

Escaping Reuterswärd's Shadow

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A Tale of Two Trajectories

Evaluations of the achievements of international small arms activity typically begin in the mid-1990s, when the first UN resolutions on the topic emerged from the General Assembly.¹ The result is a distorted picture, leaving out the most important historic comparisons. A more complete portrait of small arms activity must go back much further – over a century – and contrast the current situation with the diplomatic achievements and technical changes of the past century.

There is a good reason why assessments of the field typically begin only after the Cold War ended. As an international issue, small arms had been all but forgotten.² Starting a full century before, however, the international community tried intermittently to assert control over the trade in armaments, albeit without much success. These failures, revealing fundamental hurdles that we are still struggling to overcome, deserve much closer inspection.

Initially, control efforts dealt explicitly with small arms, especially the Brussels Act of 1890, Article 23 of the League of Nations Covenant of 1919, and more specifically in the Treaty of St. Germain. The latter was especially important, unsuccessfully attempting to create a legal basis for implementing the League mandate for internal control. In each case, however, states were unwilling to relinquish ultimate control over their ability to export.³ Subsequent efforts, most spectacularly the failed Soviet–American Conventional Arms Transfer Talks of 1977–78, switched to emphasize major weapon systems – artillery, missiles, ships, tanks and tactical aircraft – the weapons assumed to be most destabilizing in relations between states.⁴

In lieu of a successful agreement addressing the international trade in small arms and ammunition, the field was left virtually unregulated. The most important legacy of previous negotiations was international acceptance of export licenses. This permitted national supervision, but it did not require national control. Only comprehensive embargoes on arms transfers authorized by the UN Security Council could compel governments to reign in small arms exports. With that exception, governments were free to regulate their exports as they pleased. While some countries placed small arms exports under the same system of export licensing used for major weapon systems and dual-use technologies, many practiced virtual *laissez faire*. Legal transfers, such as those between states at peace, generally were only monitored. The net result was occasionally to impede, but never to control or halt, the international trade in small arms and ammunition.

Other aspects of small arms and ammunition, especially production and private ownership, were left entirely to state discretion, resulting in the global zoo of laws and regulations that continues to this day. These range from the highly restrictive (such

FIGURE 1



Non-Violence, a gift from the Government of Luxembourg to the United Nations.
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as Indonesia, Japan, Kyrgyzstan and the United Kingdom) to the highly permissive (like Mali, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United States). There is no rhyme or reason to this menagerie. It testifies exclusively to the mysteries of national diversity.⁵

While the legal environment remains retarded, the capabilities and distribution of small arms have changed fundamentally. Since the beginning of the previous century small arms have undergone an outright revolution in lethality. Although there are no comprehensive data, there is no dispute that civilian gun ownership has become much more common than it was a century ago. If only because production accelerated during the twentieth century and properly stored guns last forever, global inventories have grown much larger.⁶ Technical improvements have kept pace as well. The world's police and militaries have almost universally adopted fully automatic firearms. New forms of small arms such as grenade launchers give combatants previously unimagined firepower. Civilian ownership of automatic pistols is commonplace. Private ownership of automatic rifles appears to remain exceptional in most countries, but is no longer shocking.⁷

The profound differences in the evolution of small arms regulation and small arms ownership lead to questions about trajectories. International control over small arms may still be in its infancy. What can we say about its future growth? Are international efforts beginning to accelerate and possibly overtake trends in technology, production and ownership? Or is regulation falling ever further behind? The question can be answered in two different ways.

The End of the Beginning?

To be sure, a decade of small arms activism has reshaped the international agenda and created an institutional legacy that will guarantee the long-term importance of the issue. Now that it is a vital element of the international peace and security process, supported by a corps of specialized research institutes and NGOs, and with the commitment of the international community, small arms diplomacy and action is here to stay.

The greatest accomplishment of small arms activism is not any particular document but the creation of the movement itself, elevating the issue to a place high among international priorities. Starting from a General Assembly resolution in 1993, small arms issues have become an international trope. The 2001 United Nations conference represented the culmination of this process, dedicating the international community to make the issue a systematic part of conflict resolution. Among the most striking aspects of this process is its *routinization*. As it gained acceptance, even antagonistic governments in East Asia and the Middle East and the Bush Administration felt compelled to find ways to demonstrate their support. Some of their activity may be legalistic and peripheral – the homage resentment pays to consensus – but even this would have been inconceivable before.

