanks to an intricate net of gun runners that managed to break the United Nations embargo on Rwanda.¹⁴

There are large amounts of weapons in circulation in troubled regions of the world resulting from conflicts that took place during the Cold War. Large scale American-and Soviet-sponsored arms pipelines, or covert arms deliveries, fuelled Cold War conflicts. These arms are still serviceable and constitute a menacing post-Cold War development. One cannot forget to also note the remarkable growth of the black market and private arms gunrunners. This phenomenon had begun by the end of the 1970s and slowly unfolded until the end of the Cold War, with its full impact being felt throughout the 1990s. The mosaic of arms suppliers and

¹³ Bonn International Center for Conversion, “The Russian Military-Industrial Complex - The Shock of Independence,” Report 3: Conversion of the Defense Industry in Russia and Eastern Europe, p. 12-13.

¹⁴ Dyer, Susannah L. and O’ Callaghan, Geraldine “One Size Fits All ? Prospects for a Global Convention on Illicit Trafficking by 2000,” British American Security Information Council, *BASIC Research Report* 99.2, April 1999, p.20.

recipients has dramatically changed since the 1980s, at which time small arms suppliers were restricted to only a few countries. In the late 1980s, this pattern began to change so that there is now a larger array of small arms manufacturers in over 70 countries. The continuing pace of unregulated licit governmental transfers constitutes a disturbing trend because it adds to the scope of the overall problem. This is so, among other reasons, because governmental transfers are not transparent and thus result in trade with irresponsible governments that often use arms to commit the most serious violations of human rights¹⁵.

**ACTORS IN THE SMALL ARMS ISSUE:
THEIR ROLE IN THE DIFFUSION OF NEW POLICY PROPOSALS AND MEASURES
ADDRESSING SMALL ARMS PROLIFERATION**

There is a wealth of different state and nonstate actors involved in the diffusion of new policy proposals and measures to address the proliferation of small arms. The multifaceted nature of the small arms issue brings about the interest and participation of many different actors. The list below suggests several problems associated with the proliferation and availability of small arms and light weapons:

- Regional destabilization and threat to regional peace and security
- Obstruction of the processes of development
- Violation of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law
- Illicit Arms Trafficking
- Rise in criminality
- Links with organized crime
- Public health

¹⁵ Garcia, "World Politics of Restraint - Curbing the Unrestricted Availability and Proliferation of Small Arms and Light

There were defining moments that contributed to the rise of the small arms issue into the international agenda, such as the United Nations mission that assessed the weapons presence situation requested by Mali in 1995. The United Nations is an essential forum where actors, especially states, gathered together to discuss the issues related to small arms proliferation and spurred many key initiatives. As it is shown in the preceding list, given the nature of the problems associated to small arms proliferation, many actors became involved with different perspectives and ways of framing the issue.

States, international and regional organizations, norm entrepreneurs, nongovernmental organizations, transnational networks, grassroots movements and interest groups (arms manufacturers and pro-gun lobbying groups) are some of the many actors involved in the small arms issue.¹⁶ It is not in the scope of analysis of this paper to look at each one of these actors. The wealth of initiatives promoted by governments suggests that states were the main actors in the advancement of the small arms issue in the international agenda. They acted more as agenda-setters than the nongovernmental actors. The role of some actors, such as Canada and Norway, is important to gather the endorsement of other states. Different from the land mines case, where nongovernmental organizations assumed a prominent role in promoting international efforts to advance the issue in the international agenda and were the main actors advocating normative change, the small arms question presents a more complex relationship among state and non-state actors. The importance of nongovernmental actors cannot be neglected. The importance of the study of the role of non-state actors in international relations has found resonance in constructivist studies that identifies non-state actors as important action spearheads. States might

Weapons in Current International Relations”, p. 86.

