

Connecting Weapons with Violence:

The South American Experience

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Introduction

Virginia Gamba

At the beginning of the nineties, nation-states and international organisations focused their hopes and aspirations on the new climate for international peace and co-operation that seemed to be within reach. Freed from the ideological content and Cold War dynamics of the previous era, the community of nations began to look towards the consolidation of democracy, the opening of economic markets, and the potential for joint humanitarian action as the means to peace, development and prosperity. It is perhaps not surprising that with this set of aspirations a new wish to contain violence, and, by extension, the tools of violence, emerged. The campaigns and international actions to curtail, control and ultimately reduce the existence of weapons of mass destruction gathered speed. At the same time, a new hard look was taken at the extent of the damage caused internationally by unwise, sometimes unnecessary, transfers of conventional weapons. Public awareness began to focus on traditional versus human security concerns. Consequently, such forgotten dimensions as the need to curtail the use of anti-personnel landmines, as a result of the havoc wrought upon innocent civilian populations by decades of mining activities, arose. By 1997, the campaign to ban landmines had culminated with a major success in Ottawa. In early 1998 world endeavours to contain the tools of violence have shifted to the need to control and reduce the trade in light weapons and small arms.

The community of nations has now finally identified the proliferation of light weapons world-wide as an issue that encapsulates not only traditional security concerns, but also human security consequences. In the latter context it is now being recognised that light weapons, small arms in particular, are a threat to conflict prevention, conflict resolution, post-conflict reconstruction, peace-building and good governance.

Small Arms Proliferation

Thus, at the dawn of the 21st century, non-governmental organisations, agencies and nation-states are coming to understand the relationship between an increased availability of small arms, the emergence of a culture of violence and the pervasive links between arms, crime and developmental processes. Paradoxically, these links started to be recognised not as a result of war but of peace. During the 1990s, various United Nations peacekeeping and peace support operations brought peace to long-standing conflicts in the less-developed world. As a result of this concord, it could be argued, the amassed arsenals of small arms at the disposal of warring parties became politically redundant. Unfortunately, without either planning, destruction, or post-conflict reconstruction efforts which focused on definite disarmament, these weapons could not cease to exist. Thus, small arms proliferation acquired a dynamic of its own, where existing stocks, often in possession not of regular armies, but of individuals, started to circulate in large quantities across borders in a seemingly uncontrollable manner.

The economic considerations of those struggling to survive and earn a living in impoverished regions became one of the prime reasons for the movement of weapons between borders. Similar considerations applied to poorly demobilised soldiers who turned to banditry in field and city, utilising the only possession they still had: a gun. With crime and violence came insecurity and the need for self-defence, as state structures struggled to provide the protection they could ill manage or afford. International criminal organisations trading in illicit goods soon found that by tapping into the gun market with either protection or commodity objectives they could not only give teeth to their unlawful endeavours, but also maintain that atmosphere of instability in society which had permitted them to operate with impunity in the first place.

Small Arms Proliferation in Latin America

One of the first regions in the world where peace and democratic transitions gave rise to widespread small arms proliferation was Central and South America. Expanding light weapons pipelines in Latin America are a response to complex situations. On the one hand, the United Nations peace operations in El Salvador and Nicaragua in the early nineties failed adequately to disarm the region. As a result, weapons that were retained were moved from border to border as ex-combatants used them for economic gain. The consequence of this was a migration of vast quantities of light weapons to the north and south of the Americas. Some of these weapons made their way to fuel the Chiapas conflict in Mexico, similar to the way in which weapons that come from Mozambique are used to spark off the political disputes in KwaZulu-Natal. Others travelled south, into the hands of paramilitary organisations, such as the drug lords of Colombia and the Peruvian and Bolivian insurgency movements. And some were used by the mushrooming private security firms in the region.

Thus weapons have made wide circuits from Central America to Colombia, Peru, Bolivia and then to the Amazon jungle of northern Brazil, heading ultimately for the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, where they have been used to fuel the increase in criminal activities, perpetrated by both the existing mafia and the petty criminals of the inner city slums.

But not all weapons pipelines in South America are directly related to the end of United Nations peace operations in Central America. Some have emerged as a result of the establishment of other types of

peace in the region. For many decades the countries of South America have been over-stocked with light weapons, mostly of domestic production. This came about as a result of the existence of military governments with strongly competitive geopolitical policies and a desire to keep their national boundaries free from political unrest. Their twin motives for initiating a major arms race in the region were to exert regional hegemonic status *vis-à-vis* their neighbours and to keep ideological uprisings at bay, by means of control and repression.

After a time, the failure of military governments to gain the respect of the people or serve the basic socio-economic imperatives of developing countries led to a sudden return to democratic structures and an opening up of commerce and trade with erstwhile competitors and enemies. Thus, the mid-1980s saw a change in attitude towards neighbouring countries, leading from the earlier competition to increased co-operation.

The cardinal vehicles for the new-found willingness to co-operate in the region were principles of commercial and economic integration, such as those encapsulated in the Southern Common Market (*Mercado Commun del Sur* or *Mercosur*), uniting Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and ultimately Chile; and the readiness, between neighbours, to abandon old territorial disputes. The prescript was a basic one: if there are no hypotheses of regional conflict, the need for a strong military is not required. If the military presence is downgraded and reduced, the defence budget can be lowered and the armed presence along borders diluted or terminated. If borders are demilitarised, then integration mechanisms for the free flow of people and goods can be consolidated, thus serving the greater needs of socio-economic development.

Although the logic of this argument was impeccable at the time, the results of its application have not produced greater safety for the people in the region. What actually happened was that by liberalising and privatising economies, by generating easy access across borders, and by making military *matériel* redundant, rather than controlling or destroying it, it has become possible for vast amounts of existing light weapons to make their way towards and fuel the activities of international criminal organisations, drug dealers and smuggling communities of the region.

Even Mercosur, a structure inherently geared to development and economic growth, and affecting a limited number of countries in South America, is beginning to consider dealing with the problems associated with illicit activities, violence and the increased availability of small arms in the region. By the same token, Latin American countries are beginning to tighten their regulations for the enforcement of firearm legislation and licensing. Moreover, they are collectively attempting to prevent illicit arms flows, as demonstrated by the 1997 OAS initiative to that effect.

This monograph in the *Towards Collaborative Peace* publication series attempts to explore the evolution of recent small arms proliferation in the Mercosur countries and to demonstrate the effect of the increased availability in the emergence of a culture of violence in two cities: Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro. The comparative value of this monograph will only be fully realised when this information is contrasted with that of a similar description on the status of the movements of arms in Southern African countries and the way these flows contribute to the increase in violence in the latter region.

This monograph was undertaken by Argentine and Brazilian researchers and co-ordinated by the *Fundacion Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales*, Argentine Chapter (FLACSO Argentina). The material was reviewed and edited by the *Towards Collaborative Peace* project personnel at the ISS. Ultimately, however, the views expressed in this monograph are those of its authors.

DEVELOPING A SUB-REGIONAL APPROACH TO COMBAT WEAPONS PROLIFERATION

The countries that form the southern sub-region of Latin America, known as the Southern Cone, initiated the process of transition from military rule to democracy and from a period of confrontation to co-operation before the end of the Cold War. More specifically, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay, who completed the transition in the 1980s and in the early 1990s, undertook in the same period an active initiative for regional integration, leading to the formation of the Southern Common Market, known as the Mercosur. Democratisation and regional integration took parallel paths and were conditioned by one another. For those countries, the eighties and the early nineties could be considered a stage of transition, which was completed when power was handed constitutionally from one elected president to the next. The fact that, at this stage, even during serious political crises like the impeachment in 1992 of Brazil's President, Collor de Melo, for corruption, the military abstained from intervening is indicative of the success of the democratic transition. Today, each of these countries is taking further steps towards the consolidation of democracy and the deepening of regional integration.

This preliminary observation is important when considering the problem of light weapons and small arms¹ flows in the Mercosur countries. Research on weapons proliferation² tends to place the Southern Cone within a larger Latin American context, whereas, in fact, a sub-regional approach is necessary. Although the Southern Cone sub-region forms part of the larger South American continent and shares most of the problems faced by other Latin American countries, its historical evolution has differed from that of Central America or the Caribbean. For instance, weapons accumulated during the civil wars of the Cold War era have become a source of proliferation in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, where the armed conflicts ended recently. But the same problem should be placed in a broader historical perspective in the case of Argentina or Uruguay, the two Mercosur countries in which guerrilla movements operated. Thus, in the Southern Cone, the issue of arms proliferation is different – as are its consequences – due to historical, cultural, socio-economic, political and geopolitical factors.

A further difference lies in the difficulties encountered by a research initiative in the Mercosur countries, in relation to defining a framework, finding adequate data sources, establishing a link between the issue of light weapons proliferation and the regional integration process, or seeing its effects in the phenomenon of social disintegration. In general the issue is under-researched³ as *"it has long been assumed that light weapons play a relatively minor role in warfare with the decisive role reserved for major systems"*.⁴ Small arms flow in the Mercosur countries have not yet been considered a security problem to be treated as a major factor of instability and increasing violence, nor has it been acknowledged that they should be dealt with on a regional level. Because violence that involved the use of guns was primarily political or ideological, the perception was that an adequate solution for the broader problem would bring about, almost automatically, a solution for the former, and more minor, issue. But, though the characteristics of the violence have changed, light weapons are still involved, and more dangerously so, as may be seen when one observes the patterns of the phenomenon. This earlier perception may explain why official statistics on illegal weapons circulation or estimations are non-existent,⁵ as, at present, are the mechanisms for detecting weapons flows. Consequently, press information and interviews concerning violent acts in which small arms have been used are the basic sources of data from which the existence of light weapons proliferation might be deduced.

Moreover, in the four countries under discussion, neither the transition process, nor the historical and cultural characteristics, nor the socio-economic conditions are similar. Nevertheless, in all, the militarisation of society, resulting from military rule and insurgency, has been the main reason for the supply of arms and has characterised the current violence within society. Thus, special attention must be

paid to the evolution of civil-military relations during the first transitional stage in the eighties, to see whether any threats linked with current violence have carried over from the previous period. Since the transition process was different in each country, the first section of Part I examines each one in order to determine whether the disarming of the guerrillas and the restructuring of the military resulted in illegal weapons proliferation in that country. In the second section, in which actual sources of weapons proliferation, such as international terrorist attacks, drug trafficking or simply an increasing rate of criminality are explored, it appears the differences between the situations in the four countries tend to fade. In a globalised world these threats acquire a transnational character, and the rapid advance of the integration process is gradually eliminating the frontiers and permitting the free movement of goods and persons, whether legal or illegal. Moreover, even if analysts consider that it is internal violence that poses the greatest threat to peace and security in Latin America,⁶ such violence can no longer be contained within national borders, especially in sub-regions such as the Mercosur, where boundaries are disappearing because of economic integration.

Thus, a comparative approach is necessary to differentiate between the historical evolution of civil-military relations in the four countries as a first alleged source of weapons proliferation; and an integrated approach, according to which the Mercosur is considered as an entity, is more suitable for analysing the present problem. There is a striking similarity in the debates that take place within each country. Consequently, any type of destabilisation in one country sets off an immediate reaction in the rest. More concretely, the conditions are emerging, as is evidenced, for the future geographic zone of a light weapons black market. That is also why, when the measures being introduced into each country to counter weapons flows come under discussion, regional co-operation is almost always put forward. Often, however, it is easier to perceive the common threat than it is to implement the steps necessary for combating these flows.

The Legacy of the Past: Traditional Sources of Weapons Proliferation

The democratic transitions in Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay took place after nearly forty years of *de facto* military rule combined with the presence of powerful armed insurrection. This entire period was characterised by armed violence and by the development of a doctrine of national security which effectively led to the militarisation of security. Not surprisingly, weapons proliferated among parties across the political spectrum.

Military Rule and the Transition in Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay

Although military rule in Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay was prolonged, it was not continuous. This allowed for brief periods of democracy which, though they proved to be frustratingly short, did further the preservation of certain democratic institutions and values. In this sense, military rule in these countries was different from that of the long drawn-out regimes, such as Castro's in Cuba. Eventually, at the end of military rule, the preservation of values assisted the democratisation process in all four countries. Yet, military rule in these countries was accompanied by militarisation of the state, terrorist violence, corruption and repeated human rights abuses. As far as these military regimes and their connection with each other and with the outside world was concerned, fear of isolation and lack of legitimacy led to an arms race designed to protect boundaries from hostile neighbours and from infringement by insurgent movements; and to ensure that international sanctions would not cut off military supplies.

In each of these countries, military rule resulted in the formulation of a principal domestic political guideline and hypothesis relating to conflict over border disputes or balance-of-power considerations in the region. Entitled the National Security Doctrine, this concept proved to be an important factor in weapons circulation in the region. Between 1972 and 1982 weapons imports and exports in Latin

America increased from 0,1 per cent to 0,7 per cent of the global imports and exports.⁷ Military governments in Argentina and Brazil built huge military-industrial complexes and undertook ambitious research programmes that included research into the development of ballistic missiles, like the Argentine Condor II project, and nuclear-powered submarines.

Argentina has been producing arms since the late nineteenth century, but it was in 1930, when the military made their entry into domestic politics, that "*a large, diversified military-industrial complex*"⁸ was established under the overall supervision of the *Dirección General de Fabricaciones Militares*. As a result, the development and production of small arms expanded rapidly: German-type Mauser bolt-action rifles, Belgian-designed auto-loading 7.62 mm FAL and FAL MAG machine guns and a variety of pistols and submachine guns, such as copies of the Colt M1911 .45 cal pistols, the 9 mm Browning High Power pistol, 9 mm FMK-3 and PAM-1 and PAM-2 submachine guns and combat grenades, were produced under licence at the *Fábrica Militar de Armas Portátiles*. Heavier infantry weapons and more sophisticated systems were manufactured at the *Fábrica Militar* in Río Tercero, Córdoba and Buenos Aires.⁹ "*Brazil was slower than Argentina to develop modern military industries, but in the 1970s it laid the foundation for a large and technologically advanced military-industrial complex.*"¹⁰ The result was the production of 7.62 mm FAL machine guns, Colt M1911 .45 cal pistols, 9 mm Beretta Model 92 pistols, revolvers, .45 cal Madsen Model 1950 submachine guns and the 9 mm variant, 9 mm Beretta Model 12, locally-designed Uru and Uirapuru submachine guns, as well as light mortars, combat grenades, anti-personnel landmines and rocket launchers. Forjas Taurus is a leading Brazilian producer of handguns that in 1993 alone shipped to the United States market some 230 000 pistols and revolvers.¹¹

TABLE 1

Types of weapons traditionally produced in Argentina and Brazil by the military industrial complex

	Pistols, rifles	Sub-machine guns revolvers	Machine guns
Argentina	Colt .45 cal Mauser BHP 9 mm	9 mm FMK-3 PAM-1 PAM-2	7.62 mm FAL 7.62 mm FAL - MAG
Brazil	Colt. 45 cal Beretta 9 mm	Madsen .45 cal Madsen 9mm Uru Uirapuru	7.62 mm FAL

Domestically, right-wing extremists have always been close allies of the military who often used them as extra-military third forces. One such example is the right-wing sector of the Peronist movement which formed the Triple-A (Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance). Between 1974 and 1976 this group bought arms for terrorist use from the British through the Argentine Social Welfare Ministry.¹²

Due to newly developing needs, the 1983 economic crises and the return of democratic rule, military spending in the Mercosur countries decreased generally between 1984 and 1992,¹³ except in Paraguay. Since then, while in Argentina the trend has been generally maintained, in Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay there have been increases in the defence budgets due to the modernisation of the armed forces. The International Institute for Strategic Studies, for instance, notes that Brazil doubled its defence budget from US \$3,2 billion in 1985 to 6,8 billion in 1995 and initiated a programme of modernisation of the

On the national level, the transition process was different in each country. According to Olivera, "*While in Argentina the subordination of armed forces to the Executive [Branch] is unquestionable, in Brazil and Uruguay the military are still a power factor and act in a similar way. Moreover, in Paraguay and Chile the military have total institutional autonomy.*"¹⁵

In the main this is so because the Argentine military of 1976 to 1983 left the political scene having suffered a severe loss of prestige. Former military regime members had to stand trial in 1985 and were sentenced to prison, a unique case in Latin America. Thus, during the Menem Presidency, the military subordination to civilian power was absolute and the new orientation of the country's foreign policy left no room for a military come-back. Argentina quickly signed and ratified all the international disarmament treaties, ended its missile project and restructured the armed forces - abolishing conscription, reducing the forces and redefining their mission in accordance with the United Nations peacekeeping guidelines. Moreover, 1995 was to be recorded as the year of the military's self-examination: the Chief Commander of the Argentine armed forces, General Martín Balza, admitted publicly that human rights violations had been committed during the late dictatorship and condemned such practices, claiming: "*It's delinquency to obey immoral orders*".¹⁶ In the same year, the director of the United Nations Information Centre in Buenos Aires declared that Argentina "*was the Latin American country that contributed most to peacekeeping operations with nearly 1,500 soldiers in more than eight conflict zones*" world-wide.¹⁷ Even so, the transition period has not been easy in Argentina. Political violence manifested itself during the socially and economically harsh period of the first democratic government from 1985-1989, for which a total of 876 politically motivated violent acts, affecting 267 victims, have been identified.¹⁸

In Brazil the governments of President Collor de Melo and President Cardoso redefined the defence policy and withdrew army battalions from the southern border with Argentina to the Amazon region, a step that was seen as a definite end to the perceived threats between the two countries. This permitted a concentration of resources in defence of the Amazon interior. Today the defence of the immense area of the Amazon poses the most serious geopolitical problem for Brazil.

In Uruguay, military rule lasted from 1973 to 1984. Civil-military relations headed the agenda of President Julio María Sanguinetti's first term, after his election in November 1989. However, during those elections the military did not permit the participation of left-wing candidates.¹⁹ The debate concerning whether the military should be brought to justice for human rights violations ended, at least on a judicial level, after a public referendum in April 1989, when 56 per cent of the population favoured not prosecuting that body, thereby creating for it a base of legitimacy. Thus, when the Argentine armed forces engaged in their exercise of self-criticism, Uruguay's Chief of the Army, Juan Curutchet, refused any comparison with his Argentine colleague, General Martín Balza. General Curutchet stated that there had been an amnesty law for the military and a wide public debate resulting in a referendum, the outcome of which was known and which had been ratified by Parliament.²⁰

Of the four countries, Paraguay is the only one that did not complete the transition process. In February 1989, Alfredo Stroessner, Latin America's longest-ruling dictator, had been deposed by the army which had taken control. A coup followed, led by General Andrés Rodríguez, Stroessner's son-in-law, forcing Stroessner into exile in Brazil. Three months later, Rodríguez was elected President without allowing time for the opposition to organise elections. In May of 1993, Juan Carlos Wasmosy became the first civilian to assume power in fifty years.²¹ However, in 1996 he faced unrest in the army, as General Lino Oviedo this time threatened to stage a coup. Later the military would deny any attempt against the constitutional order, but the fact is that active pressure from the Mercosur countries and the United States has been crucial in maintaining Wasmosy in power: "[M]ilitarism is more than just a vain word or a

*mere abstraction in the Paraguayan community. Militaries inherited the legacy of 'caudillo' landlord paternalism of the last century and still have the strong support of an important sector of citizens."*²²

Arms and the Guerrillas

Guerrilla movements in the Southern Cone have been another source for arms circulation, though they have not developed an underground arms industry.

The guerrilla movement in Argentina started after the Cuban revolution. The original guerrilla group of fifty left-wing Peronists under the command of Enrique Manuel Mena, known as Comandante Uturunco, appeared in the middle of 1959 in the Tucumán province. It continued until February 1960, when its leader was arrested. In 1964, Radio El Mundo reporter, Ricardo Massetti, who covered the Cuban revolution and adopted the *nom de guerre* of Comandante Segundo, founded the People's Guerrilla Army (*Ejército Guerrillero del Pueblo*, EGP) in the Salta province. The third guerrilla group appeared in 1968, also in the Tucumán province, where the left-wing Peronist Armed Forces (*Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas*, FAP), founded by Carlos Caride, Envar El Kadri, Arturo Ferré Gadea and Gerardo Ferrari, among others, was established. Its intention to create a *foco*²³ was of very short duration, yet the violence continued.²⁴ The guerrilla movements used commando tactics, such as assaults on police departments, disarming security agents, theft at army depots and similar activities to procure arms. During the seventies, assaults were on a larger scale, as they included the military industry, like the attack that the Argentine People's Revolutionary Army (ERP) carried out against the Villa Maria military installation in 1975. The ERP tried to create clandestine workshops to produce weapons, but failed. After being paid the ransom they had demanded for the release of a kidnapped businessman, the Argentine Montoneros bought Soviet AK-47s and RPG-7 rocket launchers, which are thought to have been procured from Libya or Lebanon. The Argentine insurgents were looking for light weapons, more convenient for urban guerrilla operations. The only exception was when a rural front was set up in Tucumán.²⁵

*"The first substantial number of guns that went to the Peronist resistance groups was due to an attempted rebellion on behalf of pro Perón divisions of the army who, on 30 November 1960, occupied the 11th Infantry Regiment of Rosario and the weapons production plant at Fray Luís Beltrán. Another source of weaponry for the resistance groups was an army reserve of weapons that was stockpiled to be used in a hypothesised conflict with Brazil or Chile."*²⁶

According to the same source, foreign arms were bought illegally in Paraguay with the complicity of the local military and politicians, though these attempts were not always successful.

