

Conclusions

Virginia Gamba

“Thus the massive production of arms during the Cold War deserves little credit for keeping the peace. But it does deserve a large part of the blame for laying the foundations of today’s glut of arms.”¹

Introduction

In the international context of the last fifty years, disarmament and arms control debates made sense because the primary actors in the debate were countries who had the potential, if not the willingness, to implement reduction or restraint in the production and distribution of specific types of weapons. Furthermore, unused stockpiles of arms at the end of the Second World War were minimal, which meant that countries in the post-war world could have had, in theory at least, the potential for controlling whatever they decided to produce and sell from that time onwards, without having to worry about the redistribution of existing stocks.

The reality is that demobilisation and conversion of war industries in the 1940s never took hold, due to the commencement of the Cold War. The fifties brought about massive rearmament, technological advances in the military industrial sector, and the distribution of vast quantities of light weapons world-wide. Limited, often internal, wars broke out in many regions of the world. In these conflicts the chosen tools of violence were light weapons generally, and small arms in particular, the latter being the favourites because they were easily portable, easily obtained, easily used and easily concealed. As a result, small arms flooded the world, serving at times the few in their fight against the many; at other times, the maintenance of established order.

The glut of weapons, contained politically by the realities of the international context of the Cold War, was freed from its constraints in the 1990s as a direct result of the changing international environment. Thus, at the end of the Cold War, the world was faced with extensive stockpiles of

unused weapons, and even greater stockpiles of weapons which were used and then circulated by secondary or tertiary actors to other conflict areas in ever widening circles of distribution. Furthermore, by 1990 financially strapped countries, such as those comprising the old Soviet sphere of interest, no longer placed great emphasis on the conversion of their military industries. They were reluctant to put a stop to an industry that provided revenue and employment for many at a time when the recognisable enemy had quit the scene. If anything, there was now an incentive to export weapons widely because these were available and because they were no longer needed in vast quantities for home defence.

If this principle applied to industrialised countries in the nineties, it also applied to weaker developing countries which were recovering from decades of internal struggles, wars of liberation and civil wars. In the latter case, weapons were not so much owned by states as by individuals (as happened, for example, in Mozambique, Cambodia and Nicaragua), who began trading them for money, food, or minor commodities. Untroubled by images of the enemy and without clear political direction, light weapons flowed uncontrolled and uncontrollable from region to region. This flow does not go unheeded, however. Slowly but surely, the international community is beginning to grapple with the age-old question of whether to disarm, destroy and convert or to manage and control these weapons. But, even if this debate has started anew, the priority which nations and states, acting alone or in community, are willing to give to this topic has not yet been formalised. Some actors downplay the possibility of controlling this threat, believing still that the intention to use a weapon is more important than the actual possession of it; others find solutions in legislating for new gun possession at national level but omit to enforce it; and most believe that nothing can be done nationally toward the reduction of the flow of weapons, the solution being at either regional or international levels. The key words in this new debate remain supply, demand and control.

What all actors fail to realise is that the problem concerning small arms proliferation today is neither formulated in the production and sale of weapons nor in the quantity or quality of existing stocks. Nor does it arise as a result of changing patterns in users nor of use. And, although greatly influenced by the new international context, it is not merely a product of this ethos. It is in the mix of all of the above that the problem can best be

understood. It is the unique alchemy of all these elements fused together that is lethal to civil society today.

The Context

To assist in the international debate regarding the possible control of light weapons generally and small weapons in particular, it is important to focus on the differences between the present situation and earlier instances when weapons control was attempted. There are two major characteristics of today's international context which exacerbate the problem: transition and participation. In other words, *what* is the status of the new world order after the Cold War, and *who* are the principal actors involved.

The decade of the nineties is characterised by *transition*. This applies to both industrialised countries and less developed ones. In the North, for example, former integrated units (such as the Soviet Union) and integrated 'states' (such as Yugoslavia) have deconstructed themselves to form different and disparate identities. In some cases, the transition has been conducted in relative peace, in others it has spawned new wars. In the south, the erasing of the Cold War divide and the fall of extreme ideologies has facilitated the continuation of politics by other means, at times allowing repressed military solutions to flourish, as in the case of the former Zaire and Congo-Brazzaville; at other times allowing long-standing disputes to be settled peacefully, as in the resolution of conflict in Mozambique and Cambodia, as a result of United Nations intervention.

