Conflicts and Transfers of Small Arms

Pieter D. Wezeman

sipri
Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
Signalistgatan 9, SE-169 70 Solna, Sweden

March 2003
Contents

I. Introduction
   I.1. Structure of the report

II. The small arms debate
   II.1. Illicit and legal transfers of weapons
   II.2. Definitions of weapon categories
   II.3. Major weapons or small arms

III. The problem of arms transfer data availability
   III.1. Government-supplied data on arms transfers
   III.2. Public data sets on global arms transfers
   III.3. Conclusion on data availability

IV. Arms transfers to violent conflicts
   IV.1. Motives for restraint and supply

V. Conclusion

I. Introduction

Many factors determine both the start and the resolution of wars. Although opinions differ on exactly how, the availability of arms is generally considered a significant factor that influences the development of violent conflicts. The proliferation of arms is therefore a major issue in the debate on conflict prevention and resolution. In some cases, arms are produced by the actors involved in conflicts, but in many cases such actors are dependent on foreign suppliers for many or all of their arms acquisitions. The way in which arms proliferate through international transfers and the consequences of such transfers are thus important research and policy issues.

Recently, one particular category of weapons —small arms and light weapons— has received growing attention from researchers and policy makers because the presence of these weapons is perceived as an especially important factor for the outbreak, continuation and intensification of most current violent conflicts. This attention has resulted in a range of efforts to collect empirical material on the production, transfer and storage of small arms, with the intention of supporting assumptions on the role of small arms in conflicts. These assumptions have been the foundation for a number of proposals for controlling the spread of small arms.

In this report, which is the final product of a project sponsored by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a contribution will be made to the debate on small arms transfers to conflict areas. This contribution in turn forms part of the international debate on the impact of small arms and light weapons on crime and conflict in general.

During the collection of empirical facts for this report, it became clear that one shortfall of the small arms debate is the strong distinction made between the role of small arms transfers and that of transfers of other weapons in the development of current conflicts. Although in some cases small arms might be more important instruments of violence than in others, in general all arms are important in violent conflict. This report therefore goes beyond the issue of small arms and includes transfers of other conventional weapons in its analysis. This is relevant to SIPRI’s own more than 30 years’ experience of monitoring arms transfers and highlights one major weakness of that monitoring effort, namely, the strong focus on major conventional weapons.

I.1. Structure of the report

The report is presented in three sections. The first section includes a short description of the small arms debate. Special attention is given to the current focus on illicit transfers within this debate and the problem of defining small arms. Finally, this section assesses whether there are essential differences between small arms and major weapons with respect to transfers, use and conflicts. For the purpose of understanding the role of arms transfers in the development of most current violent conflicts, should we look at small arms as a specific category, or should we look at arms in general?

If further research and policy debates are to result in successful plans for action, reliable, viable and impartial information on the frequency, size and underlying motivations for arms transfers is needed. The second section therefore describes data problems regarding arms transfers. The report explores what kinds of arms transfer
data are collected and how further improvements in arms transfer transparency and consistent long-term monitoring can be achieved.

Because of a lack of available data, it is not possible to create overviews or complete, valid statistics on weapon flows to all actors in conflict areas. Anecdotal information is available, however, and is used in the third section to describe how actors in recent intra-state wars have obtained weapons through international arms transfers. This information includes the issue of who supplies arms to whom and the motives of the suppliers. It informs the debate on the impact of arms transfers on wars, which in turn informs the debate on the control of arms flows. The section includes general observations regarding actors in conflicts and their weapons and the relationships between arms recipients and suppliers. It also includes a discussion on different perceptions of how such weapon supplies affect conflicts.

The report’s conclusions include suggestions for further research and policy development.
II. The small arms debate

The end of the cold war changed perceptions about the incidence and nature of violent conflict. The reduction of East–West tensions made it possible to divert resources for activities aimed at addressing these tensions to projects that were concerned with other tensions. It also drove institutions preoccupied with the disappearing East–West tension to search for other issues that could provide legitimacy for their existence. Consequently, an increased and different type of attention was given to conflicts elsewhere in the world, and the prevalence of intra-state conflict became a central issue.

One result of this increased interest in active conflicts and their origins was the production of assessments of the role and types of weapons used. Several studies published since the early 1990s have concluded that small arms, not major weapons, are predominantly used in current conflicts. This has led to a specific debate and to government action in which the category of small arms and light weapons is considered a specific problem in itself.1

This debate has been characterized by a considerable amount of well-meaning but also meaningless rhetoric. Small arms were declared ‘the weapons of choice’ in conflicts, even though it is very likely that they are only weapons of opportunity. Many combatants would probably rather have had—but could not afford—more powerful weapons to fight their wars. Small arms have been called ‘weapons of mass destruction’ because they have been the prime weapon used in the killing of thousands of people in conflicts. This belief dissipates existing concepts of weapons of mass destruction and blurs the context of policy, in which different classes of weapons need to be handled along different normative and legal as well as practical lines.

This rhetoric forms only the outer shell of a serious discussion which combines a range of important topics that are considered to be related to small arms proliferation and are therefore placed in the issue category of ‘small arms’. The most important and useful effect of this debate is the continued push it gives to efforts to address the question of how to deal with the tools of violence. As a result of the small arms debate, the control of small arms proliferation and availability has come to be considered a significant instrument for conflict prevention and resolution. Important issues in the discussion are the use of small arms in conflicts; the availability, demobilization and collection of small arms in post-conflict situations; and, as discussed in this report, the supply of small arms through international transfers.

As part of the small arms debate, a wide variety of international organizations, governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have urged action against the spread of small arms. Their efforts have included discussions on and actual measures related to controlling and stemming international flows of small arms to conflict areas.

---

Starting points for further action to address the negative effects of the spread of small arms have been provided notably by the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects\(^2\) and by documents adopted in regional forums such as the Organization of African Unity (OAU—now the African Union), the Organization of American States (OAS), the European Union (EU), and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). These documents form the basis for concrete steps to address the negative effects of the spread of small arms and light weapons.\(^3\)

However, one can question some of the assumptions and concepts that are the foundation for this international attention and related actions. This is especially the case for the part of the small arms debate that deals with international transfers of such weapons. The first major questions concern the strong focus on the *illicit* supply of weapons in the intergovernmental initiatives mentioned above.

### II.1. Illicit and legal transfers of weapons

A major conceptual problem in current intergovernmental debate on small arms remains the distinction between legal and illicit trade. The Guidelines for International Arms Transfers agreed in 1991 by the UN General Assembly include the following definition of illicit arms trafficking: ‘that international trade in conventional arms which is contrary to the laws of states and/or international law’.\(^4\) The problem with this definition is that while international law may be generally accepted, national laws differ considerably from country to country. As with most international policy debates on the control of specific products or behaviour, countries have greatly divergent views on what constitutes undesirable arms transfers and therefore on what should be considered legal or illegal. For example, the transfer of weapons from Sweden to Sudan would not currently be authorized by the Swedish Government and would therefore be illegal under Swedish law. Arms transfers to Sudan have taken place from Russia with the authorization of the Russian Government, however, and are therefore legal. While these differences are obvious, few efforts have been made to take them into account in the small arms debate.

The few existing definitions of the illicit arms trade are either based on the behaviour of recipients and their actual use of the weapons; or are aimed at blocking supplies to specific actors, whether states, rebel groups or individuals, regardless of how such actors use their weapons.

In the first approach, some argue that in cases in which international law and the laws of states are inconsistent—for example, if a state allows extra-judicial executions—then it is the core values embodied in international law which take

---


\(^3\) See ‘Tackling the small arms problem: multilateral measures and initiatives’, Small Arms Survey 2001 (note 2) for an overview of international efforts to address the negative effects of the spread of small arms and light weapons.

precedence. This would legitimize the blocking of arms supplies to all actors who use or are expected to use such weapons in human rights abuses, acts of aggression and in contradiction to the law of war. Such an approach could even oblige countries to block such supplies.

The second approach does not consider specific behaviour as the basis for determining illicitness. Instead, it aims to single out certain actors as illicit recipients of arms. For example, in the Secretary General’s report on small arms of September 1999, illicit small arms trafficking is in effect defined as a function of its users. The report states: ‘The consultations identified the following categories of “clients” of illicit small arms trafficking: armed groups; criminal organizations; terrorists; individual criminals; private security services; mercenaries; and private citizens’. Governments are not mentioned as potential clients of illicit small arms trafficking. The report of the UN Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms implies that weapon transfers between governments are legal by stating that ‘much of the supply and acquisition of small arms and light weapons is legitimate trade which occurs among Governments or among legal entities authorized by Governments’.

To add to the confusion, there remains a lack of clarity about the difference between ‘illicit’ and ‘illegal’. The aforementioned expert panel report states: ‘During the cold war and in the current period, States have secretly carried out transfers of small arms and light weapons. Such transfers are not necessarily illicit. Any transfer not approved by the competent authorities in the recipient State could, however, be classified by that State as interference in its internal affairs and therefore illegal.’

Attempting to arrive at a common definition of illicit arms transfers clearly poses several problems. Questions arise such as: Is the transfer legal when arms are used by a government against armed rebels? Is it legal when arms are used by a government against unarmed civilians? Is it illegal for unarmed civilians to acquire weapons to protect themselves against armed government soldiers? Is armed rebellion per definition illegal?

The intergovernmental small arms debate remains seriously hampered by the fact that it is focused on the illicit arms trade without having a common definition or understanding of the term and has not made serious attempts to arrive at such a definition or understanding.

The importance of legal transfers

Even if governments did reach consensus about what constitutes an illegal arms transfer, it would remain important to include legal transfers in the discussion on the impact of arms transfers and conflicts for two reasons.

First, most weapons usually end up in what is commonly considered the illegal circuit after having been distributed and transferred within the legal circuit, and it is necessary to understand properly how this happens.