¹⁶ The literature on norm formation in International Relations is keen in stressing the importance of norm entrepreneurs. These are individuals who are dissociated, most of the times, of political motivation and are guided by principled ideas to change a normative situation.

become socialized to norms through several mechanisms as pointed out in the studies of Martha Finnemore on the creation of science bureaucracies all over the world, or on the creation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the subsequent creation of Red Cross chapters in virtually all countries.¹⁷ The studies of Keck and Sikkink have identified that transnational advocacy networks are powerful avenues through which states are socialized to new ideas.¹⁸ In the small arms case, the role of non-state actors is visible at the moment measures and policy proposals are implemented.

Table 1 tracks the main actors responsible for the promotion of the first initiatives on small arms. Without the pretension of being complete, nowadays, it is yet more difficult to trace the enormous wealth of actors involved in the small arms issue. Yet, the interest here is to verify what is main locale for normative change. It is hard to ascertain who follows who and who persuades who. As the issue in question is in great need of more empirical data on matters of production, transfer, storage and stockpiling, there is very little transparency in this field. As it will be analyzed further, transparency is a key normative area that the small arms issue is helping to advance as a consequence of the many related policy proposals.¹⁹

No actor, or no state alone, is enough to influence all the relevant actors for policy change in the national, regional, and international levels. This is because it is clearly a global topic with many interconnected dimensions. Also for a change of policy in this issue, the participation of many societal levels, well beyond governments is required.

¹⁷ Finnemore, Martha, *National Interests in International Society*, Ithaca, N.Y. (Cornell University Press) 1996, 149p.

¹⁸ Keck, Margaret E. and Sikkink, Kathryn, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), 227 p.

¹⁹ One of the key international initiatives to enhance transparency is the creation of the Small Arms Survey, a project of the Graduate Institute of International Studies, mainly and initially sponsored by the Swiss government. There is a conspicuous absence of knowledge related to how many guns are available in the world, and there is also a lacuna in the knowledge related to many other aspects of this issue. Therefore, the Small Arms Survey functions as a clearing-house and a node uniting the many researchers around the world devoting efforts to profile the problem and devise measures to tackle it. They provide information and try to change the face of the policy making dealing with the small arms issue through raising transparency in all the dimensions and the many aspects of the availability and proliferation of small arms.

Table 1. Main events leading up to the consolidation of the issue of small arms in the international agenda.

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT</u>	<u>ACTOR WHO SUPPORTED THE EVENT</u>
September 1993	Start of some research and policy studies	Scholars and arms control practitioners
Fall 1994	United Nations mission to Mali	United Nations and Governments
January 1995	Publication of the Supplement to an Agenda for Peace - creation of the term "microdisarmament".	United Nations
December 1995	Establishment of the Panel of Government Experts on Small Arms	United Nations and Governments
August 1997	First Report - Panel of Government Experts on Small Arms	United Nations and Governments
November 1997	Inter-American Convention Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and other Related Materials (OAS Convention)	United States, Mexico, and Brazil
December 1997	Ottawa Treaty on Land mines	Civil Society
January 1998	Establishment of the www.prepcom.org to prepare for the launch of the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA)	Edward Lurance - Monterey Institute of International Studies
June 1998	Creation of CASA - Coordinating Action on Small Arms - within the UN	United Nations Secretary-General
July 1998	Canada Meeting with 38 NGOs Oslo Meeting	Canadian Government Canadian-Norwegian government
August 1998	NGO Consultation	Canadian government
October 1998	Launch of IANSA	NGOs /governments
December 1998	Decision to convey UN Conference in 2001	Governments
February 1999	Statement Security Council Beginning negotiations Firearms Protocol	Governments Governments
August 1999	Second Report - Panel of Government Experts on Small Arms	Governments

The initial impetus for raising awareness regarding small arms can be traced back to two very important types of nonstate actors: norm entrepreneurs and scholars. One was already mentioned, and it is the initiative of the former United Nations Secretary-General to launch the call for micro-disarmament. The Secretary-General Boutros-Boutros Ghali is considered one of

the key norm entrepreneurs pushing the issue of small arms onto the international agenda. The literature in international relations, to be discussed further, addresses the key role of norm entrepreneurialship in advancing key issues in the international agenda as well as raising awareness of problems.