Aside from these transitions in specific countries and regions, all countries to a lesser or greater extent are experiencing transitions politically (as in the case of South America and Southern Africa) and economically (as in the case of South East Asia, China, Central America and Eastern Europe). Only a few regions remain constant in their dynamics, most notably the Middle East, Europe and North America; but even they must react to changes in others. It is, therefore, not surprising that the age of transition has led to an upsurge of interest in the issue of governance: whether national, multinational, or global.

Renewed interest in rendering the mechanisms for action effective in a co-operative mode has emerged. As a result, at the macro-level, the reform of

the United Nations, and the institutionalising of active *ad hoc* communities of nations into sub-regional entities with common development and security objectives has begun. At the micro-level, states are grappling with the need for effective governance, on the one hand, and the pressure for fast socio-economic reform, on the other.

Another item that has changed in the modern agenda is that of *participation*. States no longer are the sole determining entities for making things happen. Non-state actors are proliferating and their impact is far-reaching, whether for good, as is the case with global civil society, or for ill, as is the case with transnational criminal organisations. Although there is some recognition of the new actors in world dynamics, this has usually been kept the positive mode. That is, global partnerships are beginning to be formed with an objective to serving a common need or procuring a common objective. There is no such partnership emerging to combat common threats, although these might also be global in character. Of the latter, none are more pervasive than the emergence of transnational criminal organisations and the new-found dynamics with which black markets operate.

Crime: an Old Threat with New Potential

As Williams indicates, “*criminal organisations add turbulence to domestic politics, and challenge the normal functioning of government and law. They are also linked in complex ways to the growth of the black market in arms*”.² Many would dispute that these pose the only threats to global security in the future, and indeed, there are many challenges to peace and security today that are both military and non-military in character but that do not touch on either of the above. But, if transnational criminal organisations and the new competitiveness of black markets are not the only future threats to global security, they are certainly two of the most pervasive. This is so because of the far-reaching effects of destabilisation. There is, for example, no proportionality in the way these threats affect governments and societies: the environment in which these threats operate as well as being the one where the greatest amount of damage can be caused is the transitional system. And transition, as we noted above, is the mark of the decade.

Since criminal activities and parallel economies thrive in the disorder prevalent in times of transition, it follows that illegal actors, elements,

procedures and usage are flourishing at present. The response of the international community as it watches this threat develop has been slow and ineffectual. Yet it is this threat that has the greatest potential for disaster since, directly or indirectly, it influences all parties to the international system.

From the security point of view, these illegal organisations pose a direct challenge to the judiciary and the law enforcement capacity of all states. Indirectly, they generate a corruptive influence, eroding the effective functioning and the integrity of state institutions. In states in transition, however, these indirect threats include putting a stop to the establishment of a legitimate state apparatus, essential for responsible governance purposes.³ As Williams indicates, transnational criminal organisations are “*the HIV virus of the modern state, breaking down the immune system and allowing the spread of infection into law enforcement agencies and other state institutions*”.⁴

From the economic point of view, the challenge is even worse. The problem with the economics of transnational criminal organisations is that the influx of money they generate can easily be confused with quick gains for society. Leaders are sometimes tempted to downplay the long-term effects of the problem because they think that it is an issue that can be controlled down the line. This is a mistake. Although it is true that illicit trafficking can be a major source of income and employment in countries with limited export earnings, the negative, long-term effects of these operations far outstrip the advantages of ‘letting them be’.

This extraordinary situation is easily explainable in that the escalation in illicit operations occurs amidst conditions of poverty or as an accompaniment to social upheaval, economic dislocation or political disruption. For example, in Russia, the “*pool of laundered money in the economy provided an important cushion during the early transition years ... as industry tried to move from a command economy to an economy governed by the market*”.⁵ However, although criminal capital has many advantages over legitimate capital, as Williams indicates, it often drives out legitimate entrepreneurs. Moreover, a large amount of illegal money in the economy renders the task of economic management problematic. Thus, transnational criminal organisations are ultimately predatory, because they

repress the rise of a strong and sustainable economic base in emerging countries.⁶

The impact of this threat on societies is considerable, since illegal trafficking means the movement of illegal goods and this, in itself, adds to human insecurity. For example, drug trafficking for profit generates violence against individuals who steal to feed drug habits and become violent in consequence. The same can be said of guns and other types of small arms: a weapon provides power to the user who becomes more and more accustomed to getting his way by using violence.⁷ At times two illegal commodities, such as arms and drugs, become linked, as can be seen when street gangs, who operate to sell drugs or other illegal goods in specific areas, must defend their operations in typical gang-warfare style and need the weapons to do so. At times, competitive drive is confused with power and aggression, leading to the use of force, as can be seen in the infamous taxi wars in South Africa where guns figure as instruments of deterrence in a passenger transport business that should be considered 'legitimate'. In all of these variations, it is not only the users who get hurt, it is the people around them: either because they themselves become the direct victims of violence; or because they must pay the price of social insecurity in higher taxes to make up for lost productivity and an increase in the number of police, or, lastly because it becomes necessary for them to pay for their own private security which the state cannot provide.