Second, weapons in ‘legal’ hands may be used for aggression and oppression or in an irresponsible manner to achieve legitimate objectives. The global

---


8 United Nations (note 8), p.17.
intergovernmental discussion on illicit small arms transfers is now focused mainly on weapon supplies to non-state actors. To a large extent, it leaves out the irresponsible, aggressive or oppressive use of arms by state actors. This omission is unsurprising; governments are unlikely to be willing to impose restraints on their own use of weapons that they consider essential for their military strength.

II.2. Definitions of weapon categories

Efforts to research and control international transfers of arms—small and major—have been fraught with difficulties because of the controversies over the definitions of these weapons. Previous discussions of arms control and disarmament focused on weapons of mass destruction (nuclear, chemical and biological weapons) and major conventional weapons. Specific definitions for these categories of weapons were created for research purposes and as part of international agreements and legal instruments. With such definitions in mind, both diplomats and researchers also considered it important to formulate a definition of small arms.

Currently, the most commonly used definition of small arms and light weapons is that first introduced in a 1997 document prepared for the UN by a group of experts. According to this definition, small arms are those weapons that can be carried by an individual for personal use, and light weapons are those designed for use by several persons serving as a crew.9

This definition is generally considered imperfect from a research, political and legal perspective and is still a major subject of discussion in the small arms debate. For the general debate, however, this broad definition suffices.

If it is considered important to pursue the development of methods to monitor and measure small arms transfers or to formulate specific laws or international agreements on small arms, more precise definitions will have to be formulated. It is important to stress that the formulation of such definitions should be guided by their purpose. A ‘universal’ definition is unnecessary, just as a universal definition of major conventional weapons is neither necessary nor exists. This can be illustrated with a discussion of two existing definitions of major conventional weapons. While they are not universal, these definitions form the basis for an important research tool for understanding international arms flows and for an important international political instrument for building confidence and identifying excessive accumulations of weapons.

SIPRI’s Definition of Major Conventional Weapons

In SIPRI’s methodology for monitoring and measuring transfers of major conventional weapons, these weapons are defined as aircraft, armoured vehicles, artillery with a calibre of 100 mm or more, radar systems, guided missiles, and ships

---

9 More precisely, this definition of small arms includes: revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, sub-machine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns. This definition of light weapons includes: heavy machine guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers of anti-tank missile and rocket systems, portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems and mortars of calibres of less than 100 mm. The definition also includes ammunition and explosives, including cartridges (rounds) for small arms; shells and missiles for light weapons; mobile containers with missiles or shells for single-action anti-aircraft and anti-tank systems; anti-personnel and anti-tank hand grenades; landmines and explosives. United Nations (note 8), Article III, paras 25–26.
over 100 tonnes or armed with guided missiles or torpedoes.\textsuperscript{10} This definition also includes weapons that are usually considered ‘light weapons’, such as anti-tank missiles and portable anti-aircraft missiles.

It is important to note that the SIPRI definition is not constructed in this way because only these weapons are considered important. In fact, in the late 1960s, when the definition was first constructed, small arms were also considered relevant as instruments of conflict. They were omitted from the specific focus of SIPRI’s arms transfers monitoring for two main reasons.\textsuperscript{11}

First, with the resources available it was not possible to get a satisfactory picture of global transfers of small arms.

Second, the original project was to focus on arms transfers as an instrument of foreign policy, especially in North–South relations. It was believed that, because of the many possible supply sources of small arms, the recipients could easily switch from one supplier to another. The trade in small arms was considered less important in the relationship between rich and poor countries than the trade in major weapons.

The SIPRI definition originates from a specific research question and the practical problem of data scarcity at a particular moment. In fact, it could be argued that the definition is not concerned with ‘major conventional weapons’ but rather with ‘weapons that matter in international relations and for which valid and reliable statistics can be constructed’.

The UN Register of Conventional Arms

The definition of major conventional weapons used in the UN Register of Conventional Arms is a good example of a definition that considers a category of arms in the context of international agreements.\textsuperscript{12} The UN Register defines conventional arms as: most armoured vehicles; combat aircraft and armed helicopters; guided missiles, excluding land-based air defence missiles, with a range over 25 kilometres; combat ships over 750 tonnes or armed with missiles or torpedoes with a range of 25 km or more; and artillery over 100 mm.\textsuperscript{13}

The rationale for choosing these weapon categories was that it placed the focus on weapons that are indispensable for surprise attacks and large-scale military actions. It is also noteworthy that the UN Register of Conventional Arms reports on weapon transfers for which considerable information is already publicly available. States are more likely to agree to supply information that cannot be kept secret in any case.

It can be argued that this definition refers not to ‘major conventional weapons’ but to ‘weapons that can be potentially used in the international context and for which considerable public information is available’.


II.3. Major weapons or small arms

The last major question is whether small arms really are the most important tools of violence in most current conflicts and should therefore be singled out as a category of weapons that needs special attention. The most extreme, but often quoted, assessment is that small arms have been the exclusive weapons used in 90 per cent of the 49 conflicts that began in the period 1990–1999.\(^\text{14}\) The persistence with which this perception survives is remarkable, as it is an exaggeration of the facts. In reality, a wide variety of weapons, including major weapons, have been and are used in current wars. In many current conflicts, major weapons have been used on a large scale and have had a major impact on the course of conflicts and the number of casualties. This impact has been most obvious when major powers have become involved in wars. For example, the extensive use of US airpower in 1999 in Kosovo and in 2001 in Afghanistan determined the outcome of conflicts. During the late 1990s Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, was heavily damaged by Russian government bombardments with aircraft and heavy artillery.

Not only major powers use major weapons. On a very different but still significant scale, major weapons are also used in conflicts in some of the poorest countries of the world. For example, a single combat helicopter played a significant role in the fighting in Sierra Leone, the Colombian Army makes intensive use of helicopters in its fight against rebels, and the Sri Lankan and Philippine governments have used combat aircraft, tanks and ships in their fights against rebels. Even governments fighting against what are in effect city guerrillas have used major weapons. For example, the Israeli government has used tanks and aircraft in attacks on Palestinian targets. Appendix 1 presents data on selected governments that have acquired major weapons for use in their wars against rebel forces.

Although LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) rebels in Sri Lanka have used captured heavy artillery and SPLA (Sudan People’s Liberation Movement) rebels have used captured tanks, it is true that major weapons usually do not play a significant role in the military strength of rebel forces. International transfers of major weapons to rebel forces or terrorist groups have been very rare.

The need for a focus on small arms

The small arms debate has helped to highlight the role of small arms transfers to conflict areas. This role has previously been given less attention than it receives now, although it certainly has not been completely ignored. While small arms have always played an important part in most violent conflicts, small arms transfers have not been monitored in the same comprehensive and systematic way as transfers of major weapons.

There has also been less attention given to individual cases of small arms transfers than to transfers of major weapons. In spite of the international small arms debate, such transfers are still less likely to gain widespread attention than transfers of major weapons. In 2000, the potential sale of German tanks to Turkey led to extensive discussions in German political circles about the risk that these weapons might be used by the Turkish armed forces in the Kurdish conflict that was taking place at the

time. In 1998, however, much less discussion surrounded a German company’s actual sale of a licence to supply the entire Turkish Army with new rifles, a weapon more likely to be used in the Kurdish conflict.\textsuperscript{15}

The Swedish Government is an important supporter of the small arms debate and of increasing controls on international flows of small arms. Yet in 2001-2002 it supplied thousands of surplus rifles as aid to the armed forces of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia while failing to link these transfers to the small arms debate, or to comply with the UN Programme of Action’s stated preference that surplus small arms be destroyed rather than traded.\textsuperscript{16} The Swedish Government may have had legitimate and well-argued reasons for this military aid, and it took exceptional measures to exert strict controls on the weapons supplied. However, it appears not to have considered what might happen to the weapons replaced by its rifles and how to prevent these surplus weapons from ending up in conflict areas\textsuperscript{17}. These considerations are especially important given the Baltic states’ relative inexperience in creating and enforcing arms export controls. Somewhat surprisingly, the Swedish Government also has not taken the opportunity to promote as an example of responsible arms transfer behaviour the system of post-supply verification imposed on the recipients in this particular case.

The lack of and the need for monitoring of small arms transfers can also be illustrated by examining the existing SIPRI data set on transfers of major conventional weapons. In many current armed conflicts there are poorly armed actors, including both non-state and government actors. Transfers of small arms can be an important addition to the military capabilities of these actors and can significantly affect the development of the conflicts. This is not reflected in the SIPRI arms transfers statistics because small arms are not included in the trend-indicator value. As a result, few non-state actors in current conflicts appear in SIPRI’s register of arms recipients, while government actors in current conflicts usually rank low. The latter can be illustrated with the following examples of governments involved in armed conflicts and their rank in the SIPRI list of recipients of major conventional weapons for the period 1997–2001: Algeria (rank 23), Angola (31), Colombia (40), Indonesia (42), Sri Lanka (51), Macedonia (61), Democratic Republic of the Congo or DRC (63), the Philippines (67), Sudan (70), Rwanda (87), Liberia (110) and Sierra Leone (115).

In the current state of arms transfers monitoring, it is easy to find out how opposing actors in inter-state conflicts and areas of tension obtain their most important weapons. But anyone asking the same questions regarding the more common intra-state conflicts in countries such as Burundi, Sri Lanka or Côte d’Ivoire will find it very difficult to obtain useful, reliable data.