The other type of actor is arms control scholars and practitioners. I point to some scholarly studies that noted and helped to frame this new issue. For instance, Aaron Karp's study on "Arming Ethnic Conflict", which appeared in *Arms Control Today* in September 1993 argues that the most destabilizing feature of the arms trade after the Cold War was the uncontrolled transfer of small arms and light weapons to substate groups. In a similar vein, Tara Kartha investigated the reasons for the destabilization in Pakistani society that could be found in the massive accumulation of small arms.²⁰ Along the same lines, Christopher Smith in "Diffusion of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Pakistan and Northern India" denounces the destabilizing effects the American arms pipeline furnished to the Afghani war had in the region after the end of the Cold War, tracing the sources of supply and demand of small arms in that region.²¹

In the subsequent year, some relevant scholarly studies appeared. Prashant Dikshit published "Proliferation of Small Arms and Minor Weapons"; in this study he already warns of the existence of gun-runners responsible for fuelling the trade in small arms to conflicting regions of the world.²² Aaron Karp publishes "The Arms Revolution: The Major Impact of Small Arms".²³ He criticizes the literature on the arms trade for failing to recognize the drastic changes in the international patterns of the arms trade. The weapons that have assumed center-stage were

²⁰ Kartha, Tara, "Spread of Arms and Instability", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. XVI, No. 18 (November 1993), pp. 1033-1050.

²¹ Smith, Christopher, "Diffusion of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Pakistan and Northern India," *Defense Studies*, No. 20 (September 1993) pp. 48-70.

²² Dikshit, Prashant "Proliferation of Small Arms and Minor Weapons," *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 17, No.2 (May 1994), pp. 187-204.

²³ Karp, Aaron, "The Arms Revolution: the Major Impact of Small Arms," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No.4 (Autumn 1994), pp. 65-77.

small arms and light weapons. Michael Klare uncovers four channels of supply of small arms: government-to-government, commercial sales, covert deliveries by governments, black market arms deals.²⁴

All these studies began to suggest and advise that measures should be put forward to hold states more accountable and transparent in their small arms transfers. Some traces of the idea of accountability and holding states responsible for their weapons transfers can already be perceived in a nascent form. The most important to note is that these studies started setting the stage for the appearance of and attention converging to a new issue: small arms.

From the beginning of 1994 until 1995, two very important studies were compiled. They gathered several researchers that helped to advance the small arms issue within the United Nations system. First was *Lethal Commerce: The Global Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons*, edited by Jeffrey Boutwell, Michael Klare and Laura Reed. The American Academy of Arts and Sciences sponsored it. The authors in the volume met in February 1994 in a gathering of academic analysts, government officials, and representatives of human rights and other nongovernmental organizations. The meeting highlighted the gaps in the knowledge of the trade in small arms. At that point, inspired by the initial success of the international campaign to ban land mines, the groups analyzing the problems related to the unregulated flows of small arms were the British American Information Council, the national Pugwash groups of India and of the United States, and the Defense Studies Program at King's College. In this volume, there was a contribution by Edward Lurance who addressed the "Negative Consequences of Light Weapons Trafficking: Opportunities for Transparency". He was the other key moral entrepreneur, together

²⁴ Klare, Michael, "Awash in Armaments: Implications of the Trade in Light Weapons", *Harvard International Review*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Winter 1994-95), pp. 24-26, 75-76.

with Boutros-Boutros Ghali, promoting the issue in the United Nations forum. Laurant was also very important to the formation of IANSA in 1998.

On December 10, 1997, there was a meeting held in Washington D.C. to design the framework for IANSA. The conveyors of the meeting were Lora Lumpe, a researcher from the Federation of American Scientists, and Nathalie Goldring (from BASIC). Present was a small group of researchers and some activists coming especially from the human rights movement. In that meeting, an overall inclusive and comprehensive humanitarian approach to what would be IANSA was suggested. In that opportunity Edward Laurant offered to create a web-oriented campaign through the Monterey Institute of International Studies in California. The creation of the virtual “Preparatory Committee” (PrepCom) to IANSA was fundamental to gather more researchers and activists around the issue. The PrepCom served, in addition, as a useful electronic clearinghouse for disseminating information.