The 2001 Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (PoA) focuses exclusively on a narrow slice of the small arms agenda. It provides no new mandate for action on legally owned weapons – widely agreed to cause much of the world's worst gun problems – and it offers little basis for global action. But the catalytic effects of the conference were vital to the universalization of small arms policy. It compelled governments to create offices for coordination on small arms, the National Points of Contact. It was also the vehicle for the rapid expansion and redirection of research organizations and advocacy NGOs dedicated to these issues. Above all, it brought the issue to the top of the international agenda, insuring that it will be fully integrated into internal responses to violence and arms conflict for years to come.

Among the tangible results of the PoA was consensus to criminalize unlicensed small arms exports, brokering and production.⁸ A second result has been improved government control over official small arms stockpiles. Official stockpiles are a tempting target for pilferage and theft, a magnet for criminals and insurgents. These concerns instigated a series of projects, led mostly by donor governments from Europe, North America and East Asia, to help vulnerable countries strengthen control over their lethal property.⁹ Like efforts to restrain the illicit trade, these projects are popular in large part because they reinforce traditional state sovereignty. The newly completed international instrument to standardize the marking and tracing of small arms will further buttress state control and responsibility.¹⁰

On the periphery of the United Nations process are a growing number of closely related initiatives. Among the most important is the Firearms Protocol to the UN Convention against Transnational Crime. Intended to end illicit production and trafficking, the protocol came into force in April 2005. It is similar in intent to several regional agreements, such as those by the African Union and the Organization of

American States. Some, like the 1998 East African moratorium on the small arms trade, have been worthless. Others have been useful mechanisms to pressure recalcitrant governments. Some observers go so far as to identify regional processes as the greatest source of progress in restraint of small arms proliferation.¹¹

While most attention has been lavished on the PoA and other activity coming out of the General Assembly, the strongest action actually comes out of the Security Council. Unlike the PoA, limited by a mandate dealing almost exclusively with illicit transfers, and the General Assembly, which can only recommend action, the Security Council has the power to establish sweeping embargoes. Through a series of specific resolutions, the Security Council has established a strong precedent for international action to prohibit all transfers of small arms and light weapons to specific conflicts. Virtually every Security Council intervention against armed conflict now includes such a prohibition. Similarly, small arms disarmament has become a standard part of Security Council efforts to maintain the peace.¹²

The Beginning of the End?

While these accomplishments cannot be gainsaid, it is not clear how much momentum they create. The PoA was more of a culmination to a process rather than the beginning of a new one. It is revealing to note that the most important innovations – including the Firearms Protocol and most regional agreements – appeared before the PoA. Since then innovations have been sorely lacking, although the 2005 Instrument on Marking and Tracing shows that progress remains possible.

There are additional reasons to doubt how much was changed by the crescendo of activity in 1998–2001. As a result of these reforms, the international environment is far more restrictive on illegal exports. Otherwise the situation remains much as before. Many of the most important restrictions continue to emerge not through initiatives tailored to small arms, but as part of UN Security Council mandated embargoes and disarmament programs. As important as these are in specific situations, they set no precedents for legal exports generally.

Small arms activity may have been a wave, not a vector. Although it undoubtedly constitutes a permanent *addition* to international priorities, it is not clear that it has become a self-sustaining *process*. Rather than the small arms movement transforming states, it appears that states have transformed the small arms movement. They accept it because it is safe; posing no serious challenges to the policies they treasure most. Governments sacrifice none of their prerogatives. Above all, the PoA does not constrain legal exports. Even gun rights advocates can rest assured in a process that leaves legal ownership alone. International small arms activity is accepted, in other words, because it has been tamed.

The acceptance of sovereignty allows states to shake off the bits of the small arms agenda they dislike. A prominent example is the need for better national transparency. NGOs and the research community stress transparency as essential for international oversight, better-informed policy-making, and as a sign that governments accept responsibility for the exports they approve. Although governments have become more adept at preparing annual reports outlining their support for the PoA and

their activity helping other countries, very few release detailed information about their own small arms stockpiles, the weapons of their people, or their exports.¹³ In the case of the United States, once the model of transparency, the amount of data released has recently declined.¹⁴

Perhaps the most serious harbinger of declining progress on small arms comes from the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The lure of membership in major regional organizations has been an extraordinary incentive for national reform. Brussels and Strasbourg have used the membership process to transform incoming societies. It is a process that invariably causes painful change, but that all would-be members in the EU and NATO have calculated to be worthwhile. To this must be added the side effects of America's response to the events of 11 September 2001. These include measures like the Container Security Initiative, which makes large-scale smuggling much harder, and the Proliferation Security Initiative, which creates a legal basis for seizing questionable shipments.¹⁵

Although there are no specific provisions in any accession agreement pertaining to small arms, the need to clean up created an atmosphere extending to all aspects of national security and trade. Without EU and NATO membership, it is inconceivable that Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Romania would have revolutionized their export policies. Even Croatia and Serbia have felt compelled to adapt.¹⁶ But as the possibilities of admitting new EU members declined after the French and Dutch plebiscites against the EU Constitution, an invaluable instrument has been lost. Although the prospect of NATO membership still remains for countries like Serbia and Ukraine, the era of rapid policy change may well be over.