\textit{Ending an artificial division}

Although it has directed new attention to a specific category of weapons and emphasized the role of arms transfers to current violent conflicts, the small arms


\textsuperscript{17} Personal communication with Col J. Isberg, Swedish Armed Forces, Oct. 2002.
debate has created an artificial division between weapon categories. If SIPRI’s monitoring of arms transfers is deemed insufficient in the context of current conflicts, the same can be said of monitoring efforts that focus solely on small arms transfers. This report therefore aims to bridge the gap between monitoring and analysing the issues of small arms transfers on the one hand and transfers of major conventional weapons on the other. Appendix 1 provides examples of supplies of both small and major arms in 1998–2002 to actors in major armed intra-state conflicts that were ongoing in 2001-2002.

The conclusion that there is a need for bridging the gap between small arms and major weapons has also been reached elsewhere. In 1998, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) member states agreed on a moratorium on the import, export and manufacturing of small arms and light weapons in West Africa. The agreement included an intergovernmental information exchange on small arms. A 2002 Report of the UN Panel of Experts on Liberia concluded that the procurement of both small arms and major weapons had a profound influence on peace and stability in the West African region. The panel therefore recommended that the ECOWAS small arms information exchange mechanism be broadened to include all types of weapons procured by ECOWAS members.

This argument was strengthened by the outbreak of violent conflict in the ECOWAS member state of Côte d’Ivoire in late 2002. When the conflict began, the opposing forces were fighting mainly with small arms, but the government quickly imported a small number of attack helicopters. These were flown by mercenaries and put into action almost immediately upon arrival. The conflict thus followed much the same pattern as earlier conflicts in Sierra Leone and Guinea. These conflicts also started as ‘small arms wars’, but soon saw the introduction of Mi-24/35 attack helicopters, sturdy aircraft armed with missiles and cannons. Eastern European sources offer these helicopters, usually with crew, to almost all governments of developing countries that are involved in wars and not under UN embargo.

While both small arms and major weapons are significant in current conflicts, it should be noted that small arms, as a specific category, play a special role in post-conflict situations that is different from the role of major weapons in these situations. Major weapons are difficult to hide, and it is difficult or impossible for individuals or small groups to use them. As a result, major weapons are likely to come under some sort of central control when a conflict comes to an end. On the other hand, small arms, being easy to hide and use, tend to disperse in post-conflict areas. People are often reluctant to hand in weapons obtained during a conflict. They believe that the weapons may still be useful for self-defence, criminal activity or in possible resurgent politically motivated violence. This kind of conflict-related widespread proliferation of small arms in societies is a cause for concern and action. Dealing with such proliferation, for example by developing effective arms collection instruments as part of the demobilization, disarmament and reintegration process, is one of the most interesting issues in current conflict studies and policy debate and one where small arms are at the core of the matter.

20 Aplogan, J., ‘Ivory Coast peace talks resume as both sides rearm’, Reuters, 7 Nov. 2002.
III. The problem of arms transfer data availability

Although more information is available today than in the past, the lack of reliable data on arms transfers, especially small arms transfers, is a major problem for public research and discussion on how to address the issue of arms transfers to conflicts. The following section describes the available data on arms transfers to conflict areas.

III.1. Government-supplied data on arms transfers

An important source of information on international arms transfers is the reports published by governments listing exports and imports of weapons and other strategic goods to and from territory under their control. These publications include reports aimed at the national public in the framework of democratic transparency and reports produced in the framework of intergovernmental transparency. In recent years such governmental transparency has increased considerably.21

National arms export reports

Some governments publicly report on arms exports from the territory under their jurisdiction.22 Many countries report exports of ‘Weapons and Ammunition’ as one of the categories in the trade statistics they supply to the UN Statistics Division. These statistics are published by the International Trade Centre of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)/World Trade Organization (WTO). The reports are produced in accordance with the Standard International Trade Classification.23 Although these figures are more comparable than other government-supplied national arms transfer statistics (see below), they are of limited use for analysing the international trade in arms, including small arms, for three main reasons.

First, reporting is voluntary and some of the major arms exporters, such as China and Russia, do not regularly report statistics in the ‘Weapons and Ammunition’ category. Second, there is a clear reliability problem, illustrated by the fact that when Russia has reported values to the database, they have been too low to be credible, while the entry for the Netherlands’ exports was too high to be credible in 1998.24 Third, these reports include only arms transfers for which the reporting government has given an export permit and which have actually passed through customs.


22 Governments also report confidentially about arms exports, for example to parliaments or to other governments.


24 International Trade Centre (note 24). Russian exports of ‘Weapons and Ammunition’ are reported as valued at US$26 million in 1998, although it is known from other sources that Russian exports of weapons that presumably fall into this category must be considerably higher. Dutch exports of ‘Weapons and Ammunition’ are reported as ranging between US$170 million and US$321 million over the period 1995–98, although the Netherlands is known to produce only a small amount of weapons that fall into this category; it is also known that exports of surplus equipment could not have reached such high levels in any of those years.
Weapons, especially small arms, which are supplied without the permission of the originating state’s authorities, can be of significant importance for actors in conflicts. In addition, weapons supplied in the framework of military aid do not necessarily pass through customs.

An increasing number of governments also publish specific reports on their arms exports. However, it is still not the general rule for countries to make available to the general public detailed information (i.e., information on what has been supplied to whom as opposed to one figure representing aggregate arms exports). The principle of transparency is partly overridden by a perceived need for protection of the arms industry through ‘commercial confidentiality’ (avoiding the publication of information that might give foreign competitors an advantage). It is also partly overridden by a need to accommodate those customers who want to keep their acquisitions secret.

In recent years, however, governments have recognized that public discussions are needed to help assess the potential consequences of arms exports and to prevent irresponsible or unethical exports. As a result, virtually all Western European governments and the American, Canadian and South African governments have released to the public more information on arms exports.25

Government-to-government transparency on arms transfers has improved in the framework of the 1996 Wassenaar Arrangement and the 1997 OAS Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and other related Materials. However, the information shared between states in these frameworks is not made available to the general public.

Another government-to-government transparency agreement has opened up to the public. The European Union in 2002 published its fourth annual review of the implementation of the 1998 Code of Conduct for Arms exports.26 A major and important change compared to the previous reviews was the inclusion of an overview of arms export data per EU member state broken down by recipient country. Previously only aggregate arms export values for each EU member state were published. While such disaggregated data was for most member states already available in their national reports, its inclusion in the EU report, in addition to the availability of the report on the Internet, reflects an EU willingness to create more public transparency in arms transfers.27

If civil society is to be involved in tackling the problems of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, as called for in the UN Programme of Action, government transparency on arms exports must be increased.

The UN Register of Conventional Arms

Since 1992, countries have reported on a voluntary basis to the UN Register of Conventional Arms their exports and imports of selected major conventional

---


weapons. The Register’s objective is to create intergovernmental transparency in arms transfers in order to provide early warning of destabilizing arms accumulations. Some countries have gone further than the basic requirements and have reported on weapons other than those specifically defined for the Register. In some cases, this additional reporting is deliberate in other cases likely due to a lack of understanding of the Register’s definitions. The most detailed return to the Register was submitted by Togo in 2001 after it had received considerable criticism because weapons were supplied via its territory to Angolan rebels in defiance of a UN embargo. Togo included information about its full inventory of weapons, including small arms.\(^{28}\) However, there is no indication that this good example of full transparency is likely to be repeated by Togo or followed by others.

Several review commissions have considered the possibility of extending the coverage of the UN Register, including the possibility of adding small arms.\(^{29}\) No extensions have been made, however, because of political objections. There seems little hope that a consensus on how to improve and expand the UN Register will be reached. Considering the problems encountered in the reporting of transfers of major weapons, practical problems related to the lack of proper administration and expertise by the officials assigned the task of preparing reports would undoubtedly arise if small arms transfers were to be included.\(^{30}\)

In addition to the limitation in the types of weapons covered, another problem with the UN Register of Conventional Arms is that many countries seldom or never report to it. The ‘non-reporters’ include many of the countries in which small arms are among the primary weapons used by armed factions and government forces.

However, even incomplete reporting on small arms transfers within the existing UN Register or a similar instrument could be significant for a better understanding of the general role of arms transfers to conflict regions. It could also be beneficial for conflict prevention and management efforts in specific cases.

**OSCE reporting on small arms and light weapons**

In November 2000, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) adopted the OSCE Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons.\(^{31}\) Among several other measures, this document included a provision stating that member states would report to the OSCE exports and imports of small arms to and from their territories. The first reporting took place in 2002. The reporting is confidential, but in the spirit of public transparency, Germany, Spain and Belarus chose to make their reporting public.\(^{32}\) It is to be hoped that more countries will follow this example.

---

30 See the annual reviews in the SIPRI Yearbook chapters on transfers of major conventional weapons.
While it does provide some insight into small arms transfers, the main limitation of the reporting is that it covers only transfers within the OSCE and therefore does not cover transfers to most areas of active conflict.

Usefulness of government data

Overall, the data on weapon exports provided by governments have some major limitations. First, a number of major producers do not report any data. Second, most national reports on arms exports present the monetary value of these exports. These data are mainly useful for assessments of the economic impact of arms exports. To examine the military consequences of arms exports, more information is needed on the number and types of equipment being exported. Third, in most cases arms export data do not show the actual weapons and/or recipients involved, or they do so only to a limited degree. Fourth, it is often impossible to assess exactly what the values represent and therefore how helpful they are for the purpose of analysis. Most arms export reports do not explain their statistics fully. We simply do not know what is included, nor exactly how data are compiled or how calculations are made. Fifth, the data collection and processing methodologies and procedures used by the government organizations that produce the arms export reports are not transparent and cannot be verified. For some countries several data sets are available with differing totals for arms exports. Sixth, different reports include different items in the category ‘arms’. Some reports release figures only on arms exports, while others aggregate exports of arms and dual-use equipment, and still others add services. Some reports release data on the value of items delivered, others on the value of items approved for export, some on both.

While public government arms export data are far from complete, some of the detailed information can be used to illustrate who supplies weapons to which conflict areas.