The United Nations Group of Governmental Experts reports, especially the first, published in 1997, was a landmark for the understanding and international action of the problem of proliferation of small arms. At this point, the issue was markedly conveyed as a humanitarian and post-conflict resolution problem. It was only after that mostly arms control dimensions became more influential and then became predominant. The 1997 report also served to delimit the issue. It stated that the United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention and Public Health and Safety was working on a project on firearms regulation. This would become the firearms protocol primarily dealing with the connection between guns and transnational organized crime. The first report also dealt with the land mines issue separately from the small arms issue, as the land mines question was being dealt with by another forum.

It can be noted that many state and nonstate actors played a key role in the promotion of new policy proposals to curb small arms proliferation. Notwithstanding its many common underlying features, the small arms question has different agendas, varying from region to region throughout the world. Nongovernmental actors helped shape this perception. For instance, a key nongovernmental organization promoting and implementing solutions to the problems associated with the uncurbed proliferation of small arms is Viva Rio, in Brazil. Brazil has a serious problem with violence that has been linked to the drug trafficking nexus. Viva Rio condemns and fights against the widespread gun violence in Brazil.

THE SMALL ARMS ISSUE AND THE STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Small arms from an international relations standpoint is a topic to be examined by scholars interested in the role of ideas in the construction of normative change. When analyzed from an international relations standpoint, it also sheds light on the literatures of security, actors, and norms.

There is an absence of analytical perspectives on the importance of ideas and non-state actors in the advancement of normative change in international relations mainstream theories, such as realism : both power and interest-based and neo-liberalism (based on the overarching structures of the international system). Game theory, or the rational approach to international relations, addresses the form rather than the content of strategic interaction. Therefore, it sees norms as exogenously determined coordinating mechanisms that enable actors to select among multiple equilibria or to overcome collective action problems. Mainstream theories, however, do not address the issues of preference formation and diffusion of ideas where norms emerge. In

addition, they do not address the mechanisms through which norms spread. Finally, mainstream international relations theories fall short of examining which norms matter and which do not.²⁵

Rational choice theorists see norms as reflections of the fixed preferences of the most powerful states. The definition of norms in the neoliberal and neorealist schools are standards of behavior that can alter the calculations of costs and benefits and constrain the options available to policy makers. This leaves unexplained what states want to achieve.

Trying to overcome the deficiencies of absence of theoretical conceptualization for norm emergence and diffusion, a growing constructivist literature that is concerned with the role of ideas in international relations sheds light on how norms shape their perceptions of states' interests, goals and the strategies devised to achieve these goals. For instance, the case of land mines preceded the small arms issue. From a realist standpoint, one might well argue that these weapons were abandoned because they ceased to be militarily useful. On the one hand, therefore, support from countries such as Canada, Belgium, and Germany that are no longer employing such weapons would not be a telling indicator of the necessity of banning these weapons. Many states, however, have decided to stop using mines not because they are not beneficial for military purposes, but rather because their military utility is outweighed by their humanitarian costs. This introduces a strong moral component to the estimation of national security. On the other hand, realism does not provide a satisfactory explanation for whether relatively insecure countries like Angola, Cambodia, and Croatia have indeed renounced the use of land mines.²⁶

Neoliberalism is also deficient in accounting why many states opted to ban the use of land mines even before a treaty seemed likely. The neoliberal bargaining approach results in convergence around focal points in international negotiations. The limitation of this proposal is

²⁵ Florini, Ann, "The Evolution of International Norms," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 40 (1996), pp. 363-89.

that it views the interests of states as exogenously determined. In addition, it gives states the privilege of being the sole holders of agency (political locale) and promoter of normative change. The literature of interest here (differently from the mainstream neorealist and neoliberalist theories) argues that interests and perceptions have to be learned and are socially constructed. Its empirical studies addressing slave trade, colonialism, and a wide range of economic, military, and environmental matters, in ways that do not seem to reflect the underpinnings and main claims of mainstream international relations theories.