Finally, illegal trafficking does not stop at the trading of things: the means to exploit the more vulnerable members of society, such as women and children, is always present, leading to the ultimate commodity trading: that of human beings. The gross violation of human rights and the total disregard for the essential dignity of man pose a direct and constant threat to human security. On the economics front, these illegal operations threaten the integrity of financial and commercial institutions because they try to maintain existing systems in order to exploit their multiple points of access, capacity for rapid and anonymous money transfers and lack of transparency. Since, once a trafficking network is functioning effectively, product diversification is easy, it follows that not all countries might see weapons as the most destabilising commodity: illegal trade in mineral resources, gems, rare species, humans, counterfeit goods and drugs can all be processed through the same channels. The infiltration of the banking system, on the

one hand, and the corruption of its computerised information systems, on the other, are particularly pervasive problems that directly challenge the capacity of societies to govern themselves.

Today's context in which transnational criminal organisations are on the rise, supported by competitive black markets, provides an immediate threat to societies because of the level of insecurity and violence it brings to individuals, and because it challenges the establishment and consolidation of accountable and responsible government structures. Since the international arena is made up of national actors, it follows that the stronger and more secure the national actor, the stronger the international community. Conversely, the weaker the national actor, the weaker the regional and international community will become, and the greater the need for the establishment of multinational processes for crisis management and conflict resolution. For all of these reasons, the context in which transnational criminal organisations operate must ultimately be seen as a direct challenge to the capacity states have first to govern themselves, and secondly to participate in multinational initiatives for governance. The challenge of controlling the proliferation of illegal small arms is only a part of this problem; it is, however, a fundamental aspect of it.

Control of Light Weapons: The Role of International and Regional Organisations

Political and social conflict, typical of periods of transition, is exacerbated by the influence of transnational criminal activities and the globalisation of the economy. In other words, seldom has conflict been more easily sustained by global circumstances than it is today. Likewise, conflict resolution of the non-violent kind has not yet been able to prime over the more direct use of force. Thus, intra-state and social conflict in the 1990s is not characterised by the kind of struggle that led, for example, to the peaceful changes in Eastern Europe during the 1980s. It is, instead, mostly determined by the ready availability and use of small arms either by political factions, as in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the former Zaire, or by the public at large, as in Albania and Liberia.

The more this trend consolidates, the more necessary it will be for the international community to face decisions regarding the imposition of

peace or the management of ‘peace’ processes. Second-generation United Nations peacekeeping efforts, for example, are a direct reference to a new role for multinational armed forces, not only in inter-positioning themselves between recognised warring parties, but in dealing with the difficulties associated with the management of failed states and with brokering peace even before cease-fires have been agreed upon.

Experience, gleaned from United Nations peacekeeping operations since 1989, and in particular from those which were implemented in Southern Africa, demonstrates that, if multinational efforts must be undertaken in support of conflict resolution of internal conflict, these must be equally divided into three facets: peace-building negotiations between warring parties; humanitarian and infrastructure tasks to support local populations; and the disarming and demobilising of combatants. Although the success of peace operations in Africa, for example, has, for the most part, been patchy, it can be said that in a multinational operation the first two facets are generally addressed, whereas, at worst, the last one is left out of the process, or at best, badly implemented.

The problem with a mission’s failing to take disarmament and demobilisation seriously, when it is engaged in a multinational operation, is that weapons not collected or destroyed, and combatants not adequately re-integrated into civilian society will threaten the emerging democracy in that country, destabilising regional security by providing easy access to tools of violence, as well as the men to use them. For this reason, as Potgieter indicates in this volume *“peace and stability are unquestionably linked to disarmament during conflict resolution processes”*.⁸