Data from press and NGO reporting

In response to the lack of reliable governmental data, SIPRI and others have, since the late 1960s, monitored international transfers using open sources such as information reported in the press or by NGOs. It was, however, judged that data derived from open sources were too incomplete to create a comprehensive overview that included small arms. To a lesser extent, the same is true for transfers of small quantities of less advanced major conventional weapons such as second-hand equipment, especially land systems. Presumably, the lack of reporting on such deals is due to the fact that both categories are less ‘glamorous’ in technical terms, while in financial terms they are dwarfed by deals involving new major weapons or large quantities of major weapons.

A related problem is that reliable data on arms transfers to non-state actors are especially difficult to find. Suppliers and recipients usually keep such transfers secret.


and the weapons involved are mostly small arms. Non-state actors are more likely to acquire small arms than other weapons because their size makes them easy to smuggle and hide and their simplicity makes them cheap and easy to use. The information on arms transfers to non-state actors that is reported in the public domain is difficult or impossible to verify. It may come from possibly biased and unreliable sources, such as the security organizations fighting the rebel groups on which they report.

However, the availability of data on transfers of small arms and other types of under-reported arms transfers has increased for two reasons.

First, the strong interest in the issue of small arms has led to a significant increase in the resources for research into the issue. The result has included data-gathering efforts by organizations specializing in the small arms issue, such as the Small Arms Survey (SAS) and the Norwegian Initiative on Small Arms Transfers (NISAT). The increased interest also created resources that have made it possible for organizations such as Human Rights Watch to produce ad hoc reports on arms transfers to specific countries or regions.35

Second, more news sources are now easily accessible via the Internet. For research on small arms, it is necessary to scan a large number of news sources, including regional, national and subnational sources. It is now possible to obtain information from such news sources in the most remote parts of the world in a matter of seconds.

III.2. Public data sets on global arms transfers

There are a number of public data sets on international arms transfers. Firstly there are the longstanding data sets maintained by SIPRI and the US Government. The Bureau of Verification and Compliance or BVC (formerly the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, ACDA), and the Congressional Research Service (CRS) use these data sets as a basis for their annual reports on arms transfers. These data sets provide information on global arms transfers and are compiled by organizations that are more or less independent of the actors on whose arms exports and imports they report. (An exception is those parts of the BVC and CRS reporting that refer to US arms imports and exports).

The SIPRI data set on arms transfers does disaggregate its data into specific weapon systems, but it monitors and measures the flows of major conventional weapons only. The SIPRI definition includes a small number of weapon types that would usually be classified with small arms and light weapons, for example guided anti-tank missiles and portable surface-to-air missiles.

The data sets published by US government organizations, by the BVC (in its annual publication World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers) and in the annual report prepared by the CRS give only aggregate figures in dollar values for all arms transferred.36 Neither the BVC nor the CRS report includes data disaggregated by individual weapon systems or even by weapon categories.

35 See, for example, the Human Rights Watch Reports on arms transfers to Sudan, Angola and Colombia, at URL <http://www.hrw.org/arms/index.php>.

36 US Department of State, Bureau of Verification and Compliance (BVC), World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1998: Fact Sheet Released by the Bureau of Verification and Compliance (US Department of State: Washington, DC, Apr. 2000); and Grimmett, R. F., Congressional Research Service, CRS Report for Congress, Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations, 1994–2001, (Library of Congress: Washington, DC, 6 Aug 2002). In the BVC report, arms transfers are defined as follows: ‘Arms transfers represent the international transfer (under terms of grant, credit, barter, cash) of military equipment, usually referred to as
The main drawback of the BVC and CRS reports is their lack of transparency and questionable reliability. The data are collected and processed according to secret methodologies by US intelligence services that cannot necessarily be considered unbiased.

**New data sets on transfers of small arms**

In response to the strong interest in small arms and the limitations of the existing data sets on arms transfers, two organizations have initiated projects aimed at systematically gathering data on transfers of small arms and light weapons. Both have achieved considerable results in a short time.

**The Small Arms Survey**

The largest research centre focusing on small arms is the Small Arms Survey (SAS), which started operating in early 2000. The SAS collects and publishes data on a number of issues related to small arms, including the international transfers of such weapons.

In 2001, the SAS presented a crude estimate for the annual global international trade in small arms and light weapons of US$4–6 billion for legal trade and no more than US$1 billion for illicit trade. The figure for legal arms exports was disaggregated by suppliers but not by recipients, the figure for illicit trade was not disaggregated at all, and no trend over several years was given for either category. The figure for legal arms exports was derived from a combination of available government data on arms exports and from unofficial data.

The usefulness of this data is very limited, as there is no indication of who received which weapons and how many were received.

**NISAT**

The Norwegian Initiative on Small Arms Transfers (NISAT) began in 1997. A major part of this project is the creation of a database that includes data for all countries on the production and transfer of small arms and on related policy and legislation. The database provides official data on legal (state-authorized) small arms imports and exports. It also profiles the country-specific small arms industry, publishes national laws governing arms exports, and provides documents on illegal arms trafficking. The database is freely accessible on the Internet.

The database contains government-reported imports and exports of small arms by individual countries. As explained above, these reports have some major limitations. In particular, it is very unlikely that the aim of covering all countries will be fulfilled. Furthermore, no attempt is made to assess the reliability of the reporting; the user

---

*conventional*, including weapons of war, parts thereof, ammunition, support equipment, and other commodities designed for military use. Among the items included are tactical guided missiles and rockets, military aircraft, naval vessels, armoured and non armoured vehicles, communications and electronic equipment, artillery, infantry weapons, small arms, ammunition, other ordnance, parachutes, and uniforms’. The CRS does not give a similar definition, but since the CRS report is based on the same basic information as the BVC report, it can be assumed that the reports define arms transfers in the same way.

must therefore be aware that the data provided may be biased, incomplete or incorrect.

A second element in the database is a collection of newspaper clippings on the subject of the illegal trade in small arms and light weapons. The articles are taken from the Foreign Broadcasting Information Service (FBIS), a US Government agency that translates newspaper articles and broadcast transcripts from press sources worldwide. This archiving activity, comparable to that of a library, is useful as a source of background information for broader discussions and as a tool for researchers. However, the reliability of the data and information presented in articles is not verified through cross-checking between articles. Furthermore, this data set does not give a general overview; data contained in the articles are not filtered and processed into statistics or registers that provide more direct insight into the trends or absolute levels. NISAT is creating a new database that should overcome some of the shortcomings of the current version, to be available soon.

III.3. Conclusion on data availability

The lack of arms transfers data described above hinders the creation of comprehensive data sets to help analyse the impact of arms transfers on conflicts. The lack of comprehensive data sets in turn hinders the development of arms control policies, and makes it harder to discuss transfers with arms proliferators and to improve arms control enforcement.

Moreover, the data that are available are usually either insufficient or available too late (not ‘real time’) to be used as conflict early-warning indicators.

More government transparency would be helpful. Until that objective is reached, currently available data, even if incomplete and not fully reliable, can at least provide general insights into the risks and advantages of arms transfers.
IV. Arms transfers to violent conflicts

This section explores how actors involved in violent conflict procure weapons from both government-sanctioned and non-sanctioned sources abroad, the latter usually referred to as illegal transfers. It illustrates the diversity of views on the legitimacy of arms transfers and their adequacy for conflict resolution.

The threat of major interstate war still exists. In such conflicts major weapons are usually the most significant tools of violence. These weapons are monitored even more intensively than during the cold war through the frameworks of the UN Register on Conventional Arms and through the Wassenaar Arrangement, in which participating states inform each other of transfers of major weapons. Monitoring also takes place within the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), which includes reporting on holdings of major weapons.

However, most wars are internal. One widely used conflict data set asserts that, in the period 1990–2001, all but three of the 57 major wars were internal; that is, the issue concerned control over the government or territory of one state. This section discusses arms transfers to actors in these major intra-state wars because it is in these wars that small arms are likely to play a role at least as significant as that of major weapons.

The discussion is illustrated with appendix 1, which presents information on recent arms transfers to actors in several intra-state conflicts ongoing in the period 2001-2002 on various continents. Transfers to Algeria, Colombia, Israel, Nepal, the Philippines, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka and Sudan are examined. The section excludes transfers to countries or regions where tensions existed but had not erupted into violent conflict.

Abundance of weapons

Currently, the most authoritative estimate is that there are at least 639 million small arms and light weapons in the world. This figure is frequently quoted to illustrate the perceived ‘global scourge’ of small arms. The total number of small arms, however, is of very limited relevance for understanding the issue of arms and conflict. Many of the weapons included in this total are in the hands of civilians and soldiers who will either never use them in any violent act or will use them only in arguably justifiable violence such as self-defence or peacekeeping operations. Therefore, these weapons will not be considered as a potential threat by most observers, including those quoting the figure. The only real value of the figure is that it shows that there is a large stock from which weapons could leak and end up in the wrong hands, however ‘wrong’ is defined. It should be stressed that many of the

---


41 The definition of major wars used in this report is: ‘the use of armed force between two or more organized groups, resulting in the battle-related deaths of at least 1000 people in a single calendar year and in which the incompatibility concerns control of government, territory or communal identity.’ Seybolt, T.B., ‘Major armed conflicts’, SIPRI Yearbook 2002: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2002), p. 23.


weapons included in the world total will never end up in the ‘wrong hands’. Similarly, the statement that small arms and ammunition production facilities exist in at least 98 countries is mainly relevant because it indicates the ease with which more weapons could be added to the existing stock.\textsuperscript{44}

No figure for the total number of major weapons in the world has received similar attention. Such a number would be even less relevant than the total number of small arms in the world, because major weapons differ so much in potential capability. For example, it makes no sense to add a tank and an aircraft carrier and say that the figure amounts to two major weapons.