In the literature on norms in international relations, the interest of scholars in the normative and ideational aspects of the field is a constant motif for criticism of the dominant statecentric paradigms whose focal point has material capabilities since the end of World War II.²⁷ The fundamental role of ideas and principles in International Relations found more ground for a sweeping “ideational turn” near the end of 1980s. This debate opened the way for a solid address of social construction processes and how ideas and norm formation influence international politics.

SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND EDUCATION IN DEFENSE AND SECURITY: THE CASE OF TRANSPARENCY

The rise of transparency as a norm is central to the conduct of international relations and should be analyzed with reference to the literature on the role of norms and ideas. The role of a prestigious entrepreneur, such as the United States, was important to promote the normative breakthrough and spur transparency as a practice among states. The United States (the entrepreneur in the case of transparency) managed to challenge one of the most deeply

²⁶ Price, Richard, “Reversing the Gun Sights: Transnational Civil Society Targets Land Mines”, *International Organization*, Vol. 52, No. 3 (Summer 1998), p. 613-644.

entrenched practices of state behavior: the right to secrecy in military matters.²⁸ The evolution of the norm of transparency in a way served the self-fulfilling purposes of the United States who needed, at all costs, to have some degree of access to undisclosed information about the Soviet Union.

The United States was forced to come up with a truly novel argument: that the Soviet Union was obliged to provide certain types of information about itself to other states. In doing that (i.e. in promulgating the idea that releasing information became a new rule to be followed) the United States actually managed to obtain the information it needed. According to a standard neorealist assumption, could that be that the United States was imposing transparency backed by its military might? American might reached its peak in the 1950s and 1960s. During this period, the American claims to foster transparency fell on deaf ears. Transparency really succeeded in the 1980s and 1990s, when the United States was already relaxing its push for transparency. American power played little or no role in many of the more recent initiatives regarding transparency, for instance the United Nations Register on Conventional Arms. The neorealist premise that powerful states use their military power to compel others to comply, therefore, does very little to explain the massive shift towards transparency that has occurred in the past few decades. The fact that the norm entrepreneur in that case happened to be a powerful state was not a sufficient condition. Three main normative shifts happening after World War II were conducive to transparency and acted as the supporting normative structure: democratization, multilateralism, and restriction on the use of force.²⁹ These can be considered contingent factors. Democratization could be a condition that is acquiescent to more transparency, but this is not

²⁷ Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*.

²⁸ This part on the analysis of transparency and the role of the United States is based on Florini, Ann, "The Evolution of International Norms," *International Studies Quarterly*, (1996) Vol. 40, pp. 363-89.

²⁹ Florini, "The Evolution of International Norms."

always the case. The fact that one country is a democracy and the other is a dictatorship does not naturally make the former more open and the latter more closed to international efforts leading to transparency. Nonetheless, democracy is in most cases an enabling condition that might facilitate transparency.

By the same token, multilateralism has become notably prevalent after World War II calling for non-discriminatory application of agreed principles of conduct among nations. Under multilateralism, the rule of law rather than the rule of power guides state actions. It can be said that transparency found an advantageous condition of legitimacy under the nondiscriminatory rules promoted by multilateralism. For instance, , unlike the NPT, the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) already negotiated in this scenario does not concede any allowances to states that possess chemical weapons. The CWC further institutionalizes the norm of transparency. A weaker norm of “excessive and destabilizing” accumulations of conventional weapons started developing in the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution in December 1991 that created the Register of Conventional Arms. Its purpose is to bring about greater transparency conventional arms holdings.

The political shock of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait led to the successful conclusion of the CWC and the establishment of the UN Register of Conventional Arms Transfers that encourages states to voluntarily publish their arms exports and imports. In addition, technological developments that allowed the more powerful states to spy the secret activities of others through satellite has proved to be daunting for those not willing to remain transparent. Advances in technology have rendered previously covert activities much more easily observable. Each of the three broad factors, therefore, plays a somewhat insufficient role in explaining the evolution of the norm of transparency.