If the illegal flow and use of small arms has a definite capacity to destabilise national governance processes, it also influences multinational and global governance initiatives. The case of the United Nations peace missions is one such example. The lack of effective disarmament components in peacekeeping operations, and the fact that collection does not necessarily lead to destruction of existing weapons stocks, has imperilled peace processes in a number of cases, including Somalia, Liberia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. In the case of Mozambique, although the peace process was successful, weapons collected and not destroyed have spawned a number of illicit operations regionally, which ultimately has increased levels of

internal violence and criminal activity in Swaziland, Zimbabwe and South Africa. As a result of lack of disarmament initiatives during the peace process in Angola, a similar process is now underway there. It is not surprising that Potgieter strongly recommends the *“improvement of peace operations themselves, so that past mistakes will not be repeated in the future”*.⁹ More specifically what could be done to improve the mechanisms within existing United Nations operations would be to start missions with *“a clear understanding of what disarmament means for a particular operation, as distinct from demobilisation; ... to have a clear ... position on the destruction of weapons; to [have] received the financial resources to cover the cost of effective disarmament; and to ... address the existence of weapons caches”*.¹⁰

The improvement of disarmament components during peacekeeping operations conducted by the United Nations will assist in one type of control of small weapons and will diminish the magnitude of the problem of illegal weapons flows considerably; but it is not enough. Neither is it the only mechanism for effective action, because inadequate disarmament as part of such operations is not the sole source of secondary and tertiary redistribution of existing stocks.

It is at regional levels that the greatest number of control mechanisms might be applied to begin to put an end to the proliferation problem of existing stocks; in other words it is a question of *“what existing regional mechanisms and structures might do to control and reduce the damage already set in motion by the increased availability of light weapons across borders”*.¹¹

In this sense, it is interesting to note that the recommendations for control proposed in this volume reflect certain measures that become more focused as the issue is dealt with at regional levels. Potgieter advocates, *“a well co-ordinated regional approach, which focuses on both the demand and supply sides and utilises bilateral and/or multilateral agreements”*.¹² This approach would include specific initiatives such as *“[a] regional arms control mechanism [and] a broader regional security arrangement, involving transparency, consultation and co-operation with regard to defence and security matters”*.¹³

But, the obstacles to pursuing such a strategy, Batchelor contributes, are a mix of different motivations and structural weaknesses in existing mechanisms for control. For example, “[t]he lack of an effective capacity to ‘police’ arms transfers is one of the most important contributing factors to small arms proliferation in Africa. ... [S]ignificant amounts of resources, including training, need to be devoted to enhancing the capacity and effectiveness of enforcement agencies, such as the police and customs.”¹⁴ Other possible measures are to make “[g]reater use of legal instruments, such as import and export permits and end-user certificates”¹⁵ in the fight against the proliferation of weapons.

Strengthening the regulations and enforcement capabilities of individual nation- states would not only assist national safety and security; it would also improve the efficient operation of regional organisations, since most member states would have more compatible laws and policing capacities. The result could be increased co-operation in the field of regional control of weapons proliferation. Each government would then recognise that by creating a more secure environment within its own borders, through increased funding and training for the police and through providing alternative job opportunities for ex-combatants,¹⁶ for example, it was not only helping itself in its domestic fight against crime and extremism, but also making the regional community more secure and providing fewer opportunities for corrupt officials and transnational criminals to operate with impunity. The indirect impact of these measures on a lessening demand for illegal weapons might be considerable and serve to stem some of the flows of weapons existing today.

Conclusion

Although the availability of weapons might not be the primary cause for conflict, it does exacerbate it. It also bears much of the responsibility for the upsurge in criminal violence. This, in itself, should provide sufficient justification for a more co-ordinated and prioritised approach to the curbing of light weapons proliferation world-wide. As Mathiak explains, “*light weapons play critical roles ... [b]oth as commodities and as instruments of the modes of violence that are central to the new era of insecurity, in the transnational, global and local contexts.* At the same time, states have

*“increasing incentives ... to resist efforts to bring light weapons under control, either at national or international levels. States that have turned to weapons production as a form of economic development are unlikely to accept restrictions that would harm their markets.”*¹⁷

Despite the difficulties inherent in controlling both the supply and the demand of light weapons today, nevertheless, there are ways in which the issue can be made conceivable. Naylor, for example, suggests that the curtailment of production and dispersion of small arms are justified on the basis that there are three approaches that could be taken: combating the actual trafficking, challenging the supply side, or changing the demand side.¹⁸ He dismisses the first option since for him traffickers need something to sell and someone to sell it to, so that the problem is transferred to the supply and demand sides. On the supply side, Naylor distinguishes between primary, secondary and tertiary suppliers. These correspond with the categories of production of new weapons, distributing old stocks, and dispersion of arms to the user population.¹⁹