For analysis and policy making, the exact numbers are not important. Rather, it is important that there are large numbers of all types of conventional weapons, including many that have been declared surplus and are waiting for destruction or sale, and that facilities to produce such weapons are spread throughout the world. There is thus a large pool from which arms can potentially flow to conflict areas. The global availability of arms means that international cooperation is essential in order to develop and implement responsible policies regarding arms supplies to conflict areas.

\textit{Flows of weapons}

UN embargoes are the only measures that prohibit weapons transfers to certain conflict zones and are globally accepted by governments, except for those targeted by the embargoes. In late 2002, there were only six such embargoes in place.\textsuperscript{45}

Among smaller groups of countries, other international agreements exist in order to control arms transfers to actors in conflicts, and most countries have laws or policies that regulate arms exports. While such arms export restrictions may limit the options for belligerents to buy weapons, they certainly do not make weapons impossible to acquire. As discussed below, this situation is a result of both government policies in active support of arms exports and of the problems experienced by governments in enforcing existing arms export regulations.

While information is often incomplete, all efforts to monitor arms transfers show that existing and potential belligerents can acquire weapons from the large pool of existing weapons and weapon production facilities through a wide variety of sellers and channels. This is illustrated in appendix 1, which gives examples of weapons identified as imported in 1998–2002 by selected governments and rebel forces involved in intra-state wars in 2001–2002.

In some cases such flows constitute steady flows in the literal sense. For example, the governments of Sri Lanka and Colombia have received weapons from foreign sources every year for the past five years.

In other cases, especially for arms supplies to rebel forces, such supplies have trickled in at an uneven pace rather than a steady flow.

\textit{Governments procuring through imports}

Many governments do not deny arms exports to certain conflict areas. Almost all the governments involved in violent intra-state conflict in the period 2001–2002 had

\textsuperscript{44} Small Arms Survey 2001 (note 2), p.54

\textsuperscript{45} An overview of UN arms embargoes will be available on the SIPRI website at URL <http://www.sipri.org>.
access to a wide range of arms suppliers offering a wide range of weapons, including both small arms and major weapons. The exceptions are Afghanistan and Somalia, which barely had governments and where all actors were under a UN arms embargo. In effect, the arms imports ceiling for most governments engaged in armed conflict is not determined by a lack of supply options, but rather by their economic resources.

Appendix 1 primarily shows transfers of major weapons, since information on small arms transfers is scarce. The fact that a country can receive major weapons from a given source, however, makes it very plausible that the country could also receive small arms from that source. There are only a few known cases in which governments have denied the export of small arms to countries to which they have previously sold major weapons.46

Arms exports to governments involved in conflict are usually legal in so far as they are authorized by the supplying country’s responsible authorities according to national legislation.

In recent years, a few cases have been reported in which weapons were supplied to governments engaged in armed conflict without the authorization of the responsible authorities in the supplier country. For example, in the period 1998-2002 arms were supplied to Liberia in contravention of a UN arms embargo. Arms dealers used false documentation to obtain export permits from the Ukrainian and Yugoslav governments to transfer small arms to Nigeria and then diverted the weapons to Liberia.47 In another illustrative case, in 1999 the Polish Government sold 50 of its surplus T-55 tanks to what it believed was Yemen, but stopped the deliveries when it was discovered that the first 20 tanks had ended up in Sudan.48

Rebels procuring arms through imports

Arms procurement by rebel forces is restricted by their economic resources and by the fact that only a few suppliers are willing to provide them with weapons.

During the cold war, the American, Soviet and other governments regularly supplied weapons to rebel groups. With the end of East–West rivalry this practice appears to be considerably less common and smaller in scale. However, there remain many allegations and some proven cases of arms being supplied by governments to rebel forces.49 Recent examples include allegations that Iran supplied arms to the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization), that Venezuela supported rebels in

---

46 The UK government refused to sell small arms to South Africa in the early 1960s because small arms were considered useful for repression within the apartheid system. During the same time period, however, the UK permitted the sale of combat aircraft to South Africa. This example also shows that, long before the current discussion, small arms were receiving attention as a specific class of weapons. Phythian, M., *The Politics of British Arms Sales Since 1994: to Secure Our Rightful Share* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2000), p.5. In another example, the Dutch government refused a license for the export of belts for machine gun ammunition to Egypt in 2000, despite having supplied hundreds of surplus armoured vehicles to Egypt in 1999. SIPRI, ‘Data on Transfers of Major Conventional Weapons’, URL <http://projects.sipri.se/armstrade/facts_and_figures.html>; Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, *Openbaar jaarrapport Nederlands wapenexportbeleid* [Public annual report Dutch arms export policy] (The Hague, 2001), p.45.

47 United Nations (note 20).


Colombia and that Liberia supported rebels in Côte d’Ivoire. Uganda supplied arms to rebels in Sudan, but agreed in 1999 to stop such support.\(^{50}\)

Since in many cases support from foreign governments has dried up, rebel groups now tend to acquire their weapons from what are usually referred to as ‘illegal’ sources or the ‘black market’. These sources (individuals, organizations or companies) have not been given permission to trade in arms by the government that de jure controls the area where they are based and/or by the authorities of the territories to which the weapons are delivered.

This type of arms trade is obviously very secretive and reliable information is hard to obtain. Therefore, no proper assessment can be made of the total scale and, even more importantly, of the overall impact of international flows of weapons to rebel forces. Part of the available information comes from possibly biased sources, such as the intelligence services of the governments fighting the rebels in question. While there may be data on which weapons the rebels have in their possession, the rebels and opposing government forces often have the same types of weapons. It is therefore impossible to know to what extent rebel forces have acquired their weaponry through capture and theft and to what extent they have procured the weapons from abroad.

Several cases of international arms transfers to rebel forces under UN arms embargoes in Angola, Sierra Leone and Somalia have been investigated in detail by UN Panels of Experts. These investigations have contributed considerably to the understanding of illegal international arms transfers. Several criminal investigations in a number of countries have also revealed some interesting information.

The more reliable investigations make it possible to derive a general picture of how rebel forces obtain their weaponry from non-government-authorized sources. First, the sources for weapons traded to rebel forces can be found anywhere in the world. However, they are obviously most likely to come from areas in which arms stockpiles or production are combined with weak law enforcement, including weak border controls and end-monitoring resources. Such sources remain numerous despite the recent interest in and agreement on programmes of action regarding arms transfers to rebel forces as part of the small arms debate.

A typical example was the supply of several thousand rifles to an armed group in Colombia in late 2001. The Nicaraguan police swapped surplus rifles for new ones from a Guatemalan-based company that was to sell the surplus items to the Panamanian police. The US embassy was consulted and raised no objection. The weapons were subsequently loaded on a ship and diverted to a Colombian port where one of the armed Colombian groups collected them. It remains unclear who provided the false papers involved in the deal and who the final recipients were.\(^{51}\)

This example illustrates the problems of implementation of international agreements on the control of arms transfers. Regional discussions and agreements on small arms in the Central American region have included the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials. Given the existence of this convention, the Nicaraguan authorities could have been expected to be more careful


23
in their export of these weapons and to contact the intended recipients, their Panamanian colleagues, for confirmation.

It is difficult to monitor transfers such as these due to the large number of possible actors involved. Actors in illegal arms transfer activities may include corrupt government officials, dealers who buy and sell arms, arms brokers who facilitate contacts between potential buyers and sellers of weapons and who do not own the weapons being offered for sale, and persons involved in the transport and smuggling of the weapons.

Within the small arms debate, regulation of the activities of international small arms brokers is often considered a critical element in a comprehensive approach to combating illicit arms trafficking. While better controls on arms brokers would help to obstruct illegal arms trade, there is a risk that a focus on brokers will divert attention from the real problem: the lack of control at the source over the production and sale of weapons entering the illegal trade. If the original transfer of weapons could be properly controlled, brokers would find it impossible to be involved in illegal deals. This is generally true across the whole range of arms control and has, for instance, prompted the new surge of interest in export control instruments for technology related to weapons of mass destruction.

IV.1. Motives for restraint and supply

Governments can have diverse motives for permitting or denying the supply of weapons to conflict areas. Some of these motives are based on perceptions of the effect of arms supplies on a particular conflict situation.

Intra-state conflicts have underlying and immediate causes. In most cases, the availability of weapons can be considered an immediate cause in the sense that arms by themselves do not generate the conflicts in which they are used nor define their goals. Arms enable actors in conflicts to pursue their objectives on the battlefield. As such, arms can contribute towards exacerbating conflicts by increasing the lethality and duration of the violence and by encouraging a violent rather than a peaceful solution. However, there is no evidence that the supply of weapons is either necessary or sufficient to either start or escalate violent conflict. Weapons availability can have very diverse effects on conflicts.

In very broad terms, two basic assumptions are made regarding the relationship between arms supplies and the outbreak, continuation, escalation or resolution of intra-state wars. These assumptions can form the basis of decisions on whether to supply arms.

Restraining or promoting arms supplies to resolve conflicts

The first assumption is that the availability of arms, and therefore the supply of arms, triggers the escalation of conflict into violent conflict. This assumption drives the small arms debate in which, for example, the estimated 639 million small arms and light weapons in existence are often considered a scourge that fuels conflicts.

Contradicting this belief is the assumption that weapons are legitimate, efficient instruments for maintaining security, for self-defence and for use in peacekeeping

---

52 For an overview of the activities of arms brokers, see: Wood and Peleman (note 6).
operations and therefore can be instruments for conflict resolution. This assumption has received considerably little attention in the current small arms debate, but it is still the major argument used against policies to further restrain the proliferation of arms, including small arms.