It is important to note that transparency did not come in a vacuum. There was a supporting norm that allowed its appearance. In addition, after the Cold War, there were certain factors that accelerated the consolidation of transparency to include weapons other than weapons of mass destruction, such as conventional weapons. This is demonstrated by the creation of the United Nations Register on Conventional Weapons, which paved the way for more transparency as well as small arms transactions. “All of these efforts enshrine the notion that transparency in firearms exports is a normal part of a responsible state’s behavior”.³⁰

The end of the Cold War brought a reduction in the number of armies all across the world. This meant that millions of weapons were rendered surplus.³¹ The lack of consistent management of surplus weapons worldwide resulted in millions of weapons being transferred from government to government, but also from government to nonstate groups in a manner which meant that the weapons were not subjected to public scrutiny. Obviously, many of these weapons were diverted into stolen arms pipelines, or directly stolen from insecure arsenals.³²

About two-fifths of all major conventional weapons traded in the 1990s came from surplus stocks. The main reason for the existence of surplus weapons, as a phenomenon of the international arms trade in the 1990s, is that the large arsenals belonging to the former Soviet Union were suddenly freed from any central control authority (especially in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and Georgia). Given the harsh economic conditions present and the huge availability of surplus weapons, the excess arsenals became a source of hard currency that could be used to meet immediate financial needs. The former Soviet Union was not the only country to convert its arsenals into sales. The United States, China, Europe and several developing countries did

³⁰ Haug, *Shining a Light on Small Arms Exports*.

³¹ This was very well documented in the Conversion Surveys, *Global Disarmament, Demilitarization, and Demobilization*, published from 1997 to 2000 by the Bonn International Center for Conversion (Oxford University Press).

likewise. Therefore, it is clear that the arms recipients were composed of less prosperous countries, which generally possessed weaker parliamentary oversight structures. During the 1990s, at least ninety countries imported surplus major weapons.

The decline in the new arms international trade facilitated the used arms trade, especially small arms and light weapons, which are the chosen options for less wealthy countries or nonstate groups searching for arms.³³ Small arms transfers account for roughly 10-15 percent of all standard government-to-government operations. It is estimated that paramilitary groups spend US\$2.5 billion to US\$3 billion per year on small arms. Roughly 80-90 percent of the global trade in small arms (approximately US\$4 billion, is legal).³⁴ The post-Cold War developments made the issue of transparency and accountability of arms export control procedures an area of significant debate in many countries. The increased awareness of the importance of transparency and accountability led to significant improvements in the parliamentary oversight of arms exports in those states. But only two countries, the United States and Sweden, have a system of parliamentary scrutiny over licenses granted to arms exports.³⁵ That means that there is a lot of work to be done to enhance transparency. Parliamentary scrutiny of the defense budget and arms procurement are key to a sound democratic system. This idea should be encouraged in research and education in defense and security.

There are several ways to increase transparency in conventional arms transfers, including small arms and light weapons. Registers and codes of conduct figure prominently among the mechanisms that states can adopt to achieve more transparency. Parliamentarians are among the

³² Smith, Christopher “*The Forgotten Dimension of the International Arms Trade*,” in Brassey’s Defense Yearbook, 1994; and Laurance, Edward, “Addressing the Negative Consequences of Light Weapons Trafficking: Opportunities for Transparency and Restraint,” in Jeffrey Boutwell et al., eds., *Lethal Commerce: The Global Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons*.

³³ Karp, Aaron, “The Rise of Black and Gray Market,” at *Annals of the AAPSS*, September 1994, pp. 175-189.

³⁴ Small Arms Survey 2, *Counting the Human Cost* (Oxford), 2002, see chapter on “The Legal-Illlicit Link: Global Small Arms Transfers.”

main actors who can function as promoters of transparency between governments and the civil society.

Small arms registers would greatly enhance transparency, perhaps allowing the international community to detect when governments are making covert transfers to nonstate actors, or accountable transfers to other states. Moreover a small arms register could serve as way of facilitating a standardized reporting mechanism for military budgets. In addition, regional small arms registers should be put in place to enhance transparency and encourage future regional consultation mechanisms. This would facilitate research in the field of small arms. Before the illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons can be effectively addressed by nations, the regulation of the legal trade has to be addressed, as most illicit arms start their “life cycle” as licit weapons. Therefore, the enhancement of measures of transparency is key for the advancement of measures to cope with illicit arms trafficking.