Of greatest importance for small arms activity generally, the movement has not been able to articulate clear goals. Where is it going now? What are the next steps? The spectrum of small arms activity is very rich, but reviewing current programs and studies, it is hard to discern a clear direction for improvement and innovation. Unless small arms activism changes, there is reason to doubt if there ever will be further great initiatives.

Frustrations of Unequal Marriage

It was not supposed to be this way. As global priorities shifted after the Cold War, the security agenda opened to permit previously unimaginable possibilities. Previously dominated by the needs of Westphalian states, international security made room for the very different needs of human security. Small arms did not endanger the stability of major powers, but they could easily undermine smaller and weakly consolidated states. They were an even greater danger to individuals, an obvious source of needless human suffering.¹⁷ Energized by the remarkable achievement of the 1997 Ottawa Convention banning anti-personnel landmines and the seemingly ineluctable rise of NGOs, attention shifted to other destructive technologies. Small arms had arrived.

A decade later, cautious optimism has yielded to growing frustration. While significant progress has been made, the rate of change is declining. Critiques of the slow progress on small arms tend to stress either the resurgence of national sovereignty or the weakness of control campaigns.¹⁸ Both are serious barriers. The weakness of the

NGO campaign has been widely acknowledged, especially its lack of direction and poor coordination between the various groups.¹⁹

If small arms diplomacy has stalled, the advocates must bear some responsibility. One of the most sophisticated critiques stresses the failure of NGOs to develop an independent voice, the result of a Faustian bargain with sympathetic governments. 'At the outset', wrote Silvia Cattaneo and Keith Krause, 'NGO activities followed, rather than preceded state or inter-governmental affairs, so that state sponsorship was critical to the success of NGO initiatives.'²⁰ Because NGOs and research institutes rely on funding from a handful of mostly European governments, they lose the independence required to press for dramatic change. The level of cooperation between the two communities is illustrated by easy acceptance of NGO staff and analysts on national delegations to international small arms conferences. At the 2005 Biennial Meeting of States at the UN in New York, at least 22 countries accredited NGO staff or research institute analysts on their official delegations.²¹

Both sides gain from this reciprocal relationship. For states, few of whom can devote more than a few professionals to these issues, this is an easy way to acquire expertise. For outside experts and advocates, government funding ensures constant activity. Such cooperation is a healthy thing, but it is also limiting. For governments, reliance on contracts and *pro bono* assistance allows effective engagement of small arms issues, without a binding commitment of their own personnel. For NGOs and research institutes, however, government recognition and financing also means government influence.

Despite the apparent reciprocity, no one pretends this is a marriage between equals. Like a firm relying on temporary employees, the official side has greater freedom to drop the relationship. While the government side can divorce at will, NGOs become dependent, sacrificing independence. The official agenda becomes theirs, and in any contest their original concerns are bound to suffer. At a minimum the partners lose healthy antagonism, the fertile breeding ground of innovation. Worthwhile ideas are suppressed to avoid controversy. More invidiously, governments co-opt their potential critics, eliminating any danger of criticism.

Reuterswärd's Shadow

While the dilemmas of international diplomacy and the unequal marriage explain some of the frustrations of efforts to deal with small arms proliferation, the most fundamental problems lie elsewhere. Above all, the movement has been inhibited by the inability of control advocates to frame the issue in terms of readily understood and easily shared goals. In lieu of a straightforward program, the issue has been defined largely by its activities. The justification becomes tautological; the goals of small arms activity are whatever it does. This may explain why it has been difficult to generate excitement for the issue outside its dedicated community. It also explains why it has been left to others, mostly outside the small arms control community, to define the objectives of the project for broader audiences.

More so than traditional issues of arms control and disarmament, small arms lend themselves to artistic representation. There is nothing new about the role of art in

perceptions of violence. Goya's *The Disasters of War* and Picasso's *Guernica* leave no doubt of that.²² Although the nuances are subject to fierce debate among historians and critics, there is no denying that art has emerged as a force directly shaping the conduct of war. In recent years photography has received the most attention. One of the best-known contemporary examples was Nick Ut's Pulitzer Prize-winning photo of the naked Kim Phuc fleeing her burning village in 1972, a photo that helped persuade the American public to abandon South Vietnam.²³

What sets small arms apart is the iconic salience of the gun.²⁴ While most war art constitutes a quest for symbols, small arms arrive with their eponymous symbology already complete. So readily reduced to artistic presentation, small arms concerns are exceptionally vulnerable to artistic interpretation. Instead of struggling for influence, artistic representations readily take control.