Contacts between these various Latin American guerrilla groups were a long-standing feature, especially between the Argentine movements and Uruguay's *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional Tupamaros*. Often Cuba supplied these forces with military training and resources.

A crucial question is what happened to the guerrillas' weapons when the armed conflicts ended. Did any arms caches remain after the re-establishment of democracy? To answer these questions is practically impossible, because no official documents exist on weapons confiscated from the guerrillas. The most common answer given by defence officials is that the weapons were destroyed, but there is no trace of any such destruction. There is a strong likelihood therefore that a number of the guerrilla weapons confiscated by the security forces could have made their way onto black markets. *"I am sure that part of it [the supply] has been sold"*, is the assertion of the founder of the FAP.²⁷ Another reason for suspicion is the fact that most of the weapons remained in the hands of the so-called 'Special Task Groups', units of a third force created by the military in Argentina (1976-1983) for counter-insurgency purposes. After the restoration of democracy, many of their members were recruited by private security agencies. There is little wonder, therefore, according to an ex-intelligence officer, that during the democratic transition

guns were relatively available.²⁸ At that time, the press reported several episodes of arrests of former members of the task groups who had hidden weapons. As late as August 1988, when members of an ultra right-wing gang were arrested, the police confiscated machine-guns 9 mm pistols, hand grenades, pistols with silencers, communication equipment from the Argentine army, explosives, false documents, grenade launchers and Nazi-fascist literature.²⁹

New Threats, New Sources of Weapons

From the middle of the 1980s a new type of violence spread throughout Latin America. According to World Bank figures, by the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, Brazil had a ratio of 11,5 murders per 100 000 persons; Argentina 3,9; Uruguay 2,6; and Paraguay 5,1. By the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, those numbers increased to 19,7 for Brazil; 4,8 for Argentina; and 4,4 for Uruguay; while only Paraguay showed a decrease to 4. The situation became worse in big cities like São Paulo (with its population of nine million), where the murder rate in 1995, for example, was four times higher than that of New York City, where the number of police officers per 1 000 inhabitants is twice that of São Paulo.³⁰ According to the Argentine Ministry of the Interior, in 1985 one murder was committed every five hours, a ratio that increased to one every two hours in 1994. In 1985 one attack on property was registered almost every three minutes; in 1994 the ratio was one attack in every one-and-a-half minutes.³¹ During the last decade arms sales to civilians increased by 70 per cent in Argentina. For every one hunting or sports rifle, four handguns were sold for purposes of self-defence. Personal defence accessory sales increased by 40 per cent and demand for martial arts courses rose by 30 per cent.³² Gun-related violence did not increase in the large cities only, but also in the remote interior. In Comodoro Rivadavia, a city of the southern Chubut province of Argentina, for instance, businessmen and store owners began to arm for self-defence. According to Judge José Rago, a criminal act is committed there every two hours and in February 1997, within a period of ten days, some 128 criminal cases had been brought to court.³³

Guns are easily available and cheap in Paraguay. According to security sources, each day fifteen to twenty aircraft carrying guns depart from Miami, Florida, landing at any Paraguayan airport with the complicity of local authorities. President Juan Carlos Wasmosy admits that during 1995 twenty million units of munitions entered Paraguay, a country of four million inhabitants. The Brazilian government exhorted Washington to put pressure on Paraguay to stop arms imports, the result being that the United States stopped arms exports to Paraguay in October 1996.³⁴

In December 1995, the International Criminal Police Organisation (Interpol) in Uruguay received information about weaponry that had been stolen in Poland and had arrived in Uruguay. This was made public in the Montevideo newspaper, **La República**, according to which the shipment consisted of 156 9 mm pistols and fifteen machine-guns.³⁵

Parallel to the substantial modifications in economic relations, due to the globalisation of trade and the free movement of goods and people, a clandestine business activity has emerged within the context of the black market economy where, among other things, the illegal arms trade is flourishing.³⁶ Hence, the arms flow today is deeply affected by factors such as social and economic constraints, the growing importance of non-state actors (especially criminal organisations), the growing vibrancy of an underground economy, the growing privatisation of security and violence.³⁷ Moreover, the global nature of the threat implies the necessity for an integrated approach to the problem.

Currently in Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay, three types of violence can be identified as possible sources for the increasing demand for weapons: international terrorism, drug smuggling and crime, each of which will be looked at in turn.

International Terrorism

The bombing of the Israeli Embassy (17 March 1992) and the Jewish Centre AMIA (18 July 1994) in Buenos Aires moved the issue of international terrorism to the top of the security agenda in Argentina. First, the attacks proved both Argentina's vulnerability and the existence of serious security problems in that country. As Patrick Seale, a British expert on Middle East politics, observed, Argentina is "'a soft target' for terrorist attacks",³⁸ a statement endorsed during a seminar on terrorism in Buenos Aires, in August 1995, when Philip Wilcox of the US State Department mentioned the lack of security measures in the Ezeiza Airport that made it vulnerable to almost any attack.³⁹

On the other hand, as the official investigation was based on the hypothesis of an Islamic fundamentalist threat, attention has been focused on the Paraguayan city of Ciudad del Este, in the Argentina-Brazil-Paraguay triple-frontier zone, where, in a strong Arab-Muslim community, alleged Shia terrorist cells exist. The chief of the intelligence service of the Paraguayan police maintains that Ciudad del Este is the sanctuary for the Lebanese pro-Iranian Islamist Hizbullah organisation's inactive terrorist cells.⁴⁰

Finally, several alerts were issued from Uruguay, where the presence of suspected international terrorists has frequently been noted. In September 1995, the former Interior Minister, Didier Opertti, confirmed what days before had become public information: that there were international terrorists in Uruguay who took part in shooting exercises in the Canelones region accompanied by ex-*Tupamaro* guerrillas. But intelligence services could not establish a direct relationship between international terrorists and the *Tupamaros'* National Liberation Movement (MLN *Tupamaros*), today a legal political organisation with representatives in Parliament.⁴¹ In December of the same year, the intelligence services had been alerted by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to the presence of Peru's *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) guerrillas, who entered the country with false Bolivian documents.⁴² In December 1996, after being informed about the possible bombing of Jewish buildings, Argentine and Uruguayan intelligence services were put on 'red alert' and started searching for German terrorists who, allegedly, had moved through Uruguay and into Argentina.⁴³ In April 1997, after four banks had been attacked and robbed, **La Mañana** newspaper, close to the governing Uruguayan party, reported that an 'extremist' organisation might have been responsible for the crimes, because of the similarities between its attacks and commando operations carried out by *Tupamaros* at the beginning of the seventies.⁴⁴

Alarms about an international terrorist presence make sense in the general context of the region. Lack of tight border controls in the Argentina-Brazil-Paraguay triple-border zone of the Iguazú triangle, where the integration process shows a major dynamism, could be a serious security deficiency that permits, among other things, terrorist activity. This would also explain the state of alert of Argentina's three partners in the Mercosur. Hence, the issue of international terrorism should be placed within the broader context of the security conditions of the Mercosur structure, rather than treated separately. It is not international terrorism that creates insecurity, but a lack of sub-regional security conditions which opens the way to international terrorism and the related proliferation of light weapons. Such a conclusion has numerous implications, most of which lead to the understanding that terrorism is a sub-regional security issue, not a foreign policy one.

Drug Smuggling

There is no doubt that arms proliferation in Latin America is closely related to drug smuggling.⁴⁵ However, the latter issue does have distinctive features and the problem is not of the same magnitude in Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay as in Colombia, Peru, Bolivia and Mexico. The former are countries that are used as transit routes, money laundering centres, and, in recent years, as emerging markets⁴⁶ by drug smugglers. There are no connections between drug traffickers and local guerrilla movements, as is the case in Peru and Colombia,⁴⁷ because the guerrilla movements ended in Argentina

and Uruguay in the eighties, while the drug problem appeared and took on international dimensions in the nineties.⁴⁸ Therefore, we cannot refer to the *Colombianisation*⁴⁹ of the Southern Cone. However, the corrupting power of drugs, mostly visible in police structures owing to the complicity of certain officials, is well known.⁵⁰ Drugs are becoming a serious social problem in the Southern Cone, although they were already in existence in the *tanguero* culture of Argentina and Uruguay.⁵¹ Today the problem involves all social classes.⁵² It is, moreover, the result of unemployment and the failure of the state to provide social security for the lowest income sectors of the population. For these groups, especially the youth, getting involved in the drug-dealing business is sometimes the only opportunity to earn a decent income, or even to make quick money. But drug dealing cannot be separated from what is termed 'non-ideological violence',⁵³ in which light weapons are involved. Therefore, although the drug problem needs a broader social comprehension, its security aspect should not ignore the connection between drug trafficking and violence related to light weapons. Where there are drugs, it is reasonable to suspect a concomitant spread of guns.

In the Southern Cone countries the drug smugglers are trying to step up their operations. They might derive advantage due, first, to the free movement across the three frontiers and, secondly, to the fact that this represents a non-saturated market. On the other hand, according to an Interpol officer, the disintegration of Colombia's Medellin and Cali drug cartels gave birth to smaller but more numerous organisations operating further afield.⁵⁴ Today, Paraguay is becoming the country where most drug smugglers find the best conditions for plying their trade. But, in all four countries, drug smuggling and related weapons proliferation has become a major threat.

As elsewhere in the world, guns, besides being 'instruments' for dealers, are often exchanged for drugs. An official investigation of a plane which crashed carrying a million dollars' worth of firearms revealed that the guns were being transported by Paraguayan drug smugglers to Colombian guerrillas in exchange for cocaine.⁵⁵ Moreover, a report issued by the US State Department in March 1996 reveals that high-ranking officials in Paraguay's government and military were protecting, and even taking part in, drug smuggling and money laundering. Years before, in response to pressure from Washington, President Wasmosy had appointed General Ramón Rozas Rodríguez chief of the anti-drug struggle. Rozas Rodríguez was assassinated in October 1994, on the eve of his presenting a report on army officers involved in narcotics trafficking.⁵⁶ In Uruguay, drug smugglers target the night life of the tourist city, Punta del Este, particularly in the summer. As the tourists are mostly from Argentina, police suspect that there is a circuit linking Buenos Aires to Punta del Este and, for that reason, in November 1996, requested the assistance of the Argentine Federal Police.⁵⁷

Argentina is considered a transit country for cocaine from Bolivia and, to a lesser degree, from Colombia, Peru and Paraguay to Europe, the United States, South Africa and Australia. It is also regarded as a consumer market for cocaine and marijuana from Brazil and Paraguay, from which more than a hundred kilos are shipped every two weeks.⁵⁸ There is a general conviction that drugs enter Argentina from the northern borders (cocaine comes in through the Salta and Jujuy provinces, while Formosa and Misiones are related more to marijuana smuggling), but only 10 per cent of it is sold in the country. Minister Carlos Arzani of the Drugs Department of the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs estimates that one per cent of the population are drug consumers.⁵⁹ According to the 1996 figures put out by the Interamerican Commission for the Control of Drug Abuse (CICAD) of the Organisation of American States (OAS), in 1991 approximately 1 800 people were arrested on drug-trafficking charges, in 1995 5 300 people were arrested on the same charges. In 1991 294 guns were confiscated from drug smugglers, while 671 were confiscated in 1995. The question is, have the big drug cartels established branches in Argentina, or is drug smuggling in the country organised by an internationally connected mafia structure? "*The Foreign Ministry does not have any information about the existence of large mafia organisations*", confirms Minister Arzani, a view that is supported by Argentine Federal Police Chief, Adrián Palacchi, who states: "*We do not have [m]afia bands like Cosa Nostra.*" According to him, the

drug smugglers tried to bribe policemen, having some US \$300 000 to 500 000 for that purpose, but "*were not able to corrupt the Federal Police structure*", although some officers may "go astray".⁶⁰ And although, as an ex-intelligence officer says, the Cali cartel of Colombia may have intended to establish bases in Argentina, the initiative did not prosper because the best market is North America.

In May 1996 the Argentine Congress took the initiative of modifying the existing law on narcotics⁶¹ to enforce the struggle against drug-addiction.⁶² Currently, the most critical debate in Argentina is whether the military should participate in the struggle against drug trafficking. The Argentine laws give to the Federal Police the task of fighting drug smuggling, limiting the participation of the military to logistical support and intelligence gathering.⁶³ However, whether there should be more direct involvement of the armed forces has become a matter for public debate, since the United States indicated that it wished to see the Argentine armed forces take over from the police "*the strategic control*" of the struggle against drug trafficking.⁶⁴ This has yet to be decided by the Menem administration.⁶⁵

Among the military no consensus has been reached. Those who show an interest, especially the Air Force, perceive in the proposal access to part of the US \$5 million budget that the US Director of Drugs Control Policy has earmarked for the fight against drug trafficking in the region.⁶⁶ But the Argentine Army is against any attempt that could corrupt the traditional role of the armed forces. Politicians and human rights groups are also opposed, fearing the recurrence of past abuses. Public opinion is generally against military involvement in domestic affairs, although one survey published shows that 55 per cent of the respondents approved the idea of greater military participation, 62 per cent of whom are from low-income sectors.⁶⁷

In Argentina, the gendarmerie have a well prepared infrastructure in the northern province of Jujuy for fighting drug smuggling: they have two aeroplanes, transport vehicles, advanced technology and an agreement signed with the Catholic University of Salta allowing gendarmes to study for a Master's degree in social science, specialising in drug-related matters. Furthermore, public conferences and seminars are organised to warn the population against drug-addiction.⁶⁸

Peruvian drug smugglers use the Amazon as a route to transport cocaine to Colombia, because control on the Peru-Brazil frontier on the Yavarí river is weak. A Brazilian intelligence source revealed to the press that traffickers bribe police, who are hired for their guns, or even to provide protection.⁶⁹ The Brazilian press disclosed also that the Colombian Cali cartel is establishing cocaine laboratories in the Amazon region (two within three kilometres of each other) and hundreds of clandestine airports, while the peasants provide cheap labour.⁷⁰ Along with the gun-related violence, drug smuggling in the *favelas* is creating a serious social problem, as children are recruited to sell drugs.⁷¹ In Peru, the fight against drug smuggling is an important aspect of the government's defence policy and, according to the document that President Cardoso submitted for legislative consideration in November 1996, the military will be assigned a crucial role.⁷²

The determination to counter drug smuggling in the Southern Cone could prevent further light weapons proliferation. The problem exists on three different levels: first, it is a foreign policy matter, secondly, a regional strategy is required, and, thirdly, local conditions should be taken into consideration. Each one of these points will be highlighted in turn.

Since the Southern Cone countries are not producer countries but neighbours of Bolivia and Peru, which are producers, as well as a potential market for Colombia's and – to a lesser degree – Mexico's cartels,⁷³ a co-ordination of foreign policies in respect of those countries is important. Consideration must be given to co-operative measures on a hemispheric level to address the problem.⁷⁴ A common strategy for the Mercosur is required. This is particularly urgent now that drug cartels have begun to appear in Paraguay. Co-ordination of policy is under way, although a few initial differences have slowed down this

process.

On a regional level, it is possible that drug dealers are taking advantage of the conditions created by the integration process of the Southern Cone and are trying to establish bases in areas where there is less control on the free movements of persons

and goods.⁷⁵ The solution would be to introduce co-operative measures among security forces. However, a number of problems relating to internal situations arise:

- Can co-operative measures be successful when tighter national control fails? Relevant in this connection are the diplomatic pressures Brazil exercised on Paraguay to raise its awareness of the black market in weapons that is prospering in Ciudad del Este.
- How serious can a country be about fighting drug trafficking on a hemispheric level, and even involving the military, when public opinion does not support the approach?⁷⁶

This brings us to the third level of the drug-smuggling problem in the Southern Cone: the national level. The fight against drugs must be enforced on this level for two main reasons. First, since mafia organisations have failed thus far to create powerful cartels that are able to defy the state, the problem can still be effectively addressed by concentrating efforts to remove the local drug dealers, rather than confronting the problem on a larger scale.⁷⁷ However, it is useless to expect an outcome of any significance in this struggle if corruption persists, especially in the judicial system and the police forces. Secondly, the drug problem is of a different intensity and manifests different characteristics in each of the four countries. What is necessary for one is not automatically applicable to the others. Brazil had to use force in Rio de Janeiro and probably will have even greater reason to do so in the future, whereas in Argentina fighting corruption seems an adequate response, as there is no *villa miseria*⁷⁸ harbouring a powerful drug mafia like that of the Brazilian *favelas*. Moreover, military involvement in the fight against drugs makes sense in Brazil within the context of the National Defence Policy. In that region there is the vast territory of the Amazon, in which state control is weak and the drug traffickers, amongst other criminals, are trying to establish operative bases.

Crime

The phenomenon of the growth of criminality and the associated proliferation of arms is related to the state's failure to perform its role as the guarantor of certain basic public rights, among them the provision of security. Additionally, weapons proliferation poses a major challenge to the state's constitutional monopoly on the legitimate use of force.⁷⁹ While nobody doubts that within the context of globalisation and the internationalisation of the economy the antiquated welfare state should modify its functions, most critics note the fact that the issue most neglected is the social question: "*Where states are unable to provide a secure environment for their citizens or meet basic human needs, the proliferation of weaponry is both a principal consequence of, and a key contributor to, weak and ineffective governance.*"⁸⁰

The increase in homicides, armed robberies and general violence in Latin American societies makes it important to analyse certain problems that today are at the centre of the public debate. Related to the weapons proliferation issue, the focus will be on socio-economic conditions, police violence and private security as major themes in general in the Southern Cone countries, but giving special attention to Argentina and Brazil.

According to an April 1997 report of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL), unemployment in Argentina reached 17,3 per cent in 1996, which is the highest in Latin America. Poverty has also increased since 1980, although Argentina and Uruguay are the two Latin

American countries that have less than 15 per cent of families below the poverty line.⁸¹ Brazil, together with Colombia, Peru, México and Venezuela, is among the countries where the level of poverty is high (between 31 per cent and 50 per cent). The most significant fact, according to the report, is the widening gap between rich and poor: some 10 per cent of the population have become wealthier, while the situation of the 40 per cent of the poorest families has worsened. In Argentina, particularly, the 7,7 per cent annual economic growth from 1992 to 1994 resulted in an enormous increase in the incomes of 105 of the wealthiest families and an insignificant increase for the poorest. This means that the reduction of poverty within this period did not lead to a more even distribution of income.⁸² In the Greater Buenos Aires area, as official statistics show, in 1996 three million people lived below the poverty line, a number that represents 26,7 per cent of the population, while in 1995 it was 22,2 per cent. This means that within a year the living conditions of some 500 000 people had worsened.⁸³ *"There is a direct correlation between the deteriorating socio-economic conditions of people and the increase of delinquency. It is a social problem rather than a security one."*⁸⁴ An Uruguayan journalist, referring to the declaration of the Minister of the Interior that criminality is growing faster than the ways to fight it,⁸⁵ maintains: *"The explosion of delinquency is quite visible even if official statistics ignore it and the governments admit, in [one] way or another, their impotence."*⁸⁶

While it is the function of the police forces to register the growth of violence, they are often the focus of attention due to their own involvement in corruption. In 1996, the Greater Buenos Aires provincial police forces were implicated in scandal, as mafia organisations were found to be operating within the police structure.⁸⁷ A reform of the 48 000 thousand strong force responsible for the security of some thirteen million people resulted, giving rise to a public debate that is still not concluded.