Major conventional weapons are not regulated in a standardized fashion either. The 1991 United Nations Register of Conventional Arms is the first transparency regime in conventional arms transfers.³⁶ Parliamentarians, who can have a key role in enhancing transparency, can encourage adherence to relevant United Nations resolutions and guidelines in the field of conventional arms and military expenditure, such as contributing to the United Nations Standardized Reporting Process on Military Expenditures and the United Nations Arms Register on Conventional Arms. The Register includes seven agreed categories of major conventional weapons: battle tanks, armored vehicles, large caliber artillery systems, combat aircrafts, attack helicopters, warships and missile/missile launchers. It has been in operation since 1992.

³⁵ Haug, Maria, Langvandslien, Martin, Lumpe, Lora, and Marsh, Nicholas, *Shining a Light on Small Arms Exports: The Record of State Transparency*, Small Arms Survey, Occasional Paper 4, January 2002, p. 11.

³⁶ United Nations Resolution 43/71 I. See *Developing the UN Register of Conventional Arms*, Chalmers, Greene, Laurance, and Wulf, 1994.

The creation of codes of conduct restraining arms procurement and transfer can also be a useful way to enhance transparency. For instance, the European Parliament passed a resolution on a European Code of Conduct on January 15, 1998.³⁷ This resolution was intended to prevent the flow of arms from European Union countries to unstable regions of the world where gross human rights violations take place. The European Union member-states made this decision after being subjected to approximately eight years of pressure from several nongovernmental organizations to adopt a more responsible arms trade policy. The Code includes a list of sensitive destinations and provides a system of verifying and monitoring end-use provisions, as well as a system of mutual information and consultation on the granting (and denial) of export licenses.

The European Code of Conduct is not legally binding for the states parties and no mechanism is in place that holds member states accountable for obeying the Code. Therefore, it is up to the countries that have more severe export legislation to restrict exports destined for human rights violators. The Code has eight criteria addressing the following: the refusal of licenses to embargoed or sanctioned countries by the United Nations, European Union, and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe; human rights standards in the recipient country; restraint of transfers to countries in conflict or that could “aggravate existing tensions”, and the prevention of illicit arms trafficking.

Another example of enhancement of transparency is the Inter-American Convention on Transparency in Conventional Weapons Acquisitions, which was created during the General Assembly in Guatemala City, in 1999. It requires signatories to disclose information on major conventional weapons exports and imports annually. The Convention was negotiated to contribute more fully to openness and transparency by exchanging information on weapon

³⁷ Garcia, Denise, “World Politics of Restraint - Curbing the Unrestricted Availability and Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Current International Relations,” MA thesis presented at the Graduate Institute of International Studies, October

systems covered by the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms. The objective of the Convention is to contribute more fully to regional openness and transparency in the acquisition of conventional weapons by exchanging information regarding such acquisitions. Its purpose is to promote confidence among states in the Americas through reporting on imports and exports of conventional weapons covered by the Convention, which are identical to those covered by the UN Register of Conventional Arms, and second, by notification of imports or national production.³⁸

Ideally, for enhancing transparency, each government should lay down a policy on arms sales, which should then be submitted to parliament for its approval. The policy ought to define the guiding principles that govern conventional arms sales, and should include some of the following aspects. First, the import and export of conventional arms should be subject to oversight by relevant parliamentary committees. The arms trade regulations should also agree with the principles of the UN Charter, international law or UN arms embargoes and should take into account the economic, political, ethical and security concerns of the countries purchasing arms. The principles of openness, transparency of decision-making methods and prevention of unethical sales practices should be applied as well. Arms sales should not exacerbate regional tensions or armed conflicts. The nature and type of arms sold should relate to countries' genuine defense needs. There should be respect for human rights, fundamental rights and effective accountability processes for arms procurement decisions in the recipient countries. In addition, the arms sales decision should not endanger peace, generate spiraling arms sales in the region or contribute to regional instability through introduction of a destabilizing weapon system, particularly small arms and light weapons. Finally, arms sold to a particular country should not

1999.