On the basis of the second assumption, the main question becomes: under what conditions may the procurement and therefore supply and use of weapons be considered legitimate and responsible? In this context further questions arise, such as: can arms supplies be a useful tool of foreign policy and humanitarian intervention, and what is the risk that such weapon supplies will aggravate conflicts instead of help to resolve them?

Based on these two assumptions, different suppliers have made very different decisions on whether to provide weapons to combatants. This is illustrated by a number of recent examples.

One of the most obvious cases in which an arms transfer could be seen to contribute to conflict resolution was a transfer from the UK to Sierra Leone. In 1999-2000, the UK Government provided military aid, including military training and 17500 rifles and a number of other small arms to the government of Sierra Leone, which was fighting Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels. The UK arms supply was considered part of a strategy to repel the RUF, restore the peace process and rebuild Sierra Leone. The UK Government chose this policy even though at first sight it appears to be incompatible with the EU Code of Conduct on arms export, in which EU members agree not to allow exports which would provoke or prolong armed conflicts or aggravate existing tensions or conflicts in the country of final destination, and with the ECOWAS moratorium on small arms production and transfers.

The American arms supply policy for Colombia is less humanitarian but still aimed at ending a conflict. Since the late 1960s, the Colombian Government has fought left-wing rebels with US military support. From the late 1980s this support was primarily aimed at combating narcotics production and trade rather than aiding Colombian Government fighting rebels. The USA originally maintained that it saw a negotiated peace process as the only solution to the political conflict. Since insurgents and the drug trade are closely related in Colombia, however, it was unavoidable that US military aid came to be deployed against insurgents.

In 2001, the start of the US ‘war on terrorism’ and continued violence by the Colombian rebels caused changes in the positions of both the US administration and Congress. American assistance to Colombia became available to support a unified campaign against narcotics trafficking and against activities by organizations

---

54 For example, the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects (Preamble, paras 9 and 10) reaffirms ‘the inherent right to individual or collective self-defence in accordance with Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations’, and ‘the right of each State to manufacture, import and retain small arms and light weapons for its self-defence and security needs, as well as for its capacity to participate in peacekeeping operations in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations’. United Nations (note 17), Preamble, paras 9-10.


designated as terrorist organizations, such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN), and the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC). Since 2000, US supplies of weapons to the Colombian government have included equipment ranging from small arms to aircraft and radar installations worth at least $635 million.

In contrast to the massive US military support, the EU policy is to support only non-military efforts to end the war in Colombia. In recent years, EU member states have supplied very few or no weapons at all to Colombia.

In the case of the war in Nepal, several countries have decided to give military aid to the Government. Recently the most important provider of aid has been the Indian Government, which decided in late 2001 to support the Nepalese Government with military aid including training, and to supply at a reduced price small numbers of armed helicopters, armoured vehicles and small arms. The incentive for the aid was the Indian Government’s concerns over links between the Nepalese rebels and similar leftist insurgent groups active in India.

In early 2002 the Nepalese Government requested from the USA military aid including helicopters and night vision equipment, stressing that it was fighting terrorists. It was promised $20 million in non-lethal military aid. Previously the US had given only limited aid in the form of military training.

Referring to the Maoist rebellion as ‘terrorism’, the UK government decided in June 2002 to provide military aid worth £3 million to the Government of Nepal. Only support materiel such as unarmed transport helicopters and communication equipment was included and the UK government will also provide human rights training to the Nepalese military.

This military aid package was announced in connection with a June 2002 conference that was organized by the UK government and focused on the ‘Maoist terrorist crisis’ in Nepal. Major international actors participated, including the USA, several western European countries, China, Russia and India. Conference recommendations stressed the need for economic development and governance

---


reform aimed at improved democracy, but also noted that military assistance should be considered as part of a comprehensive approach to resolution of the conflict.66

In contrast to this approach, at least one government has actively decided against supplying Nepal with weapons. In early 2002 it became public that the Nepalese Government wanted to buy from a German company up to 65 000 HK-36E assault rifles. These were to become the standard rifle of the Nepalese army. When negotiations had reached the final stages, the German government refused to provide a licence for the export because it did not want weapons to be supplied from Germany to a country at war.67

Arms supplies for profit

Economic gain remains one of the main motives, if not the main motive, for arms transfers, including arms transfers to conflict areas. This is true for weapon supplies to both governments and rebel groups, and for both government-authorized and unauthorized supplies. For the year 2000, SIPRI estimated the global financial value of the legal international arms trade to be US $27–33 billion, which is less than 1 per cent of total world trade.68 Only a limited part of this trade goes to countries actually engaged in conflict. Precise information is scarce, but it is known that small arms are cheap. For example, the price of a rifle is roughly between US $10 and $1000, while an Mi-24 combat helicopter, a typical major weapon used in recent intra-state conflicts, usually sells for about US $3-4 m.69 Both types of weapons are often not bought in quantities that would generate large turnovers or profits.

In many cases, arms transfers to actors in current intra-state conflicts thus do not involve vast sums of money. At most, they are often limited to tens of millions of dollars or even down to the hundreds of thousands of dollars. Supplies to India and Israel are worth considerably more, but most of the weapon supplies to these countries are related to their tensions with neighbouring countries, not their internal conflicts.

Even though the sums involved are relatively low, they are more than sufficient for individuals, companies and governments in poorer countries to pursue such sales actively.

In some countries there is a relatively strong perception that arms are a special product that can only be traded with great care and under strict political control. In others, however, the general opinion is that arms are a commodity little different from other goods and that the problem of abuse lies with the user, not the supplier. This attitude was clearly demonstrated recently when the Russian Government permitted the simultaneous delivery of combat aircraft to both sides in the Eritrean-Ethiopian war of 1998-2001. Appendix 1 shows many examples of arms exports for which it is difficult to imagine that the driving motive was anything but profit.

Supplier countries often depicted as ruthless traders include most Central and Eastern European states, especially Belarus, Slovakia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Romania,

---

69 Small Arms Survey 2002 (note 2), p.66; Nepal bought 2 Mi-24s for $6.2 m and Uganda bought 2 Mi-24s for $9 m.
the Federal Republic of Serbia-Montenegro and Russia. China and Israel are also often cited as suppliers of weapons to conflict regions for profit. The information in appendix 1 shows that several of these states are the main suppliers of weapons to local actors in conflicts in Africa and Sri Lanka in particular.

Western countries have shown concern about supplies of weapons to certain conflict areas and have therefore tried to persuade the supplying countries, such as Bulgaria, to restrict their sales.

In the late 1990s, Bulgaria gained a bad reputation as an arms-exporting nation, in part because weapons exported from Bulgaria ended up in Angola in the hands of UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola). Even though the Bulgarian Government had become more restrictive in its arms sales, the US government still believed that it was necessary to prevent weapon proliferation from Bulgaria to certain actors in conflicts areas. The US Government paid the Bulgarian Government to destroy about 70 000 surplus arms, mainly small arms, which otherwise would have been offered on the international market. Until now, however, mainly older weapons have been destroyed. The Bulgarian government still seeks to export its large stocks of newer small arms and has made clear that if western countries want to prevent such sales, they will have to fund the destruction programmes. In 2002 a similar project began in Ukraine, where NATO will help to destroy 133 000 tons of munitions and 1.5 million small arms.

NATO and EU expansion and arms export controls

A number of Central and Eastern European states are now being integrated into NATO and the EU. It is expected that NATO and the EU will also implement ‘outreach’ policies towards the regions just beyond their new frontiers, such as the Balkans, Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. These two processes should provide more leverage for the USA and other Western actors to insist on the improvement of official export control policies throughout these areas. In particular, new EU members must accept and demonstrate that they can implement the EU Code of Conduct for Arms Exports and the EU’s country-directed sanctions.

In addition to such formal commitments, attempts are being made –and could be developed further– to persuade states in these regions to dispose of surplus weapons (including items made obsolete by military aid), and to improve their performance in import and export control. States could be paid for doing this or improved controls could be made a condition for short-term western military assistance and for longer-term hopes of integration.


Rich suppliers

Sales of arms for profit to actors in conflicts are not limited to the countries mentioned above. It is easily forgotten that richer countries —although generally considerably more restrictive in their arms exports— also permit relatively low-value sales of weapons to conflict areas for economic reasons, even though the macro-economic effects of stopping them would be minor. India, Nepal, the Philippines and Sri Lanka are examples of countries in conflict areas that are apparently seen as less controversial destinations for weapons and receive arms from countries such as the USA, the UK, Belgium, Sweden and France.

The Swedish government, despite its stated concern about the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and despite relatively restrictive arms export laws, recently transferred small arms to India. In 2002, it permitted the Swedish company FFV Ordnance to supply India with Carl Gustav portable recoilless guns and ammunition worth US $30m, a minute sum in comparison with total annual Swedish exports.74 Carl Gustavs have been delivered to India since 1974 and are used in the Kashmir conflict. Similarly, a 2002 deal in which the Belgian Government permitted a Belgian company to supply machine guns to Nepal was based on economic motives.75

Such deals need to be carefully considered, and potential economic gain should be weighed with great care against the possibility that the weapons will fuel conflicts. Projects aimed at encouraging certain countries to be more restrictive in their arms transfers are less likely to be successful if those leading the projects appear to be active and even careless arms exporters themselves.

---

V. Conclusion

The small arms debate has helped to draw attention to the problem of arms flows to conflict areas. If arms control is viewed as a tool to prevent and resolve violent conflict, there are some specific areas in which the focus on small arms remains useful. These include discussions on marking and tracing small arms and on the collection of weapons in post-conflict and other unstable societies. It is, however, time to reconsider that part of the small arms debate that deals with arms transfers to conflict areas.

The inter-governmental debate on small arms transfers remains seriously hampered by the fact that it is focused on the illicit arms trade without a common definition or understanding of the term. States could attempt to reach a consensus on this subject, but it is likely that such inter-governmental consensus would remain focused on preventing non-state actors from acquiring weapons. This would disregard the abuse of arms by governments.