The most powerful framing of the small arms issue comes not from any essay, speech or a document. Mere words can never compare to the work of the Swedish artist Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd. Although his message is far from unique, his work has a better claim to universal recognition than any other. His painting and sculpture *Non-Violence*, more familiar as *The Knotted Gun*, stands out as the best known of the many artworks conceived to inspire action on these issues. Poignant – albeit oddly humorous – it is the sole representation of the issue to win near-universal recognition. Created in reaction to the murder of John Lennon in 1980 and unveiled later that year, it has been copied innumerable times in many different mediums. The image has been reproduced on postage stamps, book covers, organizational brochures and conference programs. It is the ubiquitous metaphor for small arms control.

In 1988 a large, cast metal version was given to the United Nations by the government of Luxemburg. It rests on a plinth outside the visitors' entrance in New York. In an open letter to the artist, Kofi Annan noted: 'For those who come to visit the United Nations headquarters in New York, it is usually the first thing they see.' *Non-Violence*, wrote the Secretary-General, has 'enriched the consciousness of humanity with a powerful symbol'.²⁵ The sculpture is, above all, a plea for peace. Only secondarily is it a symbol against small arms. But in this role it conveys an indisputable message, unambiguously anti-gun. It presents the bumper-sticker message that guns are a fundamental part of the problem, that their elimination is a fundamental part of the solution.

Some go even further in their praise. At a ceremony dedicating the installation of a copy of *Non-Violence* in Berlin, Günter Grass presented the sculpture as 'an emblematic image in response to the crises and hopes' of our time, 'both a symbol and a warning'. Comparing the image directly to Albrecht Dürer's engraving *Melencolia I* (1514) and Francisco Goya's *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* (1796), Grass argued, here is the most poignant symbol of the end of an historical era. Above all, *Non-Violence*, he said, illustrates the post-modern determination to eliminate all forms of human violence.²⁶

With the profound clarity that defines his craft, Reuterswärd created not just a symbol, but a mission. Of course he did not invent the idea of eliminating guns, but through his hands the abolitionist idea finds its purest metaphor. As a work of

art it is based exclusively on inspiration and aesthetic aspirations; it makes no empirical claims. By honoring his creation, though, the UN secretariat implicitly accepts its goal and makes it the mission of the international community. The message is more powerful than any Security Council resolution. The PoA is a labyrinth of bureaucratic obfuscation by comparison. But at least it tries to keep the UN out of trouble. Luxemburg's gift, to the contrary, pitched the United Nations into its familiar trap. Once again it accepted a commitment to reshape the crooked timber of humanity without any chance of finding tools equal to the job.

Soaring without inhibitions, leaving the measured language of reports and documents far behind, the knotted gun draws a direct connection between the international community and abolition. It sets a standard that would be inconceivable in an official document. Abolition is not part of the PoA. Indeed, many national policy statements go to great lengths to express commitment to the opposite, defending the right of states to arm for self-defense or the right of individuals to private ownership. Nor do I know of a statement from any government or international NGO that even implicitly approaches such a goal. For international small arms activists, the knotted gun is the most prominent statement of the goal they dare not dream of. It confuses perceptions of their projects and trivializes their efforts, which can never approach such a standard.

The only group that well and truly believes the message of the knotted gun, ironically, are gun rights advocates. This is a diverse community, of which the most entertaining are the zealots who hysterically attack 'international gun prohibitionists' and their 'gun-grabbing'.²⁷ More sophisticated versions eye the United Nations' efforts suspiciously, as a thinly disguised conspiracy to deprive ordinary people of the weapons they need to defend themselves against repressive governments and genocidal maniacs.²⁸ In its more discrete form, distrust emerges implicitly from official statements that balance descriptions of national regulatory activity with reminders that cooperation with the PoA does not weaken freedom to arm for self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter.²⁹

The assumption that international small arms activism – whether it says so or not – is really about abolition is hardly surprising. To anyone accustomed to seeing issues framed to arouse the greatest political effect, it would seem irrational to approach the issue any other way.³⁰ Art like the knotted gun corresponds perfectly to this outlook. Its obviousness is its message, confirming what people bring to it. Just as the Monica Lewinski affair gave Bill Clinton's enemies apparent proof of what they always assumed he was really about, *Non-Violence* gives gun advocates apparent proof of what they always assumed the UN was really about. As the physical manifestation of their preferred trope – the gun-grabbing authoritarians of world government and repression – it illustrates their fears perfectly.