The solutions, according to Naylor, have to be adapted to the level of supply. He suggests that on the supply side encouraging conversion policies in primary suppliers, tightening regulations on the transfer of existing stocks and the voluntary disarming of populations are the only possible way to proceed. It is, however, on the demand side that Naylor sees the greatest difficulties for action. According to him, the solution on demand lies in “*shifting loyalties back, away from the clan, sect and tribe in favour of rebuilding civil societies*”, and in “*rectify[ing] the current gross inequalities in the global and local distribution of income, wealth and ecological capital*”.²⁰

Although this formula cannot easily be ignored, the obstacles for implementation are formidable. According to Naylor, it is not a question of reforming rules (gaps in legislation exist for a reason), but of engendering in states the will to enforce existing regulations.²¹ There seems to be no real vocation in the international community to police effectively what is actually there. It is interesting here to refer to the discussion above on ways in which disarmament during peacekeeping operations might be improved: there also the mandates are present but the will to implement them conscientiously is not.

Aside from the problem of generating a will to enforce what is actually there, there are economic problems related to contemporary conversion processes, which are quite different from conversion attempts after the Second World War, because of the vast amount of currently existing stocks of unused weapons. Conversion now must apply to both existing weapons and the production of new ones. But failing any broadly based commitment to industrial restructuring, the only outcome of reducing domestic expenditures for arms procurement will be arms manufacturers pushing export sales all the harder. For many developing countries stimulating weapons production is a deliberate strategy in industrial development and a visible source for immediate foreign exchange.²²

On the tertiary level, the arms already in the hands of the public at large, including criminals and insurgents, must be dealt with. Efforts can be made to do so through increased policing. But in the face of a pressing need for weapons, repressive tactics have not worked. The alternative is buy-backs and amnesties. But the whole arms business is subject to the law of *“entropy ...the further the material moves away from the primary source and the greater the degree of dispersal, the greater the problems of putting the process in reverse”*.²³ Thus for Naylor the best way to attach the economy of weapons production and the infrastructure for arms distribution may well be to *“render the weapons that do exist irrelevant”*.²⁴

Perhaps because the global level is so diffuse, recommendations on the reversal of existing trends relative to the proliferation of illegal small arms become so much more definite at regional and national levels, or when dealing with specific items in the disarmament agenda. It is in this context that the greatest advance can be achieved. For these reasons, the TCP project will be focusing subsequent volumes of this series on the exploration of existing regional structures that might be more effectively utilised for the control and prevention of illegal weapons proliferation.

Finally, and pending these recommendations, it is important to stress that a new approach is needed to consider both the problem of, and the solution to, the proliferation of illegal light weapons. Traditionally the proliferation of weapons has been linked to the needs and interests of international actors. As Booth suggests, *“the need for weapons arises out of the fears and ambitions associated with the clashes of interest between mistrustful*

nations and states”.²⁵ Because needs, interests, fears, ambitions and distrust cannot be eradicated from the human make-up, it follows that weapons will never be displaced as primary tools of violence. Nevertheless, the social costs of armed violence have, at times, prompted stricken societies to pay attention to the issue of weapons control.

The difference between traditional approaches to dealing with arms and today's context is that weapons no longer serve the fears and ambitions of countries only. They now serve the individuals themselves who make up societies, be they extremists, criminals, or victims. The general insecurity which emerges from this situation poses a direct threat to national, multinational and global governance processes. Aside from this changed context in the relationship between guns and societies, there is also a problem related to time. The greater the illegal proliferation of arms, the worse the impact on society in general, whether in economic or security terms. And the longer the exposure to this violence, the greater the corruptive influence of extremist and/or criminal activities and corruption in the society, making it all the more difficult for governments to pursue the tenets of good governance.

Endnotes

- 1 Naylor, Chapter 2, p. 66.
- 2 Williams, Chapter 1, 39.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 36.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 35-37.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- 8 Potgieter, Chapter 5, p. 161.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 *Ibid.*, pp. 163-5.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 162.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 164.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 Batchelor, Chapter 4, p. 126.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 Potgieter, *ibid.*, p. 165.
- 17 Mathiak, Chapter 3, p. 95.
- 18 Naylor, pp. 67-69.
- 19 *Ibid.*

- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 69.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 67.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 68.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 69.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 70.
- 25 Ken Booth, *Disarmament and Arms Control*, in Baylies *et al.*, Contemporary Strategy, Volume I (Second Edition), Croom Helm, London, 1987, p. 145.