The search for a definition of small arms has led to one that is generally considered imperfect. A ‘universal’ definition is, however, unnecessary, just as a universal definition of major conventional weapons is neither necessary nor exists. A definition should be driven by its purpose, be that legal or research-related, and without such a clear purpose, no adequate definition can be constructed.

Focus on all arms transfers

If the purpose of the small arms debate is to discuss how arms transfers affect violent conflicts and how the knowledge resulting from this discussion can be used to prevent such conflicts, the focus on small arms is too narrow, because both small arms and major weapons are significant in almost all current conflicts. The current inter-governmental debate is focused on illicit transfers of small arms, which in effect means that it is aimed mainly at combating the activities of rebel groups by cutting off their arms supplies. Since small arms are the prime weapons used by rebel groups, this focus remains at least partly valid. The issue at stake would, however, be more accurately defined as ‘weapons to rebels’ than as control of small arms in general. If the debate is defined in these terms, it clearly ignores the abuse or irresponsible use of arms by governments and has at best limited relevance to improving policies for conflict prevention and resolution through dialogue.

This report shows that it is both necessary and possible to monitor, discuss and control flows of all types of arms, not just small arms, to conflict regions, especially intra-state conflict regions.

Data for the debate

Research and debate should be aimed at understanding how arms transfers influence efforts to resolve conflicts. Such understanding should lead to the implementation of improved legislation and its enforcement.

To make a more effective debate possible, more data on arms transfers to intra-state conflicts is needed. Such data is available, but in many cases it is incomplete. If civil society is to be involved in tackling the problems related to arms transfers, government transparency on arms exports must be increased. There remains a great
demand for reliable, timely and complete data on arms transfers. Thus, the following policies are recommended:

- Data collections on small arms transfers and major weapons transfers should no longer be kept separate. For example, efforts should be made to link the NISAT database on transfers of small arms and the SIPRI database on transfers of major weapons.
- Governmental transparency in arms transfers should be improved. Development of government-to-government transparency could take place using the UN Register of Conventional Arms. The UN Register does not require states to submit information on small arms transfers, and it is unlikely that small arms and light weapons will be added to the Register. States are free, however, to include information on small arms transfers, and such voluntary transparency could add significant information to the available data. For example, coordinated approaches to establishing ‘best practice’ could be discussed in the EU and with EU partners.
- The publication of national submissions to the OSCE information exchange on small arms and light weapons should be encouraged.
- The investigations by UN panels of experts into the effectiveness of UN arms embargoes have contributed considerably to the understanding of international arms transfers to conflict regions. These investigations should continue.
- The problem of a lack of ‘real time’ information on arms flows to conflict areas must be addressed. A solution could be pursued through methodological studies and/or with the help of retrospective analysis of known arms flows to recently resolved conflicts.

Arms transfers to conflict areas

The world has a large pool of both small arms and major weapons and there are production facilities for such weapons throughout the world. The total size of this pool is irrelevant, since weapons have very different functions and effects in different contexts. Many are in the hands of law enforcers or in the arsenals of the armed forces of democratic countries. Some, however, do end up in the wrong hands, regardless of how one defines this term.

An overview of arms transfers to several current conflicts shows that many different actors continue to be involved in both legal and illegal arms supplies to both governments and rebels in conflict areas. Despite several international and national controls on arms transfers, most belligerents—including the ‘wrong hands’—continue to have access to weapon supplies.

The suppliers in such transfers have diverse motives, including the desire to contribute to the resolution of violent conflicts by arming the party with which they sympathize most strongly. Arms transfers as a potential ‘positive’ conflict-resolving measure have received no attention in the current small arms debate, although in practice such policies are common. Therefore it is recommended that:

- Support should be provided for research and inter-governmental discussions aimed at understanding whether arms transfers can be an effective and responsible policy to help prevent and resolve conflicts, and if so, under what circumstances. The field of inquiry is broad. It could cover
the advantages and risks of arms and technology transfers for the promotion of regional security cooperation (including strengthening local peacekeeping capabilities), for maintaining deterrence between or within states and for supporting the efforts of responsible governments to maintain peace and security.

- Attention should be given to the growing debate on the export and use of ‘non-lethal’ weapons which may be seen as alternatives to small arms for internal security purposes, but which are inconsistently controlled by existing rules and regimes and raise ethical questions of their own.

Controlling arms transfers

Within the small arms debate, it is often argued that a comprehensive approach aimed at preventing arms from flowing to conflict areas would have to address the conflicts and security perceptions that create the demand for arms. However this turns things upside down. Arms transfers should be controlled in order to resolve and prevent conflicts; conflicts should not be addressed in order to end arms transfers.

- Future research should not be focused primarily on the bureaucratic process of how arms transfer controls develop, nor on the exact numbers and types of weapons being transferred. Rather, it should focus on finding a balance between accepting and controlling arms transfers to intra-state conflict.

Sharing and spreading competence

Prevention is better than a cure, and attempts can be made to diminish the pool of weapons available for damaging transfers in the first place by improving export controls at the source and destination. In the European context, EU and national policies could be developed to:

- Check and, as necessary, perfect the preparations made by new EU members to enforce existing EU rules and codes relating to arms transfers.
- Actively transfer export control competence to states in the EU’s ‘new neighbour’ regions, preferably using the new members as partners and models. Provide incentives for improvements by increasing conditionality between export controls and EU aid and accession programmes.
- Consider further generic or country-specific experiments in the cooperative destruction of stocks of surplus arms on the territories of new members and new neighbours. Such destruction should take place with Western material support. (NATO policies can also be further developed in this direction, preferably in the EAPC [Euro–Atlantic Partnership Council] framework so that like-minded Western non-allies can assist.)

Most of these initiatives could also be replicated by the EU towards other regions where sufficient like-minded partners exist, or by groups of states within such regions.

Finally, arms proliferation is not the sole or main cause of tensions and conflicts. Regulating and controlling arms transfers to conflict areas is just one of the potential tools for achieving a more peaceful world.
Appendix

Examples of arms imports from 1998-2002 by actors involved in intra-state conflicts from 2001-2002

This appendix serves as an illustration to the main text. It describes imports of weapons used or likely to have been used by the actors that imported them in a number of major armed intra-state conflicts. All data on confirmed orders and deliveries of major conventional weapons are taken from the SIPRI arms transfers database; for data on other arms supplies specific sources are given in the footnotes.

Algeria

From 1998-2002, the Algerian government procured eight MiG-29/Fulcrum-A fighter aircraft, 25 Su-24MK/Fencer-D bomber aircraft and 18 BM-9A52 Smerch multiple rocket launchers from Russia. South Africa supplied 10 Seeker UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) and upgrade packages for combat helicopters. The USA supplied six light transport aircraft and six Beech-1900D HISAR ground surveillance aircraft. Ukraine supplied 28 Mi-24V/Mi-35/Hind-E combat helicopters, up to 36 MiG-29/Fulcrum-A fighter aircraft, 64 BMP-2 armoured personnel carriers and 67 T-72M1 main battle tanks.

Rebel arms imports

Reports on arms supplies to the rebel group Groupe Islamic Armé (GIA) are scarce and usually consist of information on weapons seized by police in Europe. The cases that are reported usually involve small quantities of small arms being smuggled through networks from various European locations.76

Foreign governments have been accused of supplying the rebels with weapons. Sudan, Iran and Libya have been mentioned in this regard.77 There is, however, no firm evidence to support these allegations.

Colombia

From 1998-2002, the Colombian government procured weapons mainly from the USA. The imports included 86 Bell-205/UH-1H helicopters, several transport aircraft, five SA-2-37A reconnaissance aircraft and 36 S-70A/UH-60L helicopters. A number of small arms were also supplied.

Six Mi-17/Hip-H helicopters were supplied from Russia. From the early 1990s until mid-2002, 150 000 Galil rifles were produced in Colombia under an Israeli licence.78

78 Information received from the producer, Indumil Colombia, 26 Sep. 2002.
Colombia’s anti-rebel militias also import weapons. The United Self-Defence Groups of Colombia (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, AUC) acquired, through a private company, assault rifles from a Bulgarian company.79

Rebel arms imports

Colombian rebel groups obtain weapons from a variety of sources, mainly of a clandestine nature. This section describes arms procurement by the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia).

Although the FARC maintains that most of its weapons are obtained through capture, there have been many discoveries of foreign weapon supplies. In 1999, police intercepted the transfer of 29 Russian-made AK-47 rifles that had entered Colombia by air from Panama.80 In March 2000, Panamanian authorities claimed to have uncovered a smuggling ring operating along the Colombian border. The smugglers traded AK-47 rifles, RPG-7 grenade launchers and explosives from Nicaragua in return for Colombian cocaine or cash. Among their suspected customers was the FARC. During the same month, Panamanian customs officers confiscated 19 AK-47 rifles that had been hidden in a truck.81 Three months later, Colombian and Panamanian security forces jointly seized a ship carrying 30 AK-47 rifles and 14 M-16 assault rifles in Colon, Panama.82

In May 2000, two Israelis were arrested in Cali, Colombia. They were accused of organizing a shipment of 50 000 assault rifles from Eastern European sources to the FARC. The following month, American, Colombian and Israeli authorities uncovered an arms-trafficking network with links to criminals in Russia and Israel. The smuggling ring had arranged to deliver 50 000 AK-47 rifles to the FARC by sea, via Austria and Ecuador.83

In 1999 Colombian police claimed that they had seized Venezuelan Army rifles from FARC fighters. In another case the Colombian army raided a FARC camp on the Venezuelan border and captured four Venezuelans who had supplied the FARC with a series of arms shipments, including 5 000 AK-47 rifles.84 In March 2002, a Venezuelan pilot transporting 15 000 ammunition cartridges was arrested on Colombian territory near the Venezuelan border. The pilot stated that seven deliveries of rifles, ammunition, grenades and equipment had been made from the National Guard to the FARC, with the owner of a Venezuelan aviation company acting as a broker.85

States in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have been named as supply sources for rebel groups in Colombia. Reports have highlighted links between criminal organizations in the Balkans, in particular gangs from Kosovo and Montenegro, and Colombian drug cartels, with cocaine being shipped from Colombia to Turkey, Bulgaria and Macedonia, and weapons transferred the other way.  