To put an end to abuses of power and corruption, a major reform has also been introduced into the security structure of the Greater Buenos Aires province in which elected citizen groups will control the police forces.⁸⁸ On the national level, Congress has taken the initiative to suggest important modifications of the security agencies. Among its proposals are the following: the placing of the four security organs (Prefecture, Gendarmerie, Aeronautical Police and Federal Police) under the direct control of the Secretary of Security, instead of leaving them under the mandate of the Defence Ministry; the creation of a Judicial Police; and the recommendation to the Greater Buenos Aires and Cordoba provinces that they align themselves *"immediately"* with the Internal Security Law of 1991.⁸⁹

In Brazil, the scandal of police corruption has repeatedly been the subject of reports since the disclosure of abuse by São Paulo policemen in March 1997. Public lack of confidence in police was reflected in published statistics which reveal that 23 per cent, and 52 to 64 per cent – according to social class – of the population fear the police more than they do criminals. Moreover, 77 per cent of São Paulo's population do not trust the Military Police, while 88 per cent of the respondents admitted that they had suffered some kind of aggression from police officers.⁹⁰

In Paraguay's capital, Asunción, the municipality and the National Police decided to create civilian guards in the neighbourhoods to satisfy the demand for security that public forces could no longer supply. These civilian guards are composed of unarmed citizen groups whose task it is to serve as a connection between the people and the police and thus help security organs perform their duty.⁹¹

In Brazil, private security firms were employed mostly in wealthy neighbourhoods, which originated in the 1970s, the result being that today important sectors of the upper class live in highly sophisticated complexes, quite isolated from the rest of the population.⁹²

In Argentina, private security business enjoyed a general boom after the end of military rule. Currently private security agencies employ some 65 000 - 70 000 people who work legally, but there are approximately 80 000 - 90 000 employees who are not registered. Twenty-five per cent of the personnel

are retired policemen and, generally, it is a low-skilled job that pays about US \$400 per month for an eight to ten hour working day. Private security agents use .32 and .38 calibre pistols, and sometimes 9 mm pistols, or rifles. There are some 11 368 officially registered guns used by private security agents.⁹³ Private security in Argentina represents a yearly turnover of about US \$600 million, whereas the budget of the Greater Buenos Aires police is US \$800 million; and the agents, legal and illegal, of private security comprise a group of armed men superior to the police forces of the country, "[a]n entire private army", is the general perception of the Argentine media.⁹⁴ The lack of oversight on the part of the government regarding private security firms has caused legislators to propose a far-reaching modification to the existing law in order to bring private security activities under greater control.

Yet no clear answers are available as to how the state should assume its new role in fulfilling security functions. It is, however, crucial to point to two basic considerations in relation to the Southern Cone, arising from the fact that the four countries are in a stage of democratic consolidation which is regarded as the most valuable achievement of the last decade. First, any initiative should be placed within the boundaries of the law and subjected to public debate and, secondly, civil society should be a key actor, performing side by side with the state. It follows from the first consideration that increased repression is clearly not the answer to the weapons proliferation problem. Not only would it lead to a reversion to the undemocratic performances of the past, but it would definitely not provide a solution. For instance, "*a weak judiciary and undisciplined police forces have played a key role in the escalation of social violence*",⁹⁵ a situation that clearly cannot be resolved through increased repression. Tightening security measures would require broadening the general understanding of security.⁹⁶ As for civil society's role, it should create a communal approach and safeguard values such as solidarity and non-violence, in marked contrast to the new culture of violence, the formation of which is directly linked to light weapons.⁹⁷

CONTROLLING THE PROLIFERATION OF SMALL ARMS

The circulation of guns occurs both legally and illegally. The problem of controlling arms proliferation arises in both instances. Legal circulation is determined by legislation, weak regulation of which leads undoubtedly to arms proliferation, legal and illegal. As the Secretary-General's report on the United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice states, "*The absence of effective firearm regulation in one Member State can undermine not only the regulatory efforts but also the effective governance of other Member States.*"⁹⁸ Illegal circulation of guns is also related to smuggling.

The following section will focus on the control of arms proliferation by means of a case study of Argentina. First, existing Argentine legislation will be considered, after which a case that led to illegal proliferation of light weapons in Argentine society, as well as the existing smuggling in the Iguazú triangle zone, will be examined.

Legislation

Argentina's official National Register of Arms (*Registro Nacional de Armas* - RENAR) records 1 400 000 legally registered guns. The possession and the use of weapons in Argentina is regulated by law.⁹⁹ In general, Argentine legislation is considered effective and there has been no serious public debate on the need for its modification.¹⁰⁰ For a long time, the control of firearms was exercised through police agencies. The need for legislation manifested itself during the 1970s, when the RENAR was created within the Defence Ministry.¹⁰¹ Article 4 of the legislation refers to the RENAR as the entity that supervises arms circulation, whereas the supervision of powders, explosives and related items is under the control of the *Dirección General de Fabricaciones Militares*. Thus, the RENAR is the entity that supervises what article 3 of the law defines as 'military arms' and 'arms for civilian use',¹⁰² but article 8 states that the Ministry of Defence, "*through the National Register of Arms*", can, "*whenever considered convenient*", appeal to all those who own guns to report them to the competent authorities "*for inspection*

purposes". Chapter II of the legislation (articles 10 to 19) refers to the military arms category. Article 10, in particular, states that the RENAR will register all military weapons in the country, with the exception of those that belong to the security forces. Article 14 establishes as legitimate users of military-style firearms the following: security police officers, army and police force members, people who live in areas of scarce police vigilance, people who practise hunting, sport-shooting associations and their members, officials in ports and airports, and official and civil institutions. The RENAR, in light of article 12, is the entity that also controls the transport of military-style firearms, and article 15 obliges any owner of a firearm to declare its loss in the event. Chapter III is dedicated to the third category of arms (powders and explosives), whereas Chapter IV (articles 29 to 34) regulates arms for civilian use. In particular, article 29 establishes that the Federal Police, National Gendarmerie and Navy Prefecture are the entities which supervise the process of acquisition, transmission, tenancy and the carrying of civilian-owned arms. The same article also mentions that arms dealers should keep a register to be submitted to the authorities. Article 34 obliges any owner of arms for civilian use to license these, or else come up against the sanctions defined by Chapter VI (articles 36 to 42). Concerning the acquisition, tenancy and carrying of a gun, article 53 of Annex I defines what is known as a 'legitimate user', and article 55 establishes the general conditions to be fulfilled by this user, who is required:

- to be more than twenty-one years of age;
- to be in physical and psychological condition that permits ownership of a gun, for which a medical report is required; and
- not to have a criminal record, for which a police report is required.

Articles 56 to 68 furnish further details concerning the conditions under which a permit of gun acquisition and ownership is issued. According to article 64, for instance, the licence of a legitimate user is valid for five years; and must be renewed by the owner within the ninety days established by article 65, after which it becomes invalid. Chapter III of Annex I specifies details about firearms for civilian use. Section III (articles 96 to 102), in particular, details all the formalities of the acquisition of a gun of that type.

The law is sound and permits control that is efficient and extensive. Eduardo Roberto Trench, Director of the Secretary of Security's Technical Affairs Department, makes this assessment: "*As far as I know, no statistics mentions delinquency committed with a legally registered gun, with rare exceptions only.*"¹⁰³ He does criticise certain excessive bureaucratic formalities that are slow and costly and could lead to grey areas of gun ownership. Trench's emphasis is on the concept of the responsible citizen who owns a gun legally, recognising the risks it implies, and is prepared to respect the law.¹⁰⁴ But Congressman Marcelo Vensentini does not agree: "*RENAR does not control arms traffic, doesn't know how many guns are in the police forces ... it is easy to possess a gun completing the legal steps that are required.*"¹⁰⁵ Regarding arms regulation, he claims:

*"There are laws that regulate the possession, the carrying and the use of guns, but experience prove[s] that those norms are not sufficient to make sure that weapons ... fall only [into] the hands of those who know about them. ... Even more frightening is the use of illegal weapons by individuals who [have] created a justified and perceivable sense of insecurity in the society. ... It is reasonable, then, to aspire to modify the current legislation on guns to make it complete and forbid access to weapons to those who [have] decided to live outside the law."*¹⁰⁶

The possession of firearms is a matter of civic concern in the United States¹⁰⁷ and other countries. In Argentina, gun ownership and, consequently, related legislation have only recently become a matter for public debate.

Illegal Proliferation of Firearms

There are some who estimate that about a million illegal weapons are in circulation in Argentina. In response, Chief of the Cabinet, Jorge Rodriguez, claims that the assessment is done "*upon [a] non-existent statistical basis*".¹⁰⁸ The government also admits that there are no documents relating to confiscated weapons, although it maintains that the struggle against gun smuggling from neighbouring countries has been successful. Confiscated weapons, after judicial proceedings, are transferred to the Department of Arsenals of the army to be destroyed in terms of the law.¹⁰⁹ There is, however, no central register in which an account is kept of all confiscated weapons. Therefore, it is impossible to know whether confiscated weapons are on record, or how many of them actually complete the circle from the police departments to the court and then to the Department of Arsenals to be destroyed. It is this lack of legislation that could permit the re-entry into circulation of an illegal weapon.¹¹⁰

Gun Smuggling in the Mercosur Area: A Study of the Iguazú Triangle

In the Argentina/Brazil/Paraguay triple frontier region, known as the Iguazú triangle, weapons trafficking has been a particular problem. The Brazilian government maintains that 80 per cent of the guns confiscated from mafias in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro entered Brazil illegally through Ciudad del Este and Pedro Juan Caballero, the two Paraguayan cities that are in the region of the Iguazú triangle. The guns, AR-15 and AK-47 machine-guns, were in the hands of drug smugglers operating in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro.¹¹¹ According to information given by the Foreign Trade Department of the Bank of Brazil to the police, the city of Pedro Juan Caballero on the frontier zone of Paraguay and Brazil and the neighbouring Brazilian city of Ponta Pora (in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul) are the two points where illegal trafficking of weapons is concentrated. In only ten months (from July 1994 to April 1995) two Brazilian companies exported more than 22 000 guns of different types and calibres to two shops in these areas. That means nearly a weapon per person in Pedro Juan Caballero, which has a population of only 30 000. Hence, public authorities strongly suspect the existence of arms-smuggling networks.¹¹² In 1996 Argentine security forces discovered a deposit of arms destined for sale in Brazil, in the Foz de Iguazú region. "*I think that a serious problem of arms smuggling [exists] on the triple frontier*", says Minister José María Castellano who, as Sub-secretary of Latin American Policy in Argentina's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is responsible for frontier issues, "*but it is very difficult to confirm that any pipeline exists from Buenos Aires to Rio de Janeiro*."¹¹³ After the terrorist attacks in Buenos Aires, security organs focused on the Paraguayan city of Ciudad del Este where, according to the official hypothesis, terrorists might have taken refuge. Castellano accuses the city of being "*out of institutional control*", and points to the existence of mafias, such as the Chinese Mafias, "*that control everyday security. They are well-armed gangs with a fire power that is superior to that of the Paraguayan National Police. Anyhow, police presence is symbolic*."¹¹⁴

According to security sources,¹¹⁵ in 1996 illegal trade between Ciudad del Este and Brazil was over US \$10 billion, whereas the total trade of the Mercosur during 1995 was US \$12 billion. A large percentage of foreign goods from all over the world arrives in Ciudad del Este through the Brazilian port-city of Paranaguá, the capital city of the Brazilian State of Paraná. From there, these goods are transported in huge containers by air and land routes to Paraguay. Brazilian authorities know that almost half of these goods do not, in fact, cross the border, but end up in the hands of big landowners, the *fazendas*. The authorities, however, do not have the means of controlling this illegal traffic. The transit is regulated by means of a treaty signed in 1940, between Brazil and Paraguay, according to which Brazil permits Paraguay to have a free port on the Atlantic ocean at Paranaguá. Almost 60 per cent of Paraguay's tax revenue comes from Ciudad del Este. As far as illegal business is concerned, the Chinese dominate the electronics market; the Lebanese computers, arms and prostitution; and the Brazilians illegal gambling and money transactions. Since 1980, two major immigration currents have made their way to Ciudad del

Este: a Chinese one from South-East Asia and an Arab one from the Middle East. Although encouraged initially by the Paraguayan authorities, there is, it seems, for every legal Chinese or Arab immigrant, at least one that enters illegally so that it is practically impossible to get exact statistics. There is little doubt that the existing corruption in public administration on practically every level facilitated the illegal immigration. Most of the Arabs have their homes in the neighbouring Brazilian city of Foz do Iguazú and are legally registered there. There are no Arab Mafias receiving money in return for 'protection', as there is greater solidarity among them. As for the Chinese in Ciudad del Este, the legal immigrants number about 9 000, while it is believed that the number of illegal immigrants is double. A powerful Chinese Mafia operates in Ciudad del Este, offering its fellow Chinese 'protection' which can cost as much as US \$30 000 per month. In 1995 at least six cases of homicide were registered because of revenge or failure to pay on the part of businessmen. The Chinese Mafia is composed of organisations known as Triads, the aim of which is to try to control some 7 000 Chinese stores in Ciudad del Este. Legal procedures for fighting crime are practically non-existent and/or highly ineffective. Parallel to widespread corruption, the judicial infrastructure, which is minimal, is inadequate for the cases requiring prosecution. In addition, the police structure does not have the necessary equipment for fighting crime. There were 259 reported homicides in 1995, of which only 20 per cent have resulted in arrests. Armed robberies are another common occurrence in Ciudad del Este: in 1995, a total of 774 cases was reported. Curiously, smuggling is not even mentioned as a crime in police files. While it is a violation of the law that is most frequently committed, it benefits from major political protection and generates important revenue.

The economic and demographic growth of the Brazilian city of Foz do Iguazú began in the mid-1960s, when the construction of the International Bridge of Friendship joining Brazil and Paraguay was completed and the foreign ministers of both countries signed the Act of Itaipú (1966) to regulate the exploitation of the hydro resources of the Paraná river. Today Foz do Iguazú has more than 200 000 inhabitants and is considered the most important area in the western part of the Brazilian State of Paraná. Being close to the Argentine and Paraguayan border and having an international airport, it has become an important trade zone. The most important minority in Foz do Iguazú is the Arab community, the second largest in Brazil. Inhabitants of Arab origin in Foz do Iguazú hold important positions in tourism and trade, the main economic activities of the city. Most of them are legal residents of Brazil. Although the Civil Police (in charge of controlling crime) has the necessary infrastructure to perform its task, Foz do Iguazú registers the highest crime rate in Brazil: in 1995 there were 127 homicides per 100 000 inhabitants. Homicides, robberies (an average of one car robbery per day, according to 1995 Military Police statistics) and rape are among the most common crimes committed there, and 95 per cent of the homicides are committed with a firearm. Smuggling is another common crime, mostly because of the lack of control on the Paraguayan side of the border. The judicial infrastructure is good enough to try the cases presented and no denouncements of corruption have been made against the judges.

Compared to Ciudad del Este and Foz do Iguazú, the triple-border Argentine city of Puerto Iguazú, with its 20 000 inhabitants, enjoys a far better reputation. The crime rate is very low and state control is strong. Also an important tourist and trade centre, Puerto Iguazú has an international airport, which is used by approximately 50 000 passengers per year. Statistics in 1995 reflected a very low robbery rate for the previous three years and practically no homicides. Generally acts of delinquency are committed by Brazilians, who cross the Argentine border at a point called El Pique. Control along the border is very strict, each person entering or leaving the country being registered, especially after the terrorist bombings in Buenos Aires. The measures taken by the government are so strict that local businessmen of the Chamber of Commerce have protested against them. Most of the immigrants in Puerto Iguazú are Brazilians or Paraguayans and 80 per cent of them have residence permits. There are no Arab or Jewish communities in Puerto Iguazú, and no institutions that qualify as potential targets for terrorist attacks.

Field research conducted by the *Toward Collaborative Peace* project in the Iguazú triangle (1996)

included the above-mentioned cities. The analysis of the situation reached the following conclusions:

"The Iguazú triangle covers a forty-square-kilometre perimeter where three borders intersect, each with its own city and its own airport. The disparity in the region is intense: on the Argentine border, the city of Puerto Iguazú with a population of 23 000 lives off tourism and basic agriculture. The city is extremely safe and the border police and the coast guards are very efficient in controlling suspect material crossing the borders into Argentina. In Brazil, the city of Foz do Iguazú with its population of 240 000 inhabitants lives off trade, legal and illegal, with Paraguay, is very rich and is the city with the highest crime rate in Brazil, far surpassing that of São Paulo or Rio de Janeiro where the rate of murders per capita is concerned. The local police are extremely corrupt and refuse to control material flowing north to Argentina (since they do not consider it of importance), or into Paraguay (since they do not care what leaves their country). Furthermore, the city boasts an international airport that connects directly with other regions of the world.

Ten kilometres away, in Paraguay, is the city of Ciudad del Este, with a population of 250 000 inhabitants and an international airport. This city, which has emerged as a result of peace in the region and the ability to trade freely, also has duty-free shops. It has experienced the biggest economic boom in the region, producing an annual profit of US \$12,6 billion. The price of such prosperity is high. The city is the criminal outpost for regional and international mafias and lives off counterfeit goods, smuggling, cheap electronics and clothing, drug-trafficking, prostitution, the trade of minors and the small arms trade. It is estimated that four out of five people are illegal immigrants, mostly from Asia and the Middle East. Major terrorist organisations use the city as their headquarters because it is the hub of economic activity, the reason for this being that the Paraguayan authorities prefer economic prosperity to regional security. Thus they have no border controls whatsoever, and they refuse to provide a police or military presence in the region. The borders to and from Paraguay are unchecked. Although Brazil is concerned about what comes out of Paraguay with regard to firearms, for example, if weapons are circulated from Paraguay to Argentina and then re-transported into Brazil via the Argentine-Brazilian border, the chances of their getting across the borders are high.

*As a natural consequence of this situation, it is now possible to see the amassing of weapons and drugs in Paraguay, unchecked by authorities, who are often involved in the corruption. These commodities flow into Brazil (sometimes via Argentina), where the buyer market exists and the criminal activities are spiralling in the major cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Drugs flow out of Paraguay, via Brazil – often using African couriers – into Europe, Africa and Asia. In return Africa and Asia provide arms, most of which are the stocks left over from the Cambodian peace operation, the Vietnam war, and the many UN peace operations in Africa, such as that of Mozambique."*¹¹⁶

Since an underground economy flourishes in the Iguazú triangle, small arms are becoming one of the goods that are traded on the black market. As crime rates are high, especially in Ciudad del Este and Foz do Iguazú, where different mafias operate, local demand for weapons is also high. There are, thus far, no hard facts concerning the extensions of black markets in arms to big cities, like Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo or Buenos Aires. However, illegal stockpiles of weapons have been discovered around the region and there is little doubt that a dangerous potential exists for those weapons to make their way to the cities, where the emergence of a new culture of violence is creating conditions for an increase in the use of firearms. Concomitant with the policies that, in the long run, should end these conditions, immediate security steps are needed in the Iguazú triangle to control weapons proliferation and, consequently, to eliminate one of the factors that is contributing significantly to the formation of this new culture. Fortunately, in 1994 an ad hoc mechanism for co-operation, known as the Iguazú Act, was set up between local authorities in control of the border passage and border security, including information exchange. A two-year experiment, permitting an efficient control of drugs and arms smuggling and the capture of criminals during illegal border crossings, was entered into. In 1996 negotiations took place

between the Ministries of Interior of Argentina and Paraguay and the Ministry of Justice of Brazil; and a tripartite command mechanism was created in the Iguazú triangle zone.

CONCLUSION

In the process of analysing weapons proliferation in the Southern Cone, press information is the chief source of data available. No official source could provide statistics regarding the circulation of illicit arms in Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay or Uruguay. Nor is there any mechanism in existence for creating a data base or for determining the origin of illegal weapons. Yet an increase in crime rates and delinquency shows how frequently guns are used and how available they are. Governments are aware of the existence of the problem and do take measures, both on the domestic level and in the context of regional co-operation. Focus on weapons proliferation as a threat per se, however, does not exist. *"Police records underline the confiscation of illegal weapons every time criminals are arrested. But we do not perceive that gun smuggling is a basic problem in police operations. I do not see illegal proliferation of weapons as a hypothesis of conflict for the police"*, says Vensentini.¹¹⁷ This is a statement that could, thus far, be true for the rest of the Mercosur countries. Probably the most important initial step would be to take into consideration the seriousness of the arms proliferation problem: *"The first step to dealing with the arms trade revolution is to treat small and light arms with the seriousness they deserve. A second step is to co-ordinate export restrictions by resuming a dialogue among the main suppliers. Illegal exports must be dealt with. This is mainly a matter of national priorities and domestic policy co-ordination."*¹¹⁸ However, an important consideration when dealing with the Southern Cone sub-region is to take into account the particularities which distinguish it from the other Latin American sub-regions, especially Central America and the Andean region.

As stated in the introductory section to Part I, weapons proliferation in the Mercosur countries is different from that in Central America, where some one million guns are circulating unchecked by state control. The members of the Mercosur can, in fact, produce reliable statistics that would reveal the quantity of arms in existence in the area,¹¹⁹ a situation that has come about mainly because Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay are actually in a more advanced stage of democratic consolidation. Here the transition process did not result in a recycling of weapons used during past conflicts because no major stockpiles were left. In an examination of the sources for the proliferation of small arms in the Mercosur, the foremost point to take into account is the break with its violent past experienced by each of these states. It is neither the political violence, nor the arms purchased for that purpose that constitutes a reason for, or a source of, proliferation. Rather it is the social condition that creates the need for small arms.¹²⁰ Sources of arms proliferation, therefore, are mostly local. Nor are there local drug cartels that could challenge the state authority as is the case in Colombia. Drug smuggling, although a growing activity and an important reason for weapons proliferation, could be viewed as an inevitable result of the general growth of trade due to the process of integration.