³⁸ Fact Sheet, U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, Washington, D.C. April 9, 2002.

be re-exported or diverted for purposes that are contrary to the conditions stated in the import certification.³⁹

For all those reasons, the small arms issue has profound implications to education in defense and security. In the security policy of states, ideational change is connected to the modification of deeply ingrained practices and beliefs. Therefore, as mentioned, education can play a key role on shaping new perceptions towards this new disarmament issue. In addition, education is primordial to the adoption of new patterns of transparency on small arms acquisition, transfer, and stockpiling.

CONCLUSION

This paper aims to analyze the importance of the rise of the issue of small arms onto the international agenda. It uncovers many reasons why the rise of the issue of small arms might have implications for study and research in defense and education. First, the issue sheds light on how actors other than the state, such as, how transnational movements of nongovernmental actors manage to influence the security policy of states. This is interesting to look at from the perspective of redefinition of the interests of states. Second, the process of advancing new ideas, measures, and norms on a new issue is interesting to look at as an indicator of the pace in which the relations among states are evolving. In these processes, state and nonstate actors educate other actors about the necessity of modifying their behavior and attitudes. Third, the coalition-building processes among NGOs on the one hand, and between NGOs and states on the other hand, make a compelling claim that states are no longer the sole driving force behind

³⁹ This was based in Singh, Ravinder, ed. *Arms Procurement Decision Making: Chile, Greece, Malaysia, Poland, South Africa, and Taiwan* (Oxford University Press, 1998) Volume I, SIPRI.

international politics and state behavioral change. Civil society, through transnational movements, has been playing an ever-widening role in helping states to define their interests. Finally, the importance of addressing the role of ideas and ultimately ideational change, in key issues such as transparency in international relations follows the old and undergoing processes of civilizing world politics. Research and education can play a leading role in all of these elements.

This paper traced some defining moments and events that helped the issue of small arms to become a topic of significance in the international agenda. Concurrently, this paper has explained why the world is awash with small arms, pointing to many reasons related to changes in the patterns of the international arms trade that took place after the end of the Cold War. Among the most important reasons is the large quantity of surplus weapons resulting from the worldwide downsizing of armies, the updating of NATO arsenals, and the drastic dissolution of the Soviet Military-Industrial Complex. Another very important reason that I demonstrated is the circulation of large quantities of left unaccounted weapons from conflicts that took place during the Cold War.

In the small arms issue, given its many natures and dimensions, many actors other than the state, are involved. This case differs from the land mines question where the nonstate actors are the main force for normative change. Two important norm entrepreneurs were central in highlighting the small arms question. These individuals were Edward Lurance from the Monterey Institute for International Studies and Boutros-Boutros Ghali, former United Nations Secretary-General. The former was instrumental to the creation of IANSA and the latter coined the term microdisarmament and lead all related initiatives. However, there are other nonstate actors who also play a crucial role in promoting, advancing and implementing new policy measures to address the problems associated with the proliferation of small arms. This paper also

looked at the role of some few studies of arms control scholars and practitioners that were key to raising awareness regarding the problems resulting from the proliferation of small arms in the beginning of the 1990s. This paper asserts no actor or no state alone would be enough to bring forward the necessary policy change in the national, regional, and international levels.

In the preceding pages, I have sought to analyze the implications of the establishment of the issue of small arms in the international agenda to research and education in defense and to international relations generally. Through a case study, this paper has traced how transparency became a norm in international relations. Against this background, I have examined what the factors were that gradually lead up to more transparent practices vis-à-vis conventional weapons. I have argued that the creation of registers and the establishment of codes of conducts, along with an active role of parliamentarians, are important to enhancing transparency. I have also contended that the consolidation of the issue of small arms in the international agenda is an important incentive to enhance transparency among states.

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