Israel

From 1998-2002, the Israeli Government procured from the USA most of the weapons it used in its fight against Palestinian organizations. Many of these weapons were supplied as aid. The supplies included deliveries of and orders for over 100 F-16 combat aircraft and eight AH-64D Apache combat helicopters. The USA also delivered tens of thousands of M-16 assault rifles.

Rebel arms imports

In the 1998-2002 period there were several examples of weapons allegedly destined for Palestinian organizations being intercepted by Israeli security forces. The governments of Iran, Iraq, Libya and Syria have been accused of being involved in such arms supplies. The size of the intercepted supplies has ranged from a few to hundreds of small arms, including rifles and rockets.

Nepal

From 1998-2002, the Nepalese government received two SA-315B Lama light helicopters, unidentified numbers and types of small arms and several Casspir armoured personnel carriers from India. Two Mi-17/Hip-H helicopters were delivered from Kazakhstan, while two more were ordered from Ukraine. Two Mi-24D/Mi-25/Hind-D combat helicopters were ordered from a dealer in Australia. Up to 3300 Galil rifles were supplied from Israel, 5000 M-16 assault rifles were supplied from the USA, and 5500 Minimi light machine guns were ordered from Belgium.

Rebel arms imports

The Maoist rebels have achieved substantial disruption in Nepal without access to sophisticated weaponry. They have mainly been armed with basic and old small

---

Most of these appear to have been acquired through capture during attacks on Nepalese police stations and military barracks. The rebels have sought to establish relationships with external groups for gaining access to arms. It is alleged that weapons have been procured on the Indian black market with the help of Indian leftist insurgent groups. A batch of several hundred rifles seized by the Burmese Police near the northwestern border with India in November 2001 was believed to be en route to the rebels in Nepal. It appears that the rebels have not received any military aid from foreign governments.

Philippines

The Philippine government has acquired weapons from several sources. From 1998-2002, the Philippine government imported two Blue Horizon UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) from Israel. South Korea supplied the Philippine government with up to 10 F-5A combat aircraft. The USA supplied eight Bell-205/1H-1H helicopters, seven C-130B/K Hercules transport aircraft, one Cyclone Class patrol craft and small arms including 30 000 M-16 assault rifles. An unknown number of Minimi light machine guns was ordered from Belgium.

Rebel arms imports

Very little information is available on the import of weapons by rebel groups in the Philippines. Most of their weapons appear to have been captured or stolen from the Philippine armed forces.

Sierra Leone

From 1998-2002, the government of Sierra Leone imported from Ukraine two Mi-17/Hip-H helicopters and two Mi-24V/Mi-35/Hind-E combat helicopters. It received up to 17 500 automatic rifles and other small arms and ammunition as aid from the government of the UK. The Guinean government also became involved in the conflict. It received 40 120 mortars from Croatia, three BM-22/9P140 multiple rocket launchers from Moldova, 12 M-46 towed guns from Romania and two Mi-17/Hip-H helicopters, four Mi-24V/Mi-35/Hind-E combat helicopters and four BRDM-2 reconnaissance vehicles from Ukraine.

---

Rebel arms imports

Records of weapons surrendered by Revolutionary United Front (RUF) members include weapons that were originally produced in Eastern Europe, Belgium, Germany, the UK, and the USA.\(^97\) It remains unclear when and how the weapons ended up in Sierra Leone.

Liberia is considered to be the major link in the delivery of weapons to the RUF. Several weapons shipments to Liberia have been documented. It is not known how many of these weapons were supplied to the RUF. Identified arms supplies to Liberia include 1000 Slovakian-produced rifles which were originally supplied to Uganda in 2000. The Ugandan Government refused them on technical grounds and the suppliers sent the weapons on to Liberia instead of back to Slovakia. A second batch of weapons bound for Liberia was impounded by the Ugandan authorities.\(^98\)

In 1999 68 tons of weapons including anti-tank weapons, surface to air missiles and portable rocket launchers were supplied to Liberia. Most of these weapons were supplied from Ukraine to Burkina Faso and then shipped on to Liberia.\(^99\)

Sri Lanka

The Sri Lankan Government has acquired weapons from a broad variety of countries. From 1998-2002, it acquired two Bell-412EP helicopters from Canada. From China it imported 10 CJ-6 trainer aircraft, six K-8 jet trainer aircraft, 36 Type-66 152mm towed guns, two Lushun class patrol craft and three Shanghai class patrol craft. In addition, a warehouse containing Chinese weapons was maintained in Sri Lanka so that the Sri Lankans could procure arms and ammunition when needed.\(^100\)

From 1998-2002, Sri Lanka acquired about 16 RM-70 122mm multiple rocket launchers and about 41 T-55AM-2 main battle tanks from the Czech Republic. One Sukanya Class patrol ship was imported from India. Israel became an important supplier and delivered 12 Kfir combat aircraft, about six Scout unmanned aerial vehicles and two Reshef class fast-attack craft. Pakistan supplied about six Azar multiple rocket launchers. Russia supplied six Mi-24P/Mi-35P combat helicopters and about 30 BTR-80 armoured personnel carriers. From Singapore nine 120mm mortars were delivered. Two C-130K Hercules transport aircraft were delivered from the UK. The USA supplied one Beech-1900D HISAR ground surveillance aircraft and about three AN/TPQ-36 Firefinder artillery-locating radars. Ukraine supplied about six Mi-24V/Mi-35/Hind-E combat helicopters and seven MiG-27K/Flogger-J combat aircraft.

Rebel arms imports

The Liberation Tigers of Talim Eelam (LTTE) are armed mainly with small arms but also use armed small boats, man-portable SAMs (surface-to-air missiles) and


long-range artillery. In many ways, they operate as a conventional army.\textsuperscript{101} For the LTTE, an important method of obtaining arms has been to capture them from the government; this is the sole method used by the LTTE to obtain major weapons. Small arms, however, are also procured abroad.

Most information on LTTE arms procurement seems to originate from the Sri Lankan intelligence service. This casts some doubt on its reliability, since the service may want to legitimate its own actions by creating a negative picture of the LTTE as a drug-dealing, arms-smuggling terrorist organization. However, there is sufficient information to state that money is collected from Tamils through an international network in order to acquire and smuggle weapons for the LTTE, and that the weapons are delivered by the LTTE’s own shipping fleet.\textsuperscript{102} The origins of the weapons are reportedly very diverse. Weapons have reportedly been procured with the help of front companies and middlemen in Cambodia, Myanmar, Afghanistan, Thailand, Singapore, Bulgaria, North Korea, Ukraine, Croatia and the Czech Republic.\textsuperscript{103} Such reports are seldom substantiated with strong evidence and little information is available. Cambodia is generally seen as the most important source of weapons, since corruption is widespread and weapons can be procured from the large stocks left over from the Cambodian wars. Thailand is considered to be the main transit route for such weapons.\textsuperscript{104}

No government appears to have been involved in supplying the LTTE since 1985–87, when India provided it with military support.\textsuperscript{105}

Even though a ceasefire has been in place since 22 February 2002, the Sri Lankan Navy claimed in the months after that to have intercepted weapons being smuggled by sea to the LTTE, and Thai police seized explosives and munitions probably destined for the LTTE.\textsuperscript{106} This fed suspicions that the LTTE had used the ceasefire to re-arm and re-group.\textsuperscript{107}

\textbf{Sudan}

The Sudanese government acquires its weapons mainly from Eastern Europe. From 1998-2002, identified arms imported by the Sudanese government included 40 T-55M tanks from Belarus, 20 T-55AM-2 tanks from Poland supplied without the permission of the Polish Government and 12 Mi-24P/Mi-35P/Hind-F Combat helicopters from Russia.


\textsuperscript{107} Harris, P., ‘Sinhalese fears mount as the partition of Sri Lanka looms’, \textit{Jane’s Intelligence Review}, May 2002, p.27.
Rebel arms imports

Little information is available on weapon procurement by the rebel groups in Sudan, and most of the available information relates to arms procurement by the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM). The SPLM has used a wide array of weapons. Its arsenal includes small numbers of artillery and tanks that have been used in direct assaults on government strongholds. Most of these heavy weapons and presumably many of the small arms have been captured over the years from the Sudanese government armed forces. At times, governments and rebel groups in a number of neighbouring countries have been involved in or accused of involvement in supplying the rebels. Uganda, in particular, is known to have supported the SPLM. In late 1999, however, Uganda and Sudan each agreed to stop supporting rebel forces in the other’s territory.

One example of weapons procurement by other Sudanese rebel groups concerns the South Sudanese Liberation Movement (SSLM). In 2002, the SSLM reportedly made a deal with a group of some 400 dissidents in which the latter would be given refugee status in SSLM-controlled territory if they gave the Movement three rifles for every 10 they carried to Sudan for their own use.

---


110 Connell, D., Sudan: Global trade, local impact: arms transfers to all sides in the civil war in Sudan, (Human Rights Watch: New York, 1998). <http://www.hrw.org/reports98/sudan/>. When Uganda bought T-55 tanks from Bulgaria in 1998, there were suspicions that some of the tanks were to be provided to the SPLA. No conclusive evidence for this allegation has surfaced, however; Bonner, R., ‘Porous accord on arms’, International Herald Tribune, 7 Dec. 1998, p. 5.