The threats that are commonly called the 'new security agenda' for the Southern Cone refer mostly to international terrorism and drug smuggling. As governments realise that there is no more effective approach to the transnational challenge presented by these threats than a regional one, the political will for co-operation among neighboring countries is increasing. More concrete steps are being taken on a hemispheric level, mostly in the context of the OAS, as well as by means of an *ad hoc* co-operative mechanism within the Mercosur organisation itself. Yet, an evaluation of the effectiveness of these measures cannot, at this stage, be attained. There is also a broad awareness of the close relationship between the above-mentioned threats and arms proliferation. For example, when establishing a hemispheric strategy to fight drug smuggling, the OAS special commission, CICAD, created a Group of Experts on Arms and Explosives Control that in 1997 held a series of meetings to discuss the issue of arms control.¹²¹

On a hemispheric level, however, there is a need for broader legislation¹²² with regard to an arms control system, a proposal that was put forward by Argentina: "*[E]ven if the majority of the countries that participated in that meeting did make advances in arms legislation, none had registered the progress that Argentina's legislation had reached. And it is no use having ... advanced legislation, strict measures of arms control, when the neighbouring countries' legislations are not on the same level.*"¹²³ Furthermore, at the Rio Group meeting in Cancún (Mexico) in October 1996, Mexico and Brazil proposed two projects that point to the unification of legislative criteria in the hemisphere in order for better control to be exercised on arms transfers, with a special focus on light weapons. "*The proposals were made because of a general perception of the threat of [the] indiscriminate use of conventional weapons*", says Patricia Salomon, counsellor for international security matters in the Argentine Foreign Ministry.¹²⁴

*"[W]hile multilateral and very detailed legislations do exist for weapons of mass destruction, there is absolutely no multilateral legislation about conventional armaments in Latin America, which of course leaves a gap. Terrorists and drug smugglers have easy access to these kinds of armaments. In urban violence and delinquency sophisticated weapons are used more often. There are no control mechanisms for the possession of guns and the availability facilitates the circulation. What Mexico proposed is directed more at the illegal traffic of weapons, while Argentina's objective is to regulate the transfer of conventional armaments and its proposal is quite similar to the convention of the Organisation of Security and Co-operation in Europe."*¹²⁵

What should be mentioned, is that neither Argentina nor Brazil is currently a party to any bilateral, regional or inter-regional agreements intended to regulate or prevent the trade or movement of firearms by civilians, or to share information concerning the registration of firearms or their owners for the purpose of law enforcement.¹²⁶ Arms regulation is considered a national issue and the belief is that little can be done at regional level. What is needed, however, is a shift in perception, so that within the Mercosur the regulation issue might be seen in the context of an integrated approach.

On the domestic level, government officials indicate the state has not lost control of the situation. "*The problem of delinquency and violence in Argentina is natural and logical, but not out of control. The registered incidents are isolated in nature and do not bear any relation to each other. There is no evidence for a return of political violence. Economic changes of structural order produce social turbulence but the country is far away from the misery that elsewhere is noted*", is the opinion expressed by a high-ranking official of the Secretariat of Security for Argentina.¹²⁷ While government officials believe that there is no immediate threat to the operational capacity of the state to control violence, public opinion is less convinced.

The presence of a culture of violence in a society is very much related to social and economic conditions. The situation is one that could be exacerbated by the presence of firearms, both legal and illegal. The OAS General Secretary's White Paper, dated 19 November 1996, entitled "*Crime Prevention and Public Safety and Security in the Americas: An Approach to Inter-American Co-operation*", says that no empirical proof links crime with poverty. But, continues the paper, whereas comparative studies do not sustain a direct correlation between levels of violence and the poorest areas, particular cases contain strong evidence for that hypothesis. Hence, unemployment, poverty, a certain tradition of violence in society, criminal activities and scandals left unpunished, as well as the legacies of dictatorships, together constitute factors that have led to the emergence of a culture of violence which, in turn, makes the proliferation of weapons inevitable.

The socio-economic conditions of the big cities and their suburbs are giving rise to this new culture, in which the demand for light weapons is growing. Parallel to that, the regional integration process is facilitating the emergence of an underground economy with a flourishing black market. Guns and drugs

are the most dangerous combination on this market. When those two factors – local and regional – meet, an organised base for weapons proliferation will have been established, with pipelines that will challenge state control and authority. Until socio-economic relief and new approaches to security have been implemented, this new culture of violence will remain the direct threat of contemporary society to the democracies in the Southern Cone.

On a regional level the consolidation of the Iguazú Act, the *ad hoc* mechanism for co-operation which has proved its efficiency on a technical level, is the trend to pursue. But further research is needed in several respects.

What must be determined is how, on the local level, illegal guns enter into circulation. The task is not a simple one: it involves field-work in conflict areas, with criteria and frameworks yet to be defined. The resulting analysis should lead to:

- a global assessment of the illegal circulation of weapons, including details of their origins, how they first entered into circulation and whether they have been confiscated at any time;
- an estimation of the quantity of illegal weapons that are or could be in circulation;
- an evaluation of the weaknesses in the legal control systems that permit the illegal entry or re-entry into circulation of a weapon;
- a comparison of the results in the four countries under consideration in order to predict whether local mechanisms for weapons circulation could lead to a regional flow;
- a comparative approach to arms legislation. The legislation of the four Mercosur countries must be made compatible to ensure regional progress. One such step would be the creation of a regional register of arms transfers. The result should be better policing of the legislation at local, as well as regional, levels.

Finally, if civil society is to play an active role in constraining the new culture of violence, public debate on small arms proliferation should be intensified.

ENDNOTES

1. 'Light weapon' is used as "*as a generic term to describe all conventional munitions that can be carried by an individual combatant or by a light vehicle*", whereas 'small arms' "*is a sub-category, consisting of automatic weapons up to 20 mm, including sub-machine guns, rifles, carbines and handguns*." See C Louise, **The Social Impacts of Light Weapons Availability and Proliferation**, Discussion Paper 59, UNRISD, International Alert, March 1995, p. 1.
2. See, in particular, M Klare and D Andersen, **A Scourge of Guns**, Arms Sales Monitoring Project, Federation of American Scientists, Washington, DC, 1996.
3. Louise, op. cit., p. 1.
4. Klare and Andersen, op. cit., p. 2.
5. Klare and Andersen recognise this difficulty on a Latin American level: "*The flow of light weapons into Latin America cannot be measured with a great deal of specificity. Most of the key statistical sources on the munitions trade do not provide disaggregated data on transfers of small*

arms and similar munitions. From fragmentary evidence, however, it is possible to chart at least some aspects of this inflow" (op. cit., p. 89). In the **United Nations International Study on Firearm Regulation**, prepared by the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice for the sixth session held in Vienna, 28 April-9 May 1997 (hereafter referred to as E/CN.15/1997/CRP.6, 25 April 1997), for instance, Argentina has a 'no response', while Brazil admits 'frequent' illegal import of firearms, components and ammunition (p. 55). When asked about illegal export frequency of the same, Argentina admits 'few' and Brazil 'some' (p. 61).

6. "[The] diffusion of arms is helping to fuel an epidemic of societal violence throughout the region. While the schisms in these societies have deep political and socio-economic roots, often reaching back to the colonial era, the abundance of arms is contributing to the intensity of internal conflict and the tendency of contending groups and forces to settle disputes through armed violence, rather than through negotiation or adjudication. The widespread availability of light weapons has also facilitated the rise of paramilitary formations, both political and criminal, and sustained their conflicts with the state and one another." See Klare and Andersen, op. cit., pp. 90-91.
7. **World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers**, US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, Washington, DC, 1983, as mentioned in A Varas, **Automización castrense y democracia en América latina**, FLACSO-Santiago de Chile, n. 66, December 1984.
8. Klare and Andersen, op. cit., p. 17.
9. Ibid., p. 18.
10. Ibid., pp. 18-19.
11. Ibid., pp. 19-20.
12. Interview with Envar El Kadri, founder of the Peronist Revolutionary Forces guerrilla organisation, Buenos Aires, 29 November 1996.
13. The economic crisis of the 1980s played a determinant role in cutting defence expenditures, as well as, in Argentina's case, did the new orientation of international relations. However, this discussion will not cover the economic issue.
14. *Brasil gastou mais com armamentos*, **Jornal do Brasil** (Brazil), 9 October 1997.
15. J Castro Olivera, *El proyecto defensivo del Mercosur*, **El Cronista Comercial** (Argentina), 22 February 1995.
16. E Barcelona, *El año de la autocrítica de las Fuerzas Armadas*, **La Nación** (Argentina), 30 December 1995.
17. *La ONU destacó el rol de la Argentina*, **La Prensa** (Argentina), 25 October 1995.
18. In a document prepared by the *Estudios para la Nueva Mayoría* (Studies for the New Majority) group. See also **La Nación** (Argentina), 22 October 1989.
19. E Bailby, *L'Uruguay cherche sa place au sein du Mercosur*, **Le Monde Diplomatique** (France), January 1996.

20. B Puig, *El jefe del ejército uruguayo rechaza comparaciones con Balza*, **La Nación** (Argentina), 11 January 1996.
21. C Guibeleguiet, *Le Paraguay à nouveau menacé par ses militaires*, **Le Monde Diplomatique** (France), June 1996.
22. *El militarismo paraguayo*, **La Prensa** (Argentina), 28 February 1996.
23. The guerrilla warfare *foco* theory was invented by Che Guevara who maintained that the conditions for revolution should be anticipated rather than reacted to.
24. *Tres estallidos en los años 60*, **Clarín** (Argentina), 13 March 1997.
25. Ex-intelligence officer, interview in Buenos Aires, October 1996.
26. Interview with El Kadri, op. cit.
27. Ibid.
28. Interview in Buenos Aires, October 1996.
29. **Página/12** (Argentina), 26 August 1988.
30. *La violencia es cada día mayor en América Latina*, an article from **The Economist** (UK), reproduced in **La Nación** (Argentina), 12 March 1997.
31. **El Cronista** (Argentina), 22 November 1996.
32. Ibid.
33. *En el centro de Comodoro hay un asalto cada dos horas*, **Clarín** (Argentina), 14 April 1997.
34. **La Nación** (Argentina), 6 October 1996.
35. B Puig, *Alerta en Uruguay por el ingreso de armas*, **La Nación** (Argentina), 28 December 1995.
36. "Today, clandestine business activities of all sorts have broken through the constraints formerly imposed by regulatory institutions, and have not only spread throughout the socio-economic milieu but have developed rapidly in terms of their level of technical and commercial sophistication. From 'recreational drugs' to counterfeit credit cards, from fake designer watches to stolen diamonds, it is no longer a case of the operation of this or that isolated black market, but rather the emergence of an international underground economy. That economy consists of a set of interrelated black markets supported by their own systems of information, their own sources of supply, their own distribution networks, and their own modes of financing." R T Naylor, *The Structure and Operation of the Modern Arms Black Market*, in J Boutwell, M Klare and L Reed (eds), **Lethal Commerce: The Global Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons**, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Cambridge, 1995, p. 48.
37. Klare mentions, in total, nine developments on a global level that affect small arms trade (op. cit., pp. 35-40). Not all of these are relevant in the Mercosur case; those mentioned, however, do certainly play a major role in light weapons proliferation.

38. M Justo, "*Argentina es un blanco blando*", **Página/12** (Argentina), 21 April 1996.
39. *Conferencia sobre terrorismo*, **Clarín** (Argentina), 2 August 1995.
40. "*Santuario terrorista*", **Clarín** (Argentina), 30 September 1995.
41. B Puig, *Terroristas internacionales en Uruguay*, **La Nación** (Argentina), 30 September 1995.
42. B Puig, *Sendero invierte en Uruguay*, **La Nación** (Argentina), 14 December 1995.
43. *Denunciaron el ingreso al país de grupos terroristas*, **La Prensa** (Argentina), 15 December 1996.
44. F Buttazoni, *Uruguay: temen que surja un nuevo grupo armado*, **Clarín** (Argentina), 11 April 1996.
45. "[The] diffusion of the means of violence is one of the most distinctive features of contemporary Latin American society, and - along with the spread of narcotics and the widespread increase in lawlessness and corruption - one of the most destructive. The spread of arms is, in fact, closely connected to the spread of drugs and lawlessness, in that each of these phenomena tends to reinforce the other." See Klare and Andersen, op. cit., p. 4.
46. However secondary, compared to North America or Europe.
47. The Colombian guerrilla movement started in the 1960s; before any kind of solution could be reached, in the 1980s, the paramilitary and narcotics groups appeared, "*exacerbating an already precarious domestic situation*". See D García-Peña Jaramillo, *Light Weapons and International Conflict in Colombia*, in Boutwell, Klare and Reed (eds), op. cit., p. 98. Today, the drugs business is so deeply embedded in the Colombian reality, that a general war of all-against-all is being waged for the control of the cocaine routes. In the Urabá region near the Panamanian border, for instance, "*Drug cartels sponsor at least some 3 000 civilians that form private justice groups, the paramilitary 'Grupos de Autodefensa Campesina', and the US government supports 10 000 military, who, theoretically, should maintain legal order. However, both of them ended uniting their efforts to fight some 2 000 warriors of the 'Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Colombianas' and the 'Ejército Popular de Liberación' guerrilla movements. As a result, a merciless war broke out, the equivalent of which has not been seen in the last ten years.*" See N Padilla, *Guerra por la ruta de la droga*, **Clarín** (Argentina), 27 March 1997.
48. In 1990 criminal organisations started establishing contacts with each other and Interpol published a document entitled **1990: The Year of the Cocaine in Europe**. See J U Ortiz, *Situación de la Argentina en el contexto internacional*, paper presented at the seminar **Seguridad y narcotráfico: los desafíos de fin de siglo** organised by the Argentine Council of International Relations (Consejo Argentino de Relaciones Internacionales - CARI), Buenos Aires, 30-31 October 1996.
49. A term used by María Victoria Uribe, Director of the Colombian Anthropological Institute, to define a phenomenon of social and political violence that threatens the continuity of the state. See M Uribe, *Colombia: todos contra todos*, **Clarín** (Argentina), 5 February 1997.
50. In Argentina the press uses terms like *narcoescándalo* or *narcopolicía* to define the close relationship between drug dealers, police officials and politicians. See, for instance, S Tomaro, *Narco escándalo*, **Diario Popular** (Argentina), 14 July 1996.

51. Pasquini, op. cit.
52. Most of the drug scandals in Argentina, for instance, involve popular figures from sports and showbusiness, their sponsors and people from the local jet-set societies.
53. V Massot, *Nuevos flagelos sociales*, **La Nación** (Argentina), 2 December 1996.
54. E Gosman, *Las grandes mafias de narcos ponen sus ojos en el Mercosur*, **Clarín** (Argentina), 21 November 1996.
55. **Clarín** (Argentina), 16 February 1997.
56. Guibeleguiet, op. cit.
57. G Young, *Piden ayuda argentina para luchar contra la droga en Punta del Este*, **Clarín** (Argentina), 10 November 1996.
58. G Pasquini, *Droga en la Argentina: mentiras públicas, verdades privadas*, **Página/12** (Argentina), 8 December 1996.
59. Interview in Buenos Aires, 19 December 1996.
60. *Crece la custodia a entidades judías*, **Clarín** (Argentina), 27 March 1997.
61. Law 23.737.
62. M Dinatale, *El Congreso se pone firme en lucha contra el narcotráfico*, **El Cronista Comercial** (Argentina), 28 May 1996.
63. Laws 21.521, 24.059 and 23.737.
64. *Narcotráfico: definen el rol de los militares*, **Clarín** (Argentina), 13 March 1997.
65. Luís Tibiletti, former military political analyst and Director of SER en 2000 institute, interview in Buenos Aires, 23 December 1996.
66. K der Ghougassian, *Los nuevos temas de la agenda de seguridad en el Cono Sur: ¿Una redefinición del rol de las Fuerzas Armadas?*, paper presented at the II Seminario Internacional del Mercosur Universitario, Buenos Aires, 26 November 1996.
67. **La Nación** (Argentina), 27 January 1997.
68. *En Gendarmería hay expectativa por el futuro papel de las FF. AA.*, **La Nación** (Argentina), 23 February 1997.
69. *La droga sale por Brasil*, **Página/12** (Argentina), 20 July 1996. Since 1995, there seems to have been a general increase in the reporting of drug-related violence in Brazil which also links drugs-for-arms deals. In 1995 the São Paulo police seized a shipment containing 130 kilos of cocaine and fifty-three weapons, including AR-15 and .223 Ruger rifles. Drug smuggling prompted armed clashes in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro between security forces and traffickers in October 1995.

The clashes transformed the city into a battlefield, resulting in a great number of victims. Fighting began when traffickers were negotiating, with a Rio mafia chief, the price of US AR-15 machine-guns and police intervened. After violence erupted, resulting in seventy-seven deaths, police confiscated fifteen guns, among them a US M-16, a Chinese AK-47 and a Belgium FAL, as well as two grenades. Shots from an AK-47 machine-gun reached a police helicopter.

70. *Cartel de Cáli invade a floresta amazonica*, **Jornal do Brasil** (Brazil), 21 July 1996.
71. The Brazilian Centre for the Defence of Children's Rights asserted that the recruiting of children to sell drugs in Rio de Janeiro increased during the last year. According to a report prepared by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, over 500 000 children of five to nine years old work under inhuman conditions. "*The report does not include thousands of homeless children in downtown Rio de Janeiro that fear being killed by the so-called extermination squads and, thus, take refuge in favelas, where they are recruited by drug smugglers*", says Cristina Leonardo of the Institute. The newspaper, **Jornal do Brasil**, made public the confession of a child, who told that he received US\$ 2 000 per month from a drug-smuggling gang that operates in a Rio de Janeiro *favela*, selling narcotics. Police reports say that drug smugglers prefer hiring children because they do not arouse suspicions among security forces and can escape their control. See *Río: crece la cifra de niños reclutados por los narcos*, **La Prensa** (Argentina), 31 December 1996.
72. L Fortes, *Governo prepara a primeira política de defesa nacional depois do regime militar*, **O Globo** (Brazil), 28 October 1996. This fact, however, relates more to the defence of the Amazon and the need to tighten state control on national territory than to any alliance with the United States, says Luís Tibiletti. See interview in Buenos Aires, op. cit.
73. Until now no information has been available concerning serious connections between Mexico's drug cartels and the Mercosur black market. However, as the importance of Mexico in drug smuggling increases, it seems feasible to forecast that eventually Mercosur will be taken into consideration by the Mexican drug lords.
74. One is tempted to question whether guerrilla movements in Peru and Colombia that are also involved in the drug dealing business, would not try to establish links with former 'comrades' in Argentina or Uruguay.
75. That is true particularly for the Iguazú triangle, to which further consideration will be given in this section.
76. For example, Argentina, where, according to private public opinion polls, only one out of three Argentines believes that the judiciary is not under political pressures. See A Ventura, *Añoranza de una Justicia independiente*, **La Nación** (Argentina), 14 April 1997. Interview in Morón, 13 January 1997.
77. The name given to shantytowns in Argentina; an equivalent of the Brazilian favela, although with a different social and even cultural reality.
78. "*As long as the commerce in light weapons continues unchecked, and the illegal traffic in such munitions spreads unabated, the state can only with great difficulty exercise its constitutional monopoly on the legitimate use of force or endorse measures for a reduction in arms. Furthermore, the illegal trade in weapons – with all of its deleterious effects on social peace and stability – imposes on governments a need for additional arms of their own. A vicious circle is thus formed, wherein resources that could otherwise be used to alleviate the conditions of poverty are*

directed to the military sector – thereby contributing to further political instability." See G Uribe de Lozano, *The Implications of Uncontrolled Arms Trafficking For Peace and Security in Latin America*, in Klare and Andersen, op. cit., p. 103.

79. Louise, op. cit., p. 5.
80. In fact, according to official statistics, in Argentina 11 per cent of the population cannot satisfy their basic needs.
81. E Gosman, Argentina, *la desocupación más alta de América latina*, **Clarín** (Argentina), 8 April 1997.
82. **Clarín** (Argentina), 10 October 1996.
83. Interview in Morón, 13 January 1997.
84. E Galeano, *Guerre aux pauvres!* **Le Monde Diplomatique** (France), August 1996.
85. Ibid.
86. **La Nación** (Argentina), 26 November 1996.
87. *Policía bajo control vecinal*, **Diario Popular** (Argentina), 18 August 1996.
88. M Dinatale, *Más control para las fuerzas de seguridad*, **La Nación** (Argentina), 16 February 1997.
89. **Clarín** (Argentina), 7 April 1997.
90. *La seguridad debe ser preocupación de todos*, **Diario Noticias** (Paraguay), 21 February 1997.
91. Information provided by CAESI's manager José R. Cassino in an interview in Buenos Aires, 30 December 1996.
92. See, in particular, J Palomar, *El negocio de la seguridad privada*, file on **La Nación On Line** (Argentina), <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/suples/revista/970309/r-58.htm>.
93. M Raffoul, *Brésil sous cloche à Sao Paolo*, **Le Monde Diplomatique** (France) March 1996.
94. Klare and Andersen, op. cit., p. 8.
95. Clearly to incorporate those factors that form the very basis of human security, as defined by J Cilliers and H Solomon, in **People, Poverty and Peace: Human Security in Southern Africa**, IDP Monograph Series, No. 4, May 1994, South Africa, applying, of course, the basic theoretical principles to the Mercosur reality.
96. "*Light weapons proliferation accelerates disintegrative trends such as weak governance, religious, ethnic and racial tensions, social fissures, criminal violence and civil conflicts*", see Louise, op. cit., p. 21. Civil society's role in preventing crime and small arms proliferation is recognised by the United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in the *Conclusions and Recommendations of the Criminal Justice Reform and Strengthening of Legal Institutions Measures to Regulate Firearms* Report of the Secretary-General (hereafter referred to as

E/CN.15/1997/4, 7 March 1997): "*Effective domestic regulation of firearms requires co-operation between all levels of government, law enforcement agencies, business, the media and citizens to promote crime prevention, public health and the safety and security of individuals.*" p. 7.

97. Ibid.
98. Law 24.492.
99. Which is not the case in Brazil, for instance. The number of legal gun owners increased in Brazil and press sources estimate that eleven million Brazilians have authorisation to keep a gun at home for self-defence. That was probably a major factor leading last year to the ratification of a law that punishes anyone who carries guns without a licence, a fact that indicates a growing need to modify existing legislation. In February 1997, moreover, the Brazilian National Assembly, voting on a new law to restrict the control of arms proliferation, introduced significant modifications in the carrying and use of guns, the control over arms distribution and the reduction of the lethal capacity of weapons. Church and civil society organisations favour these steps.
100. Article 1 defines the material of the law that regulates, on national territory, the acquisition, use, tenancy, carrying and transmission of any type of title, transport, importing or introducing into the country of firearms or any type of powder or explosives or chemical weapons, '*that are classified as warfare arms, powders, explosives and what is related to them, and gun, munitions and other material classified of civilian use*'. However, the law does not extend to exceptions defined by article 2. Those exceptions are a) acts related to every class of arms "*when undertaken by the Armed Forces of the Nation*", and b) weapons that are not firearms (such as knives, machetes and traditional weapons, qualified as "*armas blancas*" in Spanish), provided they do not form a part of, or are not used as accessories to, those classified as warfare arms. Further details regarding the RENAR's functions are provided in Chapter VII (articles 43 and 44).
101. The article classifies the arms in three categories: 1) military-style arms, 2) powders, explosives and what is related to them, 3) arms for civilian use. Furthermore, Section II, Annex I, article 3 defines twenty-five types of arms; Section III, article 4, defines and classifies military-style arms; articles 5, 6 and 7 refer to arms and munitions for civilian use; and article 8 regulates arms and munitions for collection purposes.
102. Interview in Buenos Aires, 13 February 1997.
103. Ibid.
104. Interview in Buenos Aires, 14 February 1997. The UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice considers that the RENAR's "*weakness is that compilation of provincial information depends on other bodies, which do not always provide timely information. Moreover the firearms are limited to those legally in circulation.*" See E/CN.15/1997/CRP.6, 25 April 1997, p. 69.
105. *El abuso de las armas*, **La Nación** (Argentina), 2 February 1997.
106. In the United States guns cause the death of 40 000 people annually. Although this is the case, the National Rifle Association carries on a vast lobbying campaign against tougher legislation. See M Rowold, *El debate sobre las armas*, **La Nación** (Argentina), 26 December 1996.
107. During a Parliamentary meeting in October 1996.

108. Law 20.785.
109. Visentini, interview in Buenos Aires, 14 February 1997.
110. **La Nación** (Argentina), 6 October 1996.
111. *El tráfico de las armas en la mira*, **Diario Popular** (Argentina), 12 November 1995.
112. Interview in Buenos Aires, 27 December 1996.
113. Ibid.
114. See TCP project files, **Report from the field trip to Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay**, ISS, Halfway House, South Africa, August 1996.
115. See TCP project, op. cit., p.5
116. Interview in Buenos Aires, 14 February 1997.
117. A Karp, *Small Arms: The New Major Weapons*, in Boutwell, Klare and Reed (eds), op. cit., p. 25.
118. **Jornal do Brasil**, 3 February 1997.
119. In general, analysts do consider that in Latin America the threats are related to internal conflicts. As Uribe de Lozano puts it, in Klare and Andersen, op. cit., p. 105: "*The demand for light weapons in many Latin American countries is intimately tied to threats originating in internal conflicts and to the atmosphere of insecurity engendered by criminal violence. Given that automatic and semi-automatic weapons and other light munitions can be acquired by a wide range of insurgents and criminals, as well as by ordinary citizens who feel vulnerable in the face of rising crime, the unrestrained circulation of and illegal traffic in these weapons - often stimulated by the state's inability to provide a just solution to long-standing socio-economic problems and to curb rampant criminal violence - fuels domestic conflict and increases the sense of insecurity.*" What is being said here is that while stockpiles of weapons which are the legacy of past conflicts in Central America are a source of proliferation that satisfies that demand, this is not the case in the Southern Cone sub-region.
120. See **Meeting of the Group of Experts on the Control of Arms and Explosives Related to Drug Trafficking, Final Report**, Caracas (Venezuela), 21-24 May 1996, General Secretariat of the Organization of American States, Washington, DC.
121. "*The greatest hurdle to overcome in controlling the trade in light arms is not powerful law breakers but weak law makers.*" See Karp, op. cit., p. 26.
122. Trench, interview in Buenos Aires, 13 February 1997.
123. Interview in Buenos Aires, 2 December 1996.
124. Ibid.
125. E/CN.15/1997/CRP.6, op. cit., p. 22.

Part II Changing patterns of the culture of violence in Buenos Aires

Khatchik der Ghougassian

INTRODUCTION

In Argentina, in the last decade, arms sales have increased 70 per cent. In the city of Buenos Aires and its surroundings, known as Greater Buenos Aires Metropolitan area, during this same period, there has been a 13 per cent increase in the crime rate. With a population of eight million, the city records nearly one hundred crimes daily, eight out of ten of which are armed attacks. Five years ago .22 calibre guns were used by criminals, today it is mostly 9 mm pistols.¹ According to the Argentine Federal Police Chief, in 1996 the registered robberies were some 3 000 more than in 1995 and the cases of armed robberies had increased. However, in 1995 forty-five banks were attacked and in 1996 only twenty-six, and acts of piracy decreased from 743 in 1991 to 302 in 1996. More immigrants are currently involved in criminal acts: in 1996, 15 per cent of the arrested criminals were immigrants, while ten years ago it was only 5 per cent.² The episodes of violence in Buenos Aires "*do not seem isolated facts. On the contrary, they are the proof of citizens' insecurity, because crimes occur in public places and by day,*"³ is the general perception of public opinion reflected in the mass-media. Stated one editorial: "*According to official statistics the spiral of crime grows incessantly. To put an end to the growth of crime is, therefore, an economic must, because violent cities, such as Buenos Aires today, do not appeal to anyone with investment interests.*"⁴

In Argentina, indeed throughout Latin America,⁵ the culture of violence has traditionally been closely linked to politics, which gave violence an ideological justification. Since the democratic transition in 1983, however, the culture of violence has changed. Neither armed struggle nor a *coup d'etat* is now seen as an option for change. There is a wide consensus that political violence should be refuted and the transformation of the military has led to its reincorporation into society. However, democracy has not brought about an end to violence: to the contrary, a new culture of violence is now emerging. This new phenomenon identifies with some aspects of the legacy of the past, as well as with novel threats to security, such as international terrorism and drug smuggling, and crime related to corruption, deteriorating social and economic conditions and aggressive behaviour of a socio-psychological origin. Weapons are integral to the culture of violence, their availability, discussed in Part I, making them tradeable commodities with a predominant role in its generation.

Part II of this monograph focuses on this new culture as it is observable in Greater Buenos Aires. First, it highlights the change from the 1960s and the 1970s to the present. Then it identifies the indicators that are expressions of the recent manifestation of violence and that affect the lives of individuals. Related to this is the reaction of government and society to the developing phenomenon. Finally, in the concluding remarks, the notion of governance during democratic consolidation is discussed to see to what extent the new culture of violence could undermine efforts to improve social stability and economic development.

THE END OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Communal violence is generally associated with weapons. Argentina's tradition of violence has, throughout history, been weapons linked. As one writer explains, "*The colonization process was not a campaign in which persuasion played a part: the struggle for independence was not a diplomatic action and, even less so, was the 1976 Process of National Organisation.*"⁶ Confirming this, Trench claims: "A

large quantity of weapons always existed in the Argentine provinces due to the geopolitical reality of vast, inhabited territories."⁷ Regional conflicts served also to augment the illegal proliferation of weapons.⁸ Furthermore, during the 1920s and 1930s, when European immigrants who subscribed to socialist and anarchist ideologies tried to organise the workers' movement, the local oligarchy and the military undertook the formation of a third force with right-wing nationalist tendencies. The *Guardia Blanca* (White Guard) para-military formation was linked to the Argentine fascist *Liga Patriótica* (Patriotic League) and used by the police as a hit squad during the suppression of strikes. State-sponsored third forces existed until the end of the authoritarian era and the fall of the final, most cruel, dictatorship, the so-called *Proceso* (for *Proceso de Organización Nacional*, the National Organisation Process) from 1976 to 1983. As a reaction to state repression a resistance movement started in the 1960s, developing into guerrilla warfare in the 1970s. Arms were brought into the country and violent actions were justified both ideologically and politically.

"The confrontation of the guerrilla and the military should be understood within the context of Argentine political culture", Ollier claims. "It is a culture with underlying components of authoritarianism and violence."⁹ During the 1960s and the 1970s these components of the Argentine political culture interacted with the national, regional and international climate, giving a violent character to the political process which left no alternative but armed struggle and military repression. It was the so-called *Libertadora Revolution*, the *coup d'etat* of 1955, that interrupted the second presidential term of the popularly elected Juan Domingo Perón and made way for the organisation of the resistance movement. In 1956 a pro-Peronist counter-coup was aborted and "a gap opened between the military and the people. (...). At that time, we used to think that there was a legitimate violence that served the interest of the people, and another one that was proper to the minorities who held the power illegitimately," says Envar El Kadri, founder of the first Peronist guerrilla group, *Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas* (FAP).¹⁰ Although the popular armed struggle was conducted by Peronists,¹¹ it nevertheless received a spiritual impulse from the Cuban Revolution in 1959. It also "elaborated an image of Argentine society on the basis of a central hypothesis: violence founds the political, social and economic order on which the society as a whole is based."¹² From then on the dichotomy was set up between an oppressive violence, to be denounced and fought, and a salutary violence that led to salvation/liberation. Communist and extreme leftist guerrillas also appeared in the armed struggle of the 1970s, such as the *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo*, but the major and most important group was the Peronist Montoneros, the ideological inspiration for which derived from "the internal evolution of Argentine nationalism and Catholicism",¹³ the direct influence being Ernesto Che Guevara's foco theory¹⁴ and the *Movimiento de Sacerdotes para el Tercer Mundo*, founded in 1967.¹⁵

It is important to understand the ideological context of the culture of violence operating in the Argentina of the 1960s and the 1970s, in order to highlight the change that took place from 1983 on, when the option for violent change was ruled out. This is as significant as the transformation of the military itself.

After the Malvinas/Falklands War and the restoration of democracy, the Argentine people put pressure on the military to transform from within. They thus played a major role in the process that resulted in the army's act of self-critical appraisal and restructuring so that it might become an institution subordinated "to the Constitution, to the rule of law and to the democratic institutions, in particular, respect for human rights and liberty, democracy and peace."¹⁶ Over and above its influence on the military, the society adopted democracy as a system to which there was no alternative, ruling out all former discourse. As El Kadri says: "There is no alternative to the will of the people, and no group, whether left-wing or right-wing, could ignore it. There is no justification to choose what the people rejected in the voting process, which is the unique way to know what society's will is."¹⁷

In January 1989, during the last year of Dr Alfonsín's democratically elected government, an armed group of the political organisation, the *Movimiento Todos por la Patria*, attacked the army cartel of La

Tablada. The attack, ending in the death or capture of the militants, was condemned by society. During the years 1995-1996 an as-yet obscure group, *Organización Revolucionaria del Pueblo* (ORP), appeared on the political scene, claiming responsibility for the placing of small amounts of explosives in key locations and, in particular, for a March 1996 assassination attempt on Alfonsín. Although this new terrorist organisation was initially linked to old insurgencies by the press, many believed it represented a new phenomenon. *"It is not a legacy of the 1970s. We can note that in the style of its tracts. No armed group in the 1970s would have argued that the assassination attempt of (the torturer) Bergés failed because the gun that was used was a 9 mm pistol and not a Magnum"*¹⁸ And ex-guerrilla leader, Kremer, claims: *"This group does not seem to have any roots in the 1970s. They do not apply the methodology of the 1970s and show a lack of ability when committing an attack such as the one perpetrated against Bergés because of the number of shots."* According to intelligence sources, it was a group of anarchists who were not interested in politics and whose unique objective was to destabilise whatever their target was at the time.¹⁹ The Chief of the Federal Police holds that ORP is *"a delirious far-left organisation"*; ²⁰ few, however, believe this to be the case.²¹

These two are rare examples of political violence. Political extremism today enjoys little support in Argentina, as the constitutional process has been legitimised as the arena for political competition. Nor are there any serious manifestations of groups trying to impose their beliefs on another order through violence. They would, in the event, not find any legitimation for such action in society. Though there may be some temptation on the part of the government to exploit social troubles politically, as well as to talk about the so-called regression to 'subversion',²² civil society is quite conscious of the danger to public freedom from this type of discourse, and human rights organisations, as well as political representatives, are ready to take immediate action to safeguard democratic values.²³

THE NEW CULTURE OF VIOLENCE

*"Today's violence has nothing to do with political performance or social messianism. No one self-assumes the role of the protector of the humble, no one demands the sacrifice of the enemy, nor is a military or clandestine discipline a requirement for violent action."*²⁴

The normalisation of civil-military relations is, perhaps, the most important assurance of democratic stability. Politically there are no more threats to the regime and debates about internal security issues are no longer concerned with the sudden interruption of the constitutional process. Nevertheless, Argentine society is beset by new types of violence which could, in the long run, become a danger to governance, since they undermine stability and affect the citizens' belief in the state's capacity to fulfil its role. Frequently guns are the instruments used to perpetrate these acts which are the trade-marks of the new culture of violence, unprecedented for the dramatic changes it has introduced into people's everyday lives.

This present violence cannot be characterised as clearly as that of the 1960s and 1970s. Observation of the manifestation of this phenomenon has led to the recognition of diverse sources, sometimes linked to one another, sometimes bearing the stamp of the past, but together forming the new culture of violence. As the threats originate from different sources they generate different reactions and give rise to different debates. These threats, which are also the sources for weapons proliferation, are international terrorism, drug smuggling, crime and corruption.

International terrorism

The anti-Semitism behind the two terrorist strikes in Buenos Aires, the attack on the Israeli Embassy and the bombing of the Jewish community's centre AMIA, as well as anti-Jewish acts of vandalism (such as the profanation of graves, anonymous bomb threats, swastika paintings in the community's schools, etc.)

affected deeply the local community. Security enforcement measures were taken and some 12 000 police officers are currently guarding the community's institutions.

Given the fact that there is a large Arab-Muslim community in Argentina it seemed this could be an instance of inter-community conflict, which could present another source of potential violence. On the other hand, as strong arguments appeared for the involvement of extreme-rightists and former *Carapintada*²⁵ military in the terrorist actions, the debate about the persistence of Nazi ideology sympathies in Argentina came to the fore. Traditionally the Argentine military enjoyed a close relationship with the German military. The Prussian army was the model on which the Argentine military structured its armed forces at the beginning of the century. During the 1920s and the 1930s, and throughout the Second World War, certain groups in Argentine society, the political elite included, made no attempt to hide their sympathy for the fascist-dictatorial political regimes. The controversy about the hospitality offered by Argentina to Nazi leaders is also still very much alive.

However alarming, these signs do not lead one to conclude that anti-Semitism exists in Argentina. "*In general*", confirm Catterberg and Vanoli, "*today there is a positive attitude towards the Jews in Argentina.*"²⁶ Neo-Nazi youth gangs and related violence appear from time to time, but this is a minor, social phenomenon, rather than a political one.

Nor is there proof for an inter-community context for this violence. As is the case with the others, the Arab community formed at the beginning of the century, is well integrated and co-exists peacefully with the rest of Argentine society. Argentine history has not registered any serious inter-community clashes. Yet the two terrorist attacks inevitably affected the Muslim community, as attention was focused on its members. No connection was found, however, and even if the official hypothesis regarding the Islamist origin of the attacks were to be confirmed, chances of a serious involvement on the part of the local Muslim community are practically nil.

Thus, the debate about violence being related to international terrorism should point to the insufficiency of security measures, rather than to an internal conflict. The lack of results in the above investigation is seriously affecting the credibility of the country's judiciary: the sense that the crime could go unpunished is certainly strong persuasion to perpetrators of crimes to persist in their activities.

Drugs: From the *Tanguero* Tradition to Narco-Trafficking

Drugs are becoming a major problem in Argentine society and statistics show an increase in consumption.

*"Illegal sale of drugs at night is part of a strong tradition in Buenos Aires. It goes back to the tanguero*²⁷*mood of the 1930s and the 1940s, and continues with the eruption of rock and roll, the discos and the bars. But this tradition is really of minor importance compared to the massive smuggling of cocaine and marijuana that started in the 1980s. (...) According to research conducted by Hugo Míguez in Punta del Este during the summer of 1993, at least for the upper and middle-upper classes, cocaine consumption is tolerated on condition that it is done in certain places like the toilets, parking lots or VIP salons."*²⁸

Together with drug consumption, drug smuggling is on the increase. However, no big cartels have so far been established in Argentina. Not even in Greater Buenos Aires are there important mafia organisations. "*The drugs smugglers are small, local groups that work independently of each other. They do not work together to distribute throughout the territory. Some groups might have regional contacts, but those are not organic, they simply exist.*"²⁹ The problem in Greater Buenos Aires, then, is the dealer in the street rather than the big smuggler. What must be done is, "*to fight those very dealers and the few grams that*

*they sell and not search for godfathers and bigger quantities. Thus we can avoid their future grouping. Or else, within five or ten years we shall be obliged to fight larger mafias of drug and arms smugglers, of bigger gangs of bandits and pirates."*³⁰

The government has demonstrated the political will to fight this social disease and important measures are being taken towards a more efficient anti-drug campaign. But the debate that concerns assigning the military a major role is politically manipulated and could misguide the search for a solution. It also generates fear regarding a return to authoritarianism. Thus, Argentine law³¹ makes the Federal Police responsible for fighting drug smuggling and limits military participation to logistic support and the intelligence service. Tibiletti asserts: *"To militarise the fight against drug smuggling does not bring any solution, on the contrary, [it] changes the very nature of the conflict."* His argument continues:

*"More military participation could lead to the very mistakes that were committed when fighting against the guerrilla forces. The drug smuggling conflict has economic, political, social and policing characteristics. If there is a national danger, such is the case of any portion of territory occupied by drug lords with fire-power, then we should have a doctrine for the use of military force as an instrument of the State to regain national sovereignty. What must not be done is to use the military as a police force. Argentina does not have jungles like Bolivia, Brazil or Colombia does, here there is no problem of the control of the national territory Anyhow, if the situation becomes so serious that it represents such [a] threat, then the decision to use military force is to be taken only by the representatives of the people."*³²

For the director of the Centro de Estudios para la Nueva Mayoría, the key issue is whether it is 'practical' to involve the military in the fight against drug smuggling. He concludes to the contrary: *"In our country drug smuggling has not transformed into narco-terrorism. Thus, there is no justification for an operational role for the armed forces, because the security organs and the police forces have enough capacity to face the problem."*³³

Yet drug smuggling is becoming a transnational problem and a threat to the entire Southern Cone. Even if the situation in each country differs and, consequently, decisions about how to combat it must also, regional co-operation is more than an imperative. However, involved in this issue of regional co-operation is a larger debate about the very nature of regional security threats, the re-structuring of the military and the creation of criteria that could make possible a common strategy against drug smuggling.

The Sociology of Crime

Violence related to crime has a complex social context in Argentina and the most significant geographical area in which to observe the new culture of violence that is emerging is Greater Buenos Aires. It includes common hooliganism, banditry and incidents related to a socio-psychological mood. However, the sociology of crime cannot ignore important topics that are at the very centre of the present-day security debates. Among these issues are the social conditions in which crime, police corruption and private security flourish. All of these form part of the new culture of violence. Once again, in all of them, guns play an important role, which is proof indeed of the increasingly aggressive character being manifested by the new culture of violence. If this trend is to be confirmed, then surely guns will become not a mere consequence of the culture of violence, but a basic component for its generation. In other words, the need for guns will not emerge merely because a culture of violence is sparking the demand for them. But the culture of violence will manifest a dynamic of its own, because the availability of guns leads to ever-increasing violence.

Football Hooliganism

From 1990 to 1994 fifty-two people were killed as a result of football hooliganism which resembles organised violence. The hooligan gangs are called '*barra bravas*' and their central leadership is composed of twenty persons only, while a hierarchy is established according to age and daring. The troop is formed of over 200 persons, aged fourteen to eighteen years, who are in the frontline whenever a clash erupts between adversarial gangs or with the police. They are also the protagonists in minor robberies and acts of vandalism. To become members of a '*barra brava*', youths pass through a ceremonial rite that is always violence related.³⁴ Football hooliganism might seem a minor security problem compared to other more crucial social issues at present. Nevertheless, not only is soccer the most popular sport in Argentina, but it is also becoming increasingly related to big business and drugs. It is thus not impossible to foresee that organised hooligan gangs will soon seek major roles in the latter activities, which will undoubtedly lead to an increase in delinquency among the gangs.

Social Geography of the Culture of Violence

In recent years, new modalities of crime have appeared in Greater Buenos Aires, among others: commando-style operations, hostage-taking during armed robberies, daylight attacks on moving vehicles and acts of revenge.³⁵ Furthermore, the gangs that are dedicated to this type of crime are armed with sophisticated light weapons. For instance, eleven members of a gang were arrested in October 1996, and police confiscated twenty-one FAL assault rifles, sub-machine guns, 9 mm pistols and hand grenades, sophisticated communication equipment, 100 grams of cocaine, 150 grams of marijuana and thirty-three stolen cars.³⁶ As private investigations and articles in the Argentine press show, the poorest areas of Greater Buenos Aires are the scenes of these activities and it is there that the new culture of violence is adopting an organised form. It is there also that crime and police corruption coexist as a way of life. One of the known shantytowns of Greater Buenos Aires is the neighbourhood of General Manuel Belgrano, better known as '*Ciudad Oculta*' (Hidden City). It has 16 000 inhabitants, 2 500 families, 2 000 homes and 50 per cent of the unemployed. "*Fear and violence, favourite children of poverty, are everywhere*", write Pazos and Comisso, when describing the way of life of the people of the neighbourhood.³⁷ The shantytown Ejército de Los Andes of Ciudadela del Norte, a city of Greater Buenos Aires, is called by the police '*Fuerte Apache*' (Fort Apache). There, nearly 300 security officers planned a police operation on 21 January 1997, leading to the arrest of a criminal gang accused of at least six homicides.³⁸ Gang warfare is common in the shantytowns. For instance, on 29 April 1997, apparently for revenge, ten to twelve members of a gang shot to death three members of a rival gang. Used in this particular gang battle were FAL assault rifles and various handguns (some of them stolen from the police). The victims controlled the shantytown, Carlos Gardel, and thirty high-rise blocks of the Villa Sarmiento neighbourhood of the city of Palomar in the western part of the Greater Buenos Aires province. Some 50 000 people inhabit the area and a stranger is ill-advised to walk there alone. The whole area is known as a conflict zone: the shantytowns, Villa el Mercado, known as '*Villa de los Paraguayos*' (Neighbourhood of the Paraguayans), and Fuerte Apache are in that area. Different gangs control different parts of the shantytowns and tension is ever-present, as each gang operates outside its own territory, offering protection to its own people from outsiders.³⁹ Shootings between rival gangs are very common in shantytowns like Carlos Gardel, says the General Security Director of the Greater Buenos Aires province. "*They are criminals who fight for drugs or revenge, or simply to prove who is commanding the zone. They resolve hegemony problems by force.*" Carlos Gardel and the neighbouring shantytowns of Matienzo and El Mercado form what came to be known as '*the Bermuda Triangle*' of Greater Buenos Aires, because they comprised the most dangerous region. Even so, police consider that today other regions, such as shantytowns like Las Ranas, Villa Ballester, or San Ignacio de Loyola, baptised – some twenty years ago – as '*the Bronx*', are far more dangerous. "*It is easy to get a gun in these shantytowns and we should admit that many of the guns used have been stolen from the police*", explains Miqueleiz.⁴⁰

Lieutenant Colonel Pombo sees a direct relation between the deteriorating social and economic

conditions and the increase in crime:

*"It is a social problem, not a security one. People cannot satisfy their basic needs, so they search [for] violent means. Advances in the technology of small weapons, the increase of their fire power, facilitate crime. Arms are just to satisfy a demand. When social conditions are bad, weapons demand is greater, for weapons are demanded not imposed. What police confiscate are late model firearms, made in the USA, but especially Brazil, because they are cheaper and quite good."*⁴¹

Youth and violence

The alarming increase in the involvement of minors in the underworld of crime is another aspect of the new culture of violence. In 1996 seven minors were arrested daily in Greater Buenos Aires for some sort of serious delinquency. Three out of ten adolescents who are submitted to a judicial process are accused of participation in homicides. The average age of minors becoming involved in delinquency has decreased to fifteen, from seventeen in 1992. In the capital of Buenos Aires, during the first ten months of 1996, almost 800 minors, some 20 per cent more than a year earlier, were accused of criminal acts.⁴² The problem of minors in the underworld of crime is closely related to the wider sociological context of violence and the youth. Facts such as the death of twenty-four adolescents in Buenos Aires' discos in the last three years, the suicide of fourteen minors in 1996 and the 700 000 young men who do not find jobs annually are a telling indictment. *"Many of them see just one way out: violence,"* writes J Palomar in *Jóvenes en un mundo violento: Zona de riesgo*.⁴³ The author of this long investigation reminds the reader that 39 per cent of the Argentine population is less than nineteen years old, which means there are some thirteen million adolescents, of whom approximately 5,5 million are living in Buenos Aires.⁴⁴ Greater Buenos Aires criminologist, Carlos Francica, claims that the Argentine society is living its *"worst historical moment concerning youth delinquency"*. When describing the profile of young criminals, he underlines the violence in their personality, *"the aggressive behaviour they engage in to steal a pair of tennis shoes or a wallet. By contrast with previous years, today they use arms, hurt their victims, kill them. They also commit crimes to get drugs, which makes their behaviour even more aggressive."* According to him, these young criminals do not originate solely from poor suburbs or shantytowns. Among those in jail for perpetrating crimes are also young middle-class men, whose crimes are related to the need to procure drugs. The future of those who are released from jail is uncertain, jobs are not easily available and often they return to crime.

Expressing his view of the changing circumstances, El Kadri remarks:

*"During the 1960s and the 1970s, youth tended to sublimate part of its energy and dreams in the struggle to change the world. Today it is hard even to take care of the personal world. ... Before there were ideas for which it [was] worth dying, today rarely are there ideas to live for. The consumer model of society creates an absence of values and makes, for instance, young people steal to have just a pair of tennis shoes. ... Excess of individualism, lack of solidarity, absence of collective projects. ... It is very difficult to convince a young man to [pursue] a political or ideological commitment."*⁴⁵

Unemployment

The new culture of violence has a specific social geography. Not only poverty, but despair and the impossibility of seeing any way out of socially and economically unsustainable conditions, all these make people choose crime and violence. The despair results mainly from unemployment that is taking on a concrete form concomitant with violence in Argentina. According to research undertaken by Luisa Montuschi, some 6,2 million Argentines, 45 per cent of the population able to work, cannot find stable jobs: of these 2,2 million are unemployed (without any occupation whatsoever), 1,3 million are visible under-employed people (working some thirty-five hours a week, but wishing to work more when

possible) and 2,8 invisible under-employed people (poor rural employees, domestic employees, urban informal workers who have a subsistence income).⁴⁶ Labour flexibility is one of the declared objectives of the Menem government, but so far finds no consensus in Parliament. However, whether a law is passed or not, labour today is precarious in Argentina. There is no stability, nor is there any kind of social security for 80 per cent of the employees who do find jobs and 500 000 of an estimated 3,5 million workers who receive a monthly salary have only a tenuous contract.⁴⁷ No wonder a far-reaching social change is taking place in a country where historically class differences were less significant than in the rest of Latin America. "*Social classes are changing*", says sociologist Villareal, "*[d]ivisions are no longer horizontal between an upper, middle and lower class, but there are vertical cuts ... more [on a] socio-cultural than socio-economic basis.*" The new culture generates unemployment, under-employment and marginalisation, accompanied by social violence.⁴⁸ The influential Catholic Church is unceasing in its warning against violence born of social injustice: "*In the long run injustice generates violence*", is the assertion of the Bishops in a report dated April 1997. Their demand is for an economy "*truly human*".⁴⁹

Guns for 'Fun'

The new culture of violence is not exclusive to the marginalised sector of society. Guns are used by middle and upper-middle class persons to commit violent acts that have a psychological rather than a sociological explanation. A forty-seven year-old medical doctor, accused of shooting his neighbours indiscriminately, was arrested in October 1996. In his apartment police found twenty guns of different calibres.⁵⁰ In the same month, three young men from middle class families were arrested and accused of shooting at people with an air-pistol, in the southern neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires, "*for fun*".⁵¹ "*There is a culture of violence that starts with toys and end[s] up as something normal thanks to TV movies, where conflicts are resolved with shootings as if that was the most normal way of behaving*", says psychologist Berardi of the *Fundación Educar para Prevenir la Violencia*.⁵²

Guns for 'Self-Defence'

Cases where guns are used, presumably in self-defence, are known in the Argentine press as '*justicia a mano propia*' (self-made justice) cases. The multiplication of the indiscriminate use of guns, albeit legal, has generated a debate, as yet unconcluded, as to what moves people to such aggressive behaviour. In 1994, for example, three such cases appeared in the press: in the Francisco Solana neighbourhood a man was shot to death for climbing a tree once owned by his assailant; in Ingeniero Budge the victim was a fourteen-year-old boy; and in the area of José Ingenieros, a sixteen-year-old adolescent. In the three cases, the shots were fired by people from middle class homes, at what were presumed to be thieves from the nearby shantytowns. Among the explanations for this type of behaviour is that of the sociologist, Jelin: "*There is an increase in the social phenomenon of self-defence.*"⁵³ Federal Police Chief of the Homicides Division, Carlos Juárez, says that "*people feel insecure, that's why they get armed*".⁵⁴ Yet, interestingly enough, the availability of guns per se has not yet been mentioned as a source of violence.

The Problems of Private Security

Owners of private security firms and other analysts explain the boom in the business as resulting from the demand by society, especially the upper-middle class living in private neighbourhoods, as well as from the new economic policy that has created conditions for the growth of that service sector. "*A private security employee plays [the] role of prevention, dissuasion and alert. Not that of repression which is police responsibility*", explains the president of the Chamber of Private Security Agencies (CAESI).⁵⁵ However, private security agencies employ former police officers and people who violated human rights during the last dictatorship. Moreover, these employees are poorly paid and do not receive proper training, not to mention those who work illegally. Naturally, private security firms own guns – 11

368, according to official records. But the main problem is the lack of control of the activity of the sector as a whole, not only of those firms that are members of the CAESI. Although a law does exist,⁵⁶ it does not permit effective control. That is why legislators, after the murder of a journalist in January 1997,⁵⁷ prepared a draft for a new law that was submitted to Parliament in April 1997. In public debate private security is perceived as a consequence of lack of security, lack of control, inefficiency of certain state organs and police corruption: "*Private security and lack of State reaction could be absolutely synonymous.*"⁵⁸ It is, moreover, one of the most visible aspects of the widening of the gap between rich and poor.

Generally known for its middle-class population and an urbanisation that reflects this reality, Buenos Aires has already forty guarded housing complexes that were built mostly as a result of a demand by society "*because of the increase of crime, especially robbery, ... this demand is [high] in private neighbourhoods, country-clubs [and] private cemeteries.*"⁵⁹ As Sarmiento says, not everyone "*can ... afford having private security, it's mostly the middle and upper-middle class who live in private gated communities and can pay for extra security.*"⁶⁰

Corruption and the Police: Reform Postponed

The new culture of violence in Greater Buenos Aires has perhaps its most dangerous component in police violence and corruption.

The Legal and Social Studies Centre (CELS) compiles annual reports on abuses committed by police.⁶¹ Another NGO, Co-ordination against Police and Institutional Repression (*Co-ordinadora contra la Represión Policial e Institucional*), records that during last year's accusations against the police force by families of the victims of police violence - in which cases multiplied - 52 per cent of the cases, involving 140 victims, were registered in Greater Buenos Aires. Furthermore, within the provincial police structure, mafia organisations exist that control illegal gambling and prostitution, and provide protection along the drug-smuggling and banditry routes. Sometimes police or ex-police members are integrated into pirate gangs.⁶² According to a *Sofres-Ibope* survey in February 1997, as far as 68,9 per cent of the population is concerned, the image of the Greater Buenos Aires Police is 'very bad' and 'bad', while 49,8 per cent of the Argentines think equally negatively of the Federal Police. The opinion of the judicial systems is similar: 34,2 per cent think that judges are 'very bad' or 'bad' and, in the opinion of 45,7 per cent, Congress is not doing enough to improve the security situation.⁶³ In Argentina "*there is a 15 per cent ... annual growth in the criminality index to which must be added more than 30 [per cent] of incidents that are not reported because people think that it's not worth it, or worse, do not trust those to whom they must report*", says a retired police officer.⁶⁴ The Governor of Greater Buenos Aires, Eduardo Duhalde, is aware of the poor reputation of the police and is himself known to have lost confidence in the security forces.⁶⁵

People responsible for security point out that the actual number of police officers is not enough to serve the province: there are 48 000 officers responsible for controlling the transit of prisoners, guarding them and ensuring their security. Lieutenant Colonel Pombo says that, although there are special training programmes, the officers who receive the training are often obliged to carry out tasks that bear no relation to their specialities: "*Low salaries, lack of modernisation, education problems, internal controls ... are other gaps that are yet to be filled.*"⁶⁶ The problem is regarded as far more serious by others, however, and has to do with the failure of the civil government to reform police structures following the end of the dictatorship. "*When the dictatorship was over the radical administration of Raúl Alfonsín assumed power but had all the armed forces against it. The first thing they did was to form an alliance with federal police and gendarmerie*", says Congressman Vensentini.⁶⁷ "*From 1983 on, State violence is related to police organs for different reasons. On one hand, [a] certain sector of society does make a constant lobby for 'law and order' because of a lack of security. On the other hand, police structures*

[were] never reformed or re-structured after the end of the dictatorship", states G Chillier.⁶⁸ Analysts hold that the Buenos Aires police always had the tacit agreement of political circles for funding from illegal business in the province, especially gambling and prostitution. *"For the political class the agreement had several benefits. First, budget problems were partly resolved, and second [it] created a context of giving and receiving favours. For the police it represented always a certain risk, but also advantages such as benefits for the officers and facilities to operate in the underworld of crime."*⁶⁹ This agreement worked during the 1976-1983 military rule, when police forces were under the command of General R Camps. The post-military administration was not able to end this arrangement and, when Minister L Brunati wanted to take action against the Peronist Governor, A Cafiero (1987-1991), he was faced with police rebellions.

From 1991 on, however, the press started to denounce police corruption when highly publicised cases such as high-ranking police officers' relations with drug smuggling, crimes committed by police and even – albeit obscure – links of certain policemen with the terrorist bombing of the AMIA Jewish centre came to light. Since then, the Buenos Aires police has been transformed into a huge corporation that works according to proper 'rules'. A former police officer recently claimed without hesitation: *"The two traditional funding sources of illegal gambling and prostitution do not provide profit as before. Illegal gambling is over because of legal lotteries and prostitution is questioned and not [as] profitable as it used to be."*⁷⁰

Police corruption is criticised by politicians and parliamentary commissions are severe in their reports.⁷¹ The press constantly denounces police violence.⁷² What must be recognised, however, is that police reform is far more difficult than military reform and that a wide political consensus is needed among all the major political parties to take the decision to end corruption. If such determination is seen to be lacking, this *"political debility"* of the system (as it is aptly described by former judge and Minister of Justice, L C Arslanian⁷³), a major risk to security, will persist; because a corrupted police structure threatens the state's ability to exercise its basic function. And this threat is even more dangerous when it issues from an armed structure that could be an imminent source of weapons proliferation.

Since the restoration of democracy, the press has been especially active in denouncing corruption and abuses of power. Hence, journalists have become a major target for threats, including death threats. According to the Human Rights Secretary of the Press Workers Union of Buenos Aires (UTPBA), between 1989 and January 1997, 720 journalists were victims of aggression, intimidation, or threats and two have been killed. Fifty per cent of the aggressive acts are physical and 27 per cent intimidations. Only in 7 per cent of the cases have arrests been made, although, since 1989, government officials have kept promising that every case will be *'thoroughly investigated'*.⁷⁴

CONCLUSION: THE NECESSITY FOR A PUBLIC DEBATE ON ARMS PROLIFERATION AS PART OF A GLOBAL SOLUTION

The increase in the crime rate and the state's inefficiency in putting a stop to crime is provoking public reaction. Some prefer civic forms of protest,⁷⁵ proof, among others, of the consolidation of the democratic culture and the progress of civil society. In other cases, the reaction is less satisfactory, especially when citizens tend to see the solution in buying guns, acting violently and justifying these actions on the grounds of self-defence; and even relying on private security. That, together with the increase in crime in its broadest sense, forms the new culture of violence that threatens the very notion of governance so central in countries that have completed the first stage of transition from military rule to a democratic regime and are at the next of consolidating the values of a pluralist society. Governance cannot be successful without social stability and economic development, neither of which can be achieved where security is lacking. Hence, security is a totality that, particularly in the Argentine case, involves encountering direct threats, such as international terrorism and drug smuggling, but also crime

with all its attendant aspects, from socio-economic conditions to police corruption and public reaction. The threat of weapons proliferation is but one of the components of this whole. To fight it in isolation will by no means bring about a miraculous solution. Moreover, at this stage, guns are mostly the result of a demand that is engendered by an emerging culture of violence. What is needed in the long term is to put an end to the very conditions that give rise to the culture of violence. This can best be achieved by a particular fusion in which state action is combined with a sound response on the part of civil society. Yet guns remain a vital component of the new culture of violence and their importance is ever-increasing. Easy access to guns is fomenting the culture of violence and creating the conditions for the perpetuation of crime. This fact should, in itself, be an issue for particular consideration within the context of the strategy of combined state-action/civil society-sound response. A public debate about arms legislation and gun-related matters could be a sound start for future deliberations regarding the sources for weapons proliferation. But the state is responsible for taking measures to fill the legal gaps and for acting decisively, on both a national and a regional level, to put an end to the availability and circulation of weapons.

ENDNOTES

1. Information published by **El Cronista** (Argentina), 22 November 1996.
2. R Saralegui, *Admitió el jefe de la Policía Federal que crecieron los robos*, **La Nación** (Argentina), 12 March 1997.
3. *La ciudad y el miedo de la furia*, **Clarín** (Argentina), 19 March 1997.
4. *Ciudad violenta*, **La Prensa** (Argentina), 20 December 1997.
5. "Civil wars raging throughout Central America and brutal military dictatorships in South America helped to cultivate a culture of violence, in which indiscriminate killings and massive human rights abuses were daily occurrences." M Klare and D Andersen, **A Scourge of Guns**, Arms Sales Monitoring Project, Federation of American Scientists, Washington, DC, 1996, p. 5.
6. A Pierini, *Violencia y poder legislativo*, **leras Jornadas Nacionales sobre Violencia**, Policía Federal Argentina, Buenos Aires, 7/8 September 1995.
7. R Trench, Director of the Department of Technical Affairs in the Secretariat for Security of the Republic of Argentina, interview in Buenos Aires, 13 February 1997.
8. During the so-called War of Chaco, Argentina served as a transit country for arms sent to Paraguay. Once the conflict was over, those guns made a clandestine re-entry into the country and ended up in the hands of the local mafias. A typical mafia weapon in the thirties and forties was the US Thompson machine-gun, used by the gangs in Rosario and popularly nicknamed the 'Piripipi'.
9. M M Ollier, **Las organizaciones armadas del peronismo revolucionario (1969-1973)**, M A thesis, FLACSO, Argentina, Buenos Aires, 1985, p. 8.
10. Interview in Buenos Aires, 29 November 1996.
11. The popular movement founded by Juan Domingo Perón that organised itself into a political party known as *Partido Justicialista*. This organisation contained left- and right-wing elements, which gave different interpretations to the political message of Perón and his second wife, Eva Duarte

(known as Evita), bloody confrontations often taking place as a result.

12. Ollier, op. cit., p. 12.
13. R Gillespie, **Soldados de Perón, los Montoneros**, Grijalbo, Buenos Aires, 1987, p. 74.
14. See Part I, note 25.
15. One of the founders and activist of this movement is the well known Catholic priest, Father Carlos Mugica, whose teachings are fundamental to the thinking of three *Montoneros* founders: Fernando Abal Medina, Carlos Gustavo and Ramus y Mario Firmenich. These three were students in the Nacional de Buenos Aires College in 1964 and active members of the *Juventud Estudiantil Católica*.
16. Lieutenant General M Balza, *The Argentinean Army in the 21st Century*, RUSI Journal, February 1997.
17. Interview in Buenos Aires, 29 November 1996, op. cit.
18. Ibid.
19. *La ORP, débiles estructuras*, **La Nación** (Argentina), 13 April 1996.
20. "*ORP, un grupo delirante*", **Crónica** (Argentina), 21 April 1996.
21. As a matter of fact, an Azzariti & Asociados public opinion poll shows that there is a wide suspicion that ORP's members are intelligence agents. See *Pocos creen que la ORP sea de izquierda*, **La Prensa** (Argentina), 19 May 1996.
22. An organisation that is under suspicion for being a subversive movement, although it is not clandestine, is the *Quebracho*. In recent years, especially during anti-governmental protests regarding questions mostly social, Quebracho's militants were always in the frontline, a fact that prompted the government to denounce the existence of conditions that might lead to the return of subversion. Claims El Kadri (Interview in Buenos Aires, 29 November 1996, op. cit.):
"*Quebracho's militants are mostly young people of humble origin in the poor suburbs of Buenos Aires and La Plata (capital of the province of Buenos Aires). They consider that democracy does not bring [the] desired solutions to social problems, hence think that a certain degree of violence that is generated because of the despair of people is permitted. But Quebracho is not an armed group and I do not think that its actions lead to armed resurrection. In fact, I am surprised that today's social violence does not lead to armed rebellion, but massive reactions no longer create revolutionary situations. Today, the violence of the most marginal sectors has a boomerang effect. What they steal gives them a day['s] meal.*"
23. A gendarmerie report, for instance in April of 1997, mentioned human rights organisations as responsible for a so-called resurgence of subversion during an unruly demonstration of school-teachers in the Neuquen province. The reaction of recognised human rights organisations, such as the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights, the Ecumenical Movement for Human Rights, was to make application to the court, for government evidence substantiating the information in the report. See *Reclamo judicial de la APDH*, **Clarín** (Argentina), 24 April 1997.
24. V G Massot, *Nuevos flagelos sociales*, **La Nación**, 2 December 1996.

25. Literally 'painted faces'. An extremist sector in the Argentine army that revolted against the constitutional order from April 1987 to December 1990, when the last attempt was successfully repressed. Since then, the leaders of the movement have been either imprisoned, or incorporated into the legal political process.
26. *Argentine Attitudes Towards Jews, Working Papers on Contemporary Anti-Semitism*, The American/Jewish Committee, Institute of Human Relations, New York, 1994, p. 3.
27. Reference to the cultural tradition created by the Argentine classical dance, the *tango*.
28. G Pasquini, *Droga en la Argentina: mentiras públicas, verdades privadas*, **La Nación** (Argentina), 8 December 1996.
29. Lieutenant Colonel C Pombo, Security Director of the Morón Municipality, interview in Morón (province of Buenos Aires), 13 January 1997.
30. Ibid.
31. Laws 21.521, 24.059 and 23.737.
32. Director of the institute SER en el 2 000, interview in Buenos Aires, 23 December 1996.
33. *Un problema práctico*, **La Nación** (Argentina), 12 December 1996.
34. A Pairone, *Terrorismo de tablón*, **La Prensa** (Argentina), 13 December 1994.
35. Reports in the Argentine press, mostly, **La Nación** (11 November 1996) and **Clarín** (13 November 1997).
36. **Clarín** (Argentina), 12 October 1996.
37. *Ciudad Oculta: la pobreza al descubierto*, **Viva**, 1 December 1996.
38. From records in **Página/12** (Argentina), 22 January 1997.
39. Villa de los Paraguayos, for instance, was the territory of Néstor 'Sopapita' Merlo, aged twenty-two, the rival of *El Loco* Jerry. 'Sopapita' was shot dead on 10 May 1996, by a neighbour from whom he committed the 'error' of stealing. During his short life he killed two police officers and an inhabitant of the 'enemy' neighbourhood of Carlos Gardel. His funeral was celebrated with shots in the air and marijuana smoking.
40. From records in **Clarín** (Argentina), 30 April 1997.
41. Interview in Morón, 13 January 1997.
42. **Clarín** (Argentina), 23 October 1996.
43. See file on: **La Nación Online**, <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/suples/revista/961006/r-14.htm>.
44. Ibid.

45. El Kadri, interview in Buenos Aires, 29 November 1997, op. cit.
46. From the report, *El empleo en la Argentina*, **Clarín** (Argentina), 4 December 1996.
47. *Flexibilización de hecho y precarización laboral*, **Clarín** (Argentina), 17 April 1997.
48. A Roffo, "Las clases sociales estean cambiando", interview in **Clarín** (Argentina), 19 January 1997.
49. S Rubín, *Obispos alertos por la violencia*, **Clarín** (Argentina), 24 April 1997.
50. **La Nación** (Argentina), 9 October 1996.
51. **La Nación**(Argentina), 10 July 1996.
52. **Página/12** (Argentina), 4 January 1997.
53. **Página/12** (Argentina), 31 May 1994.
54. **Página/12** (Argentina), 4 January 1997.
55. Interview in Buenos Aires, 27 December 1996.
56. Law 21.265.
57. See Part I, note 147.
58. J Palomar, *El negocio de la seguridad privada*, file on: **La Nación On Line**, <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/suples/revista/970309/r-58.htm>.
59. J R Casino, general manager of CAESI, interview in Buenos Aires, 30 December 1996.
60. Interview in Buenos Aires, 27 December 1996.
61. According to figures released, the death toll as a result of police violence in Buenos Aires and the Greater Buenos Aires Province from 1985 to 1995 was as follows:

1985: 97 1988: 133 1991: 108 1994: 124
1986: 227 1989: 113 1992: 102 1995: 195
1987: 135 1990: 84 1993:151
62. A nine-member gang was arrested in March 1994, two of whom were ex-policemen. The gang operated in the southern zone of the province and used Argentine army machine-guns. Three members of the Federal Police, an ex-guerrilla, two ex-army sub-officers and one Navy Intelligence service member formed another pirate gang that has been arrested. Drug-trafficking protection is estimated at about twelve million dollars per month, while each private apartment or sauna where prostitution is practised (some 700 and 400, respectively,) should pay between US\$ 1 000 and 1 500 per month in order to be able to work unhindered. See D Juri, *Crimen S.A. Los caminos del Infierno*, **Clarín**, **2ª Sección** (Argentina), 2 February 1997.

63. *La policía tiene muy mala imagen*, **La Nación** (Argentina), 24 February 1997.
64. *Qué debe hacerse con la policía*, **Página/12** (Argentina), 9 February 1997.
65. "La gente ve un patrullero y siente temor", **Clarín** (Argentina), 12 March 1997.
66. Interview in Morón, 13 January 1997.
67. Interview in Buenos Aires, 14 February 1997, op. cit.
68. Interview in Buenos Aires, 27 December 1997.
69. G Pasqini, *Crisis de la policía de Buenos Aires. Punto final*, file on: **La Nación On Line**, <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/suples/enfoques/970319/en-01.htm>.
70. Ibid.
71. *Proponen cambios en la seguridad*, **La Nación** (Argentina), 22 April 1997.
72. The **Clarín** editorial, 20 April 1997, *Cuando la policía balea a inocentes* ("When police shoot at innocent people") finds, for example, "Many of today's unfortunate episodes would not occur with a crime prevention policy, or with legal repression methods that obey the rules."
73. **Clarín**, 2a Sección (Argentina), 2 February 1997.
74. J Palomar, *Periodistas: las amenazas de cada día*, file on **La Nación On Line** (Argentina), <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/suples/revista/070223/r-53.htm>.
75. A Margulis, *Cuando los vecinos se cansan*, file on: **La Nación On Line**, <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/suples/revista/970112/r-41.htm>.

Part III Firearms in Rio De Janeiro: Culture, prevalence and control

Leandro Piquet Carneiro

INTRODUCTION

The sociological literature on crime and violence in Brazil gives little attention to the problem of firearms. At the same time, studies conducted in other countries reveal that the availability of firearms in the home, the illegal arms transfer process and even the lack of control of the use of firearms by police officers and other public officials are frequently linked to the increase in violence and crime and may, consequently, be considered a serious threat to public health.

While debates in the United States on firearm control policies have considerable impact on public opinion and on organised groups in civil society, in Brazil a law adopted in 1997 to limit the access of normal citizens to firearms was approved without demur.¹ The lack of interest relating to this issue was not only reflected in public opinion and in the actions of the legislators, but also in the pro- and anti-regulation movements of civil society.

Despite the apparent apathy on the part of pro-regulation movements, in recent years their activities have

increased to exceed the influence of those opposed to the adoption of legal measures aimed at controlling the sale, possession and use of firearms. Rio de Janeiro has been the scene of major initiatives in this area. Civic associations, the Brazilian Evangelical Association (AevB) and the *Movimento Vivo Rio* (Viva Rio Movement) have developed merit campaigns for disarmament, including radio and television public service broadcasts to educate the population about the risks of keeping a firearm in the home and, in particular, of using it in self-defence. The educational campaigns were discontinued, however, before their results could be evaluated.

The National Rifle Association (NRA) with its millions of members and more than a century of involvement, is the unrivalled leader of the anti-regulation movement in the United States. In Brazil, by contrast, it is the army that has, historically, influenced the regulation of firearms. The new legislation does not change this situation, although it does broaden the functions of the other agencies. Thus the army is responsible for the production, import and supply of firearms to be used by the state police, while the Federal Police and the Department of Justice are responsible for the development of the newly established National Arms System (SINARM). In addition, the presence of national executive agencies may be one of the factors that helps to explain the low priority of firearms regulations for the general public.

The disregard amongst policy makers, both for the issue of firearms control and for the sociological effects of crime and violence, is offset by the importance of Brazil in Latin America's market in military arms and equipment. Since it is the largest arms exporter in Latin America, followed by Mexico and Argentina, it might be reasonable to expect greater action from pro- and anti-regulation lobbies. Yet the apparent lack of interest could be explained by the fact that national production is geared towards export and domestic markets, represented by federal and state public security bodies, as well as by the private security industry, as opposed to civilian sales.

Finally, it is the extent of Brazil's problem which explains, in part, why firearms issues are almost absent from sociological thinking in that region. In the United States, research on victimisation estimates that 50 per cent of households have a firearm;² in the city of Rio de Janeiro, by contrast, a similar research project indicated a prevailing rate of 4,5 per cent. The observed rates in other Latin American cities confirm, in fact, that Rio is amongst those with the lowest rate of firearms in households. But it is the peculiar aspect of the firearms problem in Rio de Janeiro that is cause for concern. The issue of crime and violence does not arise from the legally purchased firearms that are kept in the home. It is the illegal transfer and sale of arms that represents the most urgent aspect of the problem. This is, moreover, a grey area, in which coercive legislation does not seem to have the desired results.

In part III this monograph presents a description of the use of firearms in criminal acts and violent interpersonal conflict. In addition, there is an analysis of the data on the availability of legal and illegal firearms in the Rio de Janeiro Metropolitan Region. The data that follow are, to a large extent, quoted from the report of a project co-ordinated by the Pan-American Health Organization, **Cultural Attitudes and Norms Resulting in Violence in Selected American Cities** (OPAS, ACTIVA Project), for which a representative sample of the population of the Rio de Janeiro Metropolitan Region between the ages of eighteen and seventy years was used.

Firearms in Crime and Interpersonal Violence

In Rio de Janeiro, firearms are used extensively in criminal activities and in violent acts against people. Three sources of information with similar characteristics were used to determine the extent of the problem: research on victimisation, the register of police statistics, and health statistics. According to recent research on victimisation,³ it is possible to estimate that between 8 and 10 per cent of the regional population were the victims of robberies during the twelve month period prior to the survey. In 61 per

cent of these robberies, a firearm was used (i.e., six times more frequently than knives, in this type of crime).⁴ The weapon chosen by the assailants had the advantage, from the aggressor's point of view, of reducing the resistance of the victim and facilitating the robbery. The disadvantage, from the victim's point of the view, was that the mortality rate is three times higher than in a knife attack.⁵ Furthermore, in the research on victimisation,⁶ it becomes evident that, within the period of twelve months, eight in every thousand people were injured by a firearm, compared to three in every thousand who were injured with knives. In other words, injuries by firearm were approximately three times more frequent than others (Table 1). It is interesting to bear in mind that the injuries inflicted by firearms are not only caused by criminals but, in many cases, by domestic or work accidents, or by violence between people who know one another.

TABLE 1

Firearms in Crime and Interpersonal Violence

FORMS OF VICTIMISATION ROBBERY	RATE PER 1 000 INHABITANTS
ACTIVA Research (18-70 years) armed robbery	
(firearm or knife)	64
Law, Justice and Citizenship (16 years or older)	
with a firearm	60
with a knife	10
without a weapon	27
INJURIES	
with a firearm	8
with a knife	3

Sources:

1 **Cultural Attitudes and Norms resulting in Violence in Selected American Cities**, Pan-American Health Organization and ISER, 1996.

2 **Law, Justice and Citizenship**, CPDOC-ISER, 1996.

Another source of information, the Brazilian Police Statistics Register, was also used in evaluating the prevalence of firearms in criminal activity. A simple model was set up establishing a correlation between various crimes. As a dependent variable, the number of occurrences with at least one seized firearm in each station in the Rio de Janeiro Municipality was used; as independent variables (i) the number of registered murders, (ii) the number of drug seizures, and (iii) the number of stolen vehicles in the same stations were used.

TABLE 2

Factors Correlated with the Presence of Firearms in Rio de Janeiro, 1993-1995

OLS REGRESSION RESULTS

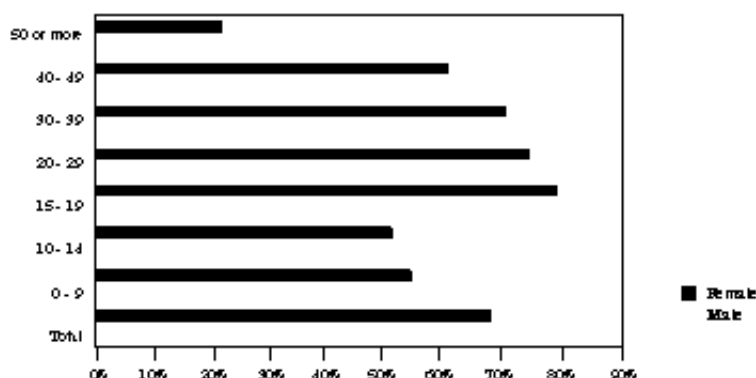
Independent Variables	Beta	Significance
Drugs	0,362	0,000
Murders	0,261	0,006
Stolen Vehicles	0,184	0,040
R2 = 0,34		

Source: Civil Police of Rio de Janeiro, 1993-95

It is interesting to perform an empirical test on the hypothesis that correlates the increase in murders committed with firearms with the increase in drug trafficking.⁷ The results in Table 2 indicate that a better indicator in the firearms seizure by the police (an indicator in the distribution of illegal firearms in the city) is, firstly, the number of drug seizures, and, secondly, the number of murders. The combination of drugs and firearms would explain the high mortality rate in the conflicts between youths for the control of drug sales points.⁸

The figures for 1993 of the Mortality Information Systems (SIM) of the Ministry of Health indicate that 82 per cent of the murders in Rio de Janeiro (including the rural areas and inland cities) were committed with firearms. Based on a sample of 496 police enquiries into murders committed in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, Soares estimates this rate to be 91,5 per cent.⁹ According to the SIM data, the murders committed with firearms correspond to 89 per cent of the total murders and to 40 per cent of the deaths by external causes¹⁰ between men of fifteen to nineteen years old. On a total of murders the proportion committed with a firearm drops gradually, as the ages of the victims increase, both among men and women. Therefore fifteen to nineteen is the age group in which men are most likely to be the victims of murders committed with firearms. The longitudinal analysis of murders indicates a deterioration in the situation: between 1979 and 1986 the murders in this age group increased by 136 per cent.¹¹ Although men older than fifty are less likely to become murder victims, it is in this age group that we note the biggest discrepancy between men and women: men are 3,3 times more at risk of being murdered with a gun than women. Yet, between the ages of fifteen and nineteen years (Graph 1), women are also more at risk of meeting the same fate.

Graph 1: Homicides with Firearms as a Percentage of the Total Number of Homicides



This brief survey on the presence of firearms in crime raises other questions. What weapons are used? What are their origins? What is the explanation for the long route that leads from the manufacturer to the criminal in the streets and suburbs of Rio?

During the last two years, the Rio de Janeiro police have seized 430 weapons that were in illegal circulation or in the possession of criminals. The Arms and Explosives Supervisory Division (DFAE) stockpiles the seized arms, although it does not possess a computerised system or any statistics that allow for the recovery of the make, model or the origin of these arms. According to information obtained from the Civil Police, the best seized firearms are, in many cases, used to equip the police force, thereby

hampering the recovery of information. The absence of a control system for seized weapons severely limits research on the topic. It is, therefore, impossible to offer a complete picture on the distribution of makes and models of illegal arms seized in the city based on police information. Apart from the unsatisfactory manner in which this information is classified, a further obstacle is the culture of local police institutions that considers the information on its activities, which are a service in the public interest, as the private property of the police.

To overcome the lack of information on illegal arms an alternative method of research was undertaken. A specific type of firearm was selected after which information was compiled on its origin and the probable route it followed before arriving in Rio. A Swiss-manufactured firearm was chosen for the following reasons: first, following a popular initiative aimed at banning the export of all weapons and military equipment, Switzerland recently held a referendum (June 1997) on the export of military material. In an effort to get the support of the Swiss voters, information was supplied regarding the presence of Swiss manufactured firearms used by dictatorships or in criminal activities in countries in the southern hemisphere. Useful information was produced regarding the presence of Swiss arms in various parts of the world, Brazil, in particular. Secondly, despite speculation by the local police that superior weapons are used by criminal groups, it is rare to find expensive, high-quality weapons, such as pistols and Sig-Sauer rifles, among the firearms seized by the police. Therefore, a small number of Swiss firearms located in DFAE made the gathering of the primary information possible from the case records. Finally, as the main aim of the research is to draw conclusions on the transfer process of illegal arms into Rio de Janeiro, this small sample was enough to develop possible hypotheses on the routes used.

In short, the following are the features of the seized firearms:

- in 1995 and 1996, five Swiss-made Sig-Sauer firearms were seized in Rio, which corresponds to one per cent of the total for seized arms for the same period;
- a .223 mm rifle was seized from a minor;
- among the seized arms, five assault rifles (.223 and 7.62 mm) and a 9 mm semi-automatic pistol were found. The prevalence of assault rifles is an important indicator that these illegal arms were probably not procured for self-defence.

An hypothesis on the routes followed may be formulated in the following manner:

Hypothesis 1: an investigation by journalist Daniel Schuppli identifies Paraguay as a port of entry into Brazil for illegal Swiss arms. The Sig-Sauer arms were sold legally to Paraguayan dealers who, in turn, sold them to Brazilian buyers responsible for their illegal introduction into Brazil.¹² Obviously the journalistic nature of Schuppli's work requires further investigation if this hypothesis is to be proved.

The accumulated information on the cycle of drugs on the continent allows for the formulation of a second hypothesis on the route used for the illegal arms transfer into Rio de Janeiro:

Hypothesis 2: in a recent study on the routes used for drug trafficking in Brazil, Machado recalls that "the routes and corridors used for drug smuggling serve a dual purpose; for smuggling gold, electronic products, merchandise (coffee, soya), stolen vehicles, in exchange for coca, cocaine, arms or industrial products".¹³ Since the routes for the chemical products used to refine cocaine and for the circulation of the drug itself do not necessarily include Paraguay,¹⁴ it may be concluded that Paraguay is not one of the cocaine refinement centres. A broader hypothesis therefore has to be developed on the routes used as ports of entry for illegal arms into Brazil, and consequently, into Rio de Janeiro. Taking into account the dual nature of the drug routes, the focus should be on the production and the refinement centres,

especially of cocaine. Due to the extent of its borders with Brazil, the continuous military activity of its political groups and its conspicuous participation in the refinement and export of cocaine and other drugs, it appears that Colombia might be the main port of entry of arms into Brazil.

The above-mentioned hypotheses are not mutually exclusive. The first is the most adequate explanation for the presence of expensive firearms which are produced in countries that exercise strict controls on the smuggling of these weapons abroad (such as the Swiss firearms found in the DFAE warehouse). The second hypothesis may be useful, above all, in explaining the presence of cheaper weapons manufactured in countries that have little or no arms export controls. This seems to be the case with the Russian AK-47 semi-automatic assault rifles, or even the American AR-15 rifles.

The available data on the transfer of arms and military equipment into Latin America reveal another dimension on the problem of illegal arms in the region. Although the military regimes in Latin America have ended, thereby reducing the entry of arms into the region, the peace process in El Salvador and Nicaragua, which was initiated in the second half of the eighties, is the main reason for the spread of assault weapons on the black markets throughout the entire continent.

Although a decrease in the import of arms and military equipment by Latin American countries between 1983 and 1993¹⁵ has been recorded, the former USSR and the United States transferred a considerable amount of weaponry and military equipment into the region. The USSR was responsible for the transfer of US \$815 million in weaponry and military equipment into Cuba, Nicaragua and Peru between 1987 and 1994. The US was the second largest exporter, transferring US \$695 million in arms and military equipment to different Latin American countries, especially Colombia (US \$160 million) and El Salvador (US \$120 million).¹⁶ This information, however, only explains the presence of Soviet AK-47s and US AR-15 rifles into Brazil.

In short, it is suggested that various routes are used for the illegal transfer of weapons to Rio de Janeiro, and that each type of weapon follows a particular route. Drug-trafficking organisations alone are not responsible for the maintenance of these routes. The inefficient patrol systems at harbours, airports and roads, associated with the high levels of corruption among various police officials involved in the combating of arms and drug trafficking, guarantee the conditions for illicit arms trafficking into Brazil. Rio de Janeiro, a city which is far from the production and refinement centres of cocaine, is a secondary route for the circulation of those arms which follow drug-trafficking routes. With a small consumer market, the importance of the variable of organised crime to explain arms trafficking tends to take second place to the existence of inefficient control systems. However, this is an area that requires additional research to broaden the available knowledge.

Firearms as Defence Against Crime

The use of firearms as objects of self-defence is a controversial issue, debated by formulators of public policy.¹⁷ While many claim that a firearm in the home is an instrument of defence against crime, others believe it is a source of continuous risk to its owner. The difference between Brazil and the United States, as far as the debate goes on policies regulating the right of ownership and carrying of a weapon, cannot be over emphasised. In Brazil, the debates on the recent changes in legislation included only a few organisations of civil society who were clearly pro-regulation, and specific sectors of the public bureaucracy, thereby marginalising public opinion. Throughout the entire legislative process there was an absence of protests or demonstrations by organisations and associations to defend the rights of firearm owners and users. However, a 'silent minority' of current and potential firearm users is to be found in the large Brazilian cities, in addition to Rio de Janeiro. Owners believe that firearms make homes safer and that carrying a firearm increases a person's safety. Comparative research in homes indicates that 4,5 per cent of all households in the Rio Metropolitan region have a firearm,¹⁸ while in the United States an

estimated 50 per cent of all American households have one.¹⁹ Of the five Latin American cities studied (Caracas, Santiago, Cali, San Salvador and Rio), Rio de Janeiro is the one with lowest proportion of households owning firearms and the lowest tendency to purchase them.²⁰

The belief in the efficiency of a firearm as an instrument of self-defence is much greater among those who already have one at home. In Rio de Janeiro, 11 per cent of the population agree that the carrying of a firearm increases the individual's safety, whereas 19 per cent believe that a firearm makes the home more secure. The proportion of persons who agree that the possession of a firearm makes the individual and the home safer is three times greater among those who have a firearm at home.

One of the most frequently cited reasons for the need to have a firearm in the home is 'personal protection'.

Table 4

Reasons for Keeping a Firearm in the Home

	The main reason for keeping a firearm in the home %
Sport/ Hunting	2,2%
Personal Protection	61,4%
Professional Activity	36,4%
Total:	100% (n=50)

Source: G Kleck, *Crime Control Through the Private Use of Armed Force*, **Social Problems** 35, February 1988.

Before any conclusion may be drawn from these results, it is necessary to examine the meaning of the phrase 'personal protection'. The expression may reflect different attitudes: protection against someone who is threatening the respondent; protection against rival groups and so forth. In the United States this percentage is 20 per cent lower,²¹ which means that in Rio de Janeiro there is a greater potential use of firearms in response to attacks or during interpersonal conflicts. Yet sociological studies on crime and violence in Rio de Janeiro practically disregard this problem in their analysis. It was impossible to find any other analysis regarding Brazil and the presence of firearms in the home or any on the use of firearms to deter crime. Use has, therefore, been made of the data of **National Crime Survey** in the United States and other studies carried out in American cities to provide evidence for the risks associated with the presence of firearms in the home.

The Kleck study, aimed at evaluating the probability of the use of firearms in self-defence in the US, indicates that there is a minimum probability of a firearm owner using a weapon in self-defence against a criminal or in a violent act. The percentage of victims using their own guns varies from 1,2 per cent for general robberies to 4,6 per cent in the case of house robberies perpetrated by strangers.²² A study on the victims of robberies recorded by the Chicago police in 1975 describes the following trade-off between the self-defence measures used against crime (use of a weapon against the assailant, for example) and the chances of victimisation: the victim's reaction slightly decreases the probability of the aggressor completing the robbery and severely increases the probability of injury or death of the victim.²³ Kellerman and Reay, in their study on the characteristics of the type of deaths occurring from firearms, confirm that in households with a firearm it is eighteen times more likely that the firearm will be used against a member of the household than against a stranger.²⁴

It is suggested here that a factor which needs to be adequately described and analysed, with the aim of

supporting effective policies for the control of violence, is the presence of firearms in the household. According to a study performed by Soares, 20 per cent of the murder cases in Rio de Janeiro occur in the course of interpersonal conflict.²⁵ During the last three years, according to Civil Police data, an average of 8,188 murders were committed in the state of Rio. Therefore, it is possible to estimate that approximately 1 600 murders committed each year are not directly related to drug trafficking, organised crime or other criminal acts. These are as a result of conflict, such as disputes between neighbours, marital violence and outbursts of anger in traffic. In the absence of an hypothesis on the causes of such murders, an argument can be made for cultural factors being taken into account in any initiative to explain the phenomenon. Among these we must include attitudes and actions relating to firearms. A table will illustrate the characteristics of firearm owners in the Rio de Janeiro Metropolitan area. The selected variables are only an attempt to introduce the reader to a brief description of the problem. Future analyses may certainly reveal other equally important variables for an understanding of the phenomenon.

From this sequence of varied links a schematic description of the firearm owner may be compiled. The significant correlations detected indicate that the firearm owner is typically male, the head of a household or he lives in a household where the head is a male, over thirty years old, of average schooling and occupies a non-manual position.

The profile of the potential firearm owner involves other social dimensions. The intention to acquire a firearm is greater among young white men whose religious participation is minimal and who manifest aggressive behavioural tendencies towards strangers. The tendency to purchase arms is also greater among women who are battered by their spouses, but any attempt to interpret these results should take into account a further theoretical hypothesis on the aggressive behaviour of women in marriage, which we do not have at our disposal.

Varied analysis techniques may be used to perfect the above-mentioned profiles. Despite the temporary nature of these results, it is possible to point out important asymmetries between the profiles of owners and the profiles of potential owners. There are only a few legal owners in Rio (4,5 per cent of the respondents said they had a gun at home, thus representing a good estimate in the number of legal weapons in the city), but the number of persons that indicated a desire to own a firearm is three times greater and represents up to 15,5 per cent of the population. The results allow for an evaluation of the probable effect of changes in the conditions of available firearms: cheaper firearms or legislation that makes it easier to purchase them may mean more firearms in the hands of the youth or even in the hands of people with aggressive behavioural tendencies.

Therefore, the literature on this issue raises the following questions. What should be expected from legislation which regulates public access to firearms? How may one prevent firearms in the home from becoming an element of risk to their owners?

Final Considerations: Control Strategies

Brazil has a long tradition of control policies on the ownership and carrying of firearms. The origins of this tradition date back to the times of the Empire. The monarchy that succeeded Portuguese colonial rule maintained a strict control on the use of weapons by citizens in the capital of Rio de Janeiro. Firearms owned by civilians were considered a disturbing element to the social and political order and were the subject of restrictive legislation.²⁶ The republican tradition did not alter the regulatory culture inherited from the monarchy which saw the armed citizen, above all, as a threat to the state.²⁷ The adoption of a federal political system, after the proclamation of the Republic, meant the gradual decentralisation of the legislative process on the issue and in legislation subsequently adopted the authority of the army has been protected as the sole public agency responsible for the regulation of the production and use of firearms and ammunition, as expressed in the adopted measures during the dictatorships of the Republic (1930-

1945 and 1964-1935). Decree 1.246 of December 1936 guaranteed the monopoly of the Ministry of the Army over all the activities relating to the control of import, sales and use of firearms. At the same time, Decree 55.649 of 28 January 1965 imposed new restrictions on the use of firearms by citizens and extended the army's control over the manufacture,²⁸ export, import and sales of arms.²⁹ Legislation further consolidated the market reserve for the national producers, guaranteeing military control on the process of establishing new foreign subsidiary companies. A prerequisite for the establishment of new companies in Brazil was the nationalisation of production and the "*influence that company production may have on the established industries in the country*".³⁰

TABLE 5

Profile of Current and Potential Firearm Owners

	Has a firearm at home	Wishes to own a firearm
AGE*+ Under 30 Over 30	2,3 5,5	25,8 10,7
GENDER OF THE HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD Male(a)* Female	5,5 1,2	15,1 16,7
GENDER OF RESPONDENT*+ Male Female	6,5 3,0	23,1 9,7
SOCIO-EDUCATIONAL LEVEL(b)* Average-high Average Low	6,5 9,4 2,1	10,2 15,8 18,6
COLOUR(c)+ Black Coloured White	5,7 4,4 4,7	6,1 17,2 15,6
RELIGIOUS PARTICIPATION(d)+ Medium-high Low or none	3,9 4,9	11,1 18,0
PHYSICAL AGGRESSION AGAINST SPOUSE (BOTH GENDERS) (e)+ Reported aggression No aggression Male - reported aggression Male - no aggression Female - reported aggression + Female - no aggression	5,3 5,7	25,0 13,2 23,1 18,2 26,1 8,8
AGGRESSION AGAINST STRANGERS+ Reported aggression No aggression		

Technical Notes: *equivalent to 5% (selected variable x availability of a firearm)
+ equivalent to 5% (selected variable x desire to own a firearm)

Key to Table 5

a) The definition used for a *head of the household* corresponds to the definition adopted by the Brazilian Institute for Geography and Census statistics of 1991.

(b) The *socio-educational* definitions include the variables of occupation and schooling. Under *average-high* are included people with tertiary education who hold posts in government and administration; who are liberal professionals, employers, qualified public officials and other qualified white-collar workers. Under *average* are included persons with eight years of schooling or more, who have a qualified white-collar occupation. Under *low* are included the respondents with less than eight years schooling, who have blue-collar occupations.

(c) The classification of the respondents' *race* was established according to the question, "*Which of these options would best describe you?*" Apart from the three presented in the table, indigenous, Asian, coloured (mixed race of white and Indian) were indicated.

(d) *Average-high religious participation* corresponds to the regularity with which the person practises a religion more than once a month. *Low* or *none* indicates less than once a week, or that the person does not practise any religion at all.

(e) (i) Physical aggression against a spouse is based on the answers to the following questions:

1 How many times have you beaten your partner or spouse during the last twelve months?

2 How many times have you beaten your partner or spouse with an object that could have caused an injury during the last twelve months?

Answer scale: "*frequently*", "*sometimes*", "*rarely*", "*never during the last 12 months*".

(e)(ii) Aggression against strangers is based on the answers to the following questions:

1 How many times have you insulted someone who is not a family member during the last twelve months?

2 How many times have you attacked someone who is not a family member during the last twelve months?

3 How many times have you asked someone to act against a person who is not family during the last twelve months?

Answer scale: "*frequently*", "*sometimes*", "*rarely*", "*never during the last 12 months*".

The main changes to firearm legislation in Brazil occurred in 1980, 1987 and 1997.³¹ The Decree of 1980 stipulated the number of firearms that an individual could purchase annually and defined the special criteria that related to athletes in training and military purposes. In 1987 the use of 9 mm semi-automatic firearms was legalised, a change in the legislation that foresaw the power of the national firearm manufacturers' lobby.³² The Act of 1997 is certainly the most restrictive legislation in Brazil: it creates a National Arms System (SINARM),³³ forcing owners to re-register their firearms, limiting the use of firearms, increasing the sentences for crimes committed with a firearm, and preventing the sale of counterfeits.

In short, the development of the Brazilian legislation on the use of firearms is characterised by two long-term trends. First, there is a continuous restriction on the civilian's right to use firearms. The focus of the legislation has shifted from a concern for political stability to a strategy for controlling crime, with one basic principle: the control of civilian access to firearms. If 'national security' was threatened before by

military activity from left-wing groups, today success at the polls depends on the control of new urban phenomena – closely scrutinised by public opinion – which manifest themselves in an increase in the number of murders, crimes against property and the activities of organised crime.

Secondly, different laws seek to guarantee the special rights of public officials to possess and use firearms: military officials, civilian and military police, members of the fire brigade, judges, attorneys, public defenders, federal and state congressmen and prison guards, who are among the classified authorised public officials who may purchase, carry and use firearms. They are also authorised to purchase more ammunition than other citizens and to purchase up to three firearms a year.

This dichotomy has been present in all firearm legislation since the 1930s. Even the legislation produced in the context of the present democracy and clearly reflecting an anti-crime concern maintains the disequilibrium between citizens and certain classes of public officials characteristic of the legislation under previous dictatorships, where the problem of political stability, namely the control of armed political groups, formed the core of the government agenda. The legislation adopted in 1997 perpetuates, in many ways, this inequality: it imposes prison sentences of one to two years for carrying or even possessing a firearm without state authorisation. In other words, while the current legislation, like the previous, tries to restrict the right of the ordinary citizen to use firearms, even punishing such behaviour, it reneges on its responsibility to regulate many sectors of the state bureaucracy. Public officials with clear powers such as military police or public prosecutors are guaranteed the right to carry firearms even off duty.

This discrepancy in the treatment between citizens and public officials does not prevent new legislation aimed at limiting the ownership and use of firearms from having a positive impact on public health (to the extent that it reduces the chances of domestic violence, for example). This is, moreover, an important complement to the crime control strategies. What escapes the focus of legislation, however, and what may be identified as one of the sources of the present public security crisis in Brazil, are acts of corruption and abuse perpetrated by public officials responsible for the maintenance of law and order.

ENDNOTES

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1. Act 9.437, February 1997.
2. R E Nisbett and D Cohen, **Culture of Honor: The Psychology of Violence in the South**, Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 1996, p. 13.
3. **Cultural Attitudes and Norms resulting in Violence in Selected American Cities**, Pan-American Health Organization (OPAS, ACTIVA Project), 1996; and **Law, Justice and Citizenship**, CP DOC-ISER, 1996.
4. **Law, Justice and Citizenship** op. cit.
5. A J Reiss and J A Roth, **Understanding and Preventing Violence: Panel on the Understanding and Control of Violent Behavior**, National Academy Press, Washington D C, 1993, p. 263.

6. OPAS, ACTIVA Project 1996, op. cit.
7. L E Soares, *Mapeamento da criminalidade letal*, in **Violência e Política no Rio de Janeiro**, L E Soares (editores), Rio de Janeiro, Relume Dumará e ISER, 1996, p. 217-242; A Zaluar, *A globalização do crime e os limites da explicação local*, in G Velho and M Alvito (editores), **Cidadania a Violência**, UFRJ Editora, Rio de Janeiro, 1996, p. 48-68.
8. Soares, op. cit., p. 237.
9. Op. cit., p. 235.
10. For the causes of death included as 'External Causes', consult the **International Disease Classification System**.
11. J Yunes and D Rajs, *Tendencia de la Mortalidad por Causas Violentas en la Poblacion General y entre los Adolescentes y Jovenes de la Region de las Américas*, **Caldernos de Saúde Pública**, 10(1), p. 88-125, 1994, at p. 110.
12. D Schuppli, *Sturmgewehr 90 im Drogenkrieg*, **Mosquito** 1(6-8), 1997.
13. L O Machado, **Movimento de Dinheiro e Tráfico de Drogas: Uma Abordagem Regional**, 1997, p. 7.
14. Op. cit. , Map 1.
15. Annual Average Figure on the Export and Import of Firearms in Selected Countries in Latin America and the USA (millions of dollars at 1993 prices)

	COUNTRY	1983-89	1990-93	PERIOD VARIATION
Imports				
	USA	2351	1729	-26%
	BRAZIL	195	161	-18%
	VENEZUELA	313	132	-58%
	COLOMBIA	207	58	-72%
	PERU	239	45	-81%
	ARGENTINA	471	19	-96%
	PARAGUAY	15	5	-66%
	COSTA RICA	5	0	-100%
Exports				
	USA	14611	11685	-20%
	BRAZIL	537	101	-81%
	ARGENTINA	84	11	-88%

Source: U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers, Washington, DC, 1994, Table II.

16. U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, 1994, op. cit.
17. Nisbett, op. cit., 1996.
18. These figures seem reliable only to estimate the legal weapons in circulation. They are probably an underestimation of the total quantity of firearms, as the owners of illegal firearms tend not to report the presence of firearms in their homes. OPAS, ACTIVA research , op. cit.

19. Nisbett, op. cit., 1996, p. 13.
 20. R Briceño-Leon, L P Carneiro, L Velez, M C Alas, H Oviedo and A Mc Alister, *Comparando Violencia y Confianza en la Policia en America Latina*, **Revista Venezolana de Economia e Política**, 1997, Table 3.
- | | Has a firearm at home | Does not have a firearm at home | Total |
|---|-----------------------|---------------------------------|-------|
| Carrying a firearm makes the person safe | 34,0% | 10,0% | 11,1% |
| ... does not make the person safe | 0,0% | 2,2% | 2,1% |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| n= | 50 | 1063 | 1113 |
| Keeping a firearm at home makes the home safe | 54,0% | 17,2% | 18,8% |
| ... does not make it safe | 10,0% | 2,5% | 2,9% |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| N= | 50 | 1065 | 1015 |
21. Figures for 1979 quoted by Reiss and Roth, op. cit., 1993, p. 264.
 22. G Kleck, *Crime Control Through the Private Use of Armed Force*, **Social Problems**, 35, February 1988.
 23. M G Yeager, J Alviani and N Loving, How well does the Handgun protect You and Your Family?, in **The Gun Control Debate**, L Niesbet (ed.), Prometheus Books, Buffalo, N Y, 1990, p. 224.
 24. A L Kellermann and D T Reay, *Protection or Peril? An Analysis of Fire-Arm-Related Deaths in the Home*, in **The Gun-Control Debate**, L Niesbet (ed.), Prometheus Books, Buffalo, N Y, 1990, p. 242. Excluded from this statistic is the use of firearms in suicides.
 25. Soares, op. cit., 1996, Table 18.
 26. T H Holloway, **Politicia no Rio de Janeiro: Repressão e Resistência numa Cidade do Século XIX**, Fundação Getúlio Vargas, Rio de Janeiro, 1997.
 27. This observation was made by Professor Jose Murilo de Carvalho – it was presented at a seminar of the Law and Liberty Forum, focusing on the debate of recent Brazilian legislation on firearms. In this section advocate Jose Carlos Fragoso presented a critical exposition on the newly adopted legislation.
 28. During this period, the firearm industry was being developed in Brazil, the weapons being destined for the export market and to meet the domestic demand of the armed forces and the police.
 29. Article 21.
 30. Article 48.
 31. Decree 1.261 and Decree 1.237 and Act 9.437, respectively.

32. At that time, Taurus, Rossi and CBC; subsequently, Taurus bought up Rossi.

33. The objectives of SINARM (see Government Gazette, Act 9.437) are:

1. to identify the characteristics and the ownership of firearms in a register;
2. to register the firearms that are produced, imported and sold in Brazil;
3. to register the transfer of ownership, the loss, theft and robbery etc;
4. to identify changes that alter the characteristics and operations;
5. to integrate into the register the current police arsenals;
6. to register seized firearms.

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