Assuming that their adversaries play by the same rules they follow themselves – populist, uncompromising and extremely dedicated – gun advocates naturally assume that international activity cannot be about anything other than abolition. Similarly, repressive states see a sneaky attack against their ability to control their societies. Compared to their own simple and incisive messages, the nuanced language and delicate initiatives of the international community seem to conceal something. In

Non-Violence, the gun advocates and repressive governments believe they see someone's secret revealed. By framing small arms activism around the threat of abolition, moreover, they gain exaggerated influence over a debate in which they actually play a marginal role. By allowing others to set the terms of the debate, the small arms control community lost grip of the issue.

One of the hardest tasks facing the international community in its efforts to deal with small arms proliferation is the imperative to free itself of the Reuterswärd's shadow. If it is to continue to develop, to progress toward more ambitious goals, influencing not just specific conflicts, but all conflict, small arms activity must take control over its identity. Rather than allow others to determine how it is perceived – be they friends like Reuterswärd or enemies like the NRA – the movement must delineate its own long-term objectives.

Subversive Friends

While the international small arms control community has never advocated abolition, it has labored under Reuterswärd's inescapable shadow. Unwilling to embrace the commandment of his art, activists are mocked by it. Compared to his simple and incisive standard, their efforts do not amount to much. In place of abolition, their work has been organized around undefined goals, typically translated into poorly expressed expectations. In lieu of a clear agenda or a unified program, the tendency is to always seek more: more control, more transparency, more activity.

One result of this outlook is widespread discontent with the PoA. Although their language is less scathing, small arms controllers have only slightly more praise for the United Nations than their adversaries. Thus an author of a prominent evaluation of UN performance concludes:

we are very disappointed by how little has been achieved . . . In 2005 we are still saying very much that the glass is still ninety-five percent empty for most countries of the world . . . since 2001 hundreds of thousands more people have been killed by gunshot wounds and the scale of interventions to try to tackle the problem are nowhere near sufficient.³¹

Another report acknowledges that the PoA has been 'a useful guide for action', but argues it also must be transcended. Instead of focusing exclusively on illegal transfers and official inventories, 'efforts to control guns and ammunition must address the fact that the bulk of the world's small arms arsenal are in the hands of civilians, and that civilian misuse is a primary source of firearm-related death and insecurity'. This leads to the conclusion that 'It is time for States to abandon the artificial distinction drawn between the legal and illicit trade.'³²

There is a point to this discontent. Neither the highly specific decisions of the Security Council nor the deliberately vague recommendations of the General Assembly amount to a systematic program for universal reform. From this perspective, even the most concrete manifestations of international agreement like the Firearms Convention, the Instrument on Marking and Tracing, or regional treaties only deal with secondary or marginal aspects of the problem of small arms proliferation. Nor

do they cumulatively amount to a comprehensive plan. Without assurances that the field is approaching take-off, it may be prudent to assume it remains unlikely to accelerate. If it is poised, it is closer to the beginning of the end rather than the end of the beginning.

Such criticisms make an important point, but they also seem exaggerated. The United Nations has done more on small arms than it has on any other issue of international security since it concluded the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in 1995. Compared to the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament – the UN's only formal armaments negotiating body, deadlocked for a decade – the accomplishments of the small arms process are impressive. There are more teeth in small arms instruments than in the Security Council's highly celebrated consensus against WMD terrorism.³³ International action on small arms may not set speed records, but it compares favorably to the painful collapse of the nuclear non-proliferation regime.³⁴

What makes UN small arms action look bad is not its own shortcomings, but the knotted gun. Compared to the ideal, to the dream of liberating humanity of the trauma of war and crime, any concrete policy has to look paltry.

The Dilemmas of Broadening and Deepening

Perhaps the most natural response to disappointment has been adaptation. Instead of concentrating more aggressively on the basic problem of weapons proliferation, it has been tempting to pursue other dimensions of the problem. The result has been a dramatic widening of the small arms agenda. The same tendency has been widely observed throughout the field of security studies.³⁵ From its origins in the immediate causes and consequences of weapons proliferation, small arms-related endeavors now reach far beyond, concentrating more explicitly on small arms effects and the motives that create demand for them. The emphasis on the consequences of firearms proliferation creates opportunities for overlap with related fields. The broader agenda includes support for gun victims, interference with provision of emergency aid, tailoring responses to the different implications for men and women, non-violent conflict resolution, reintegration of former combatants and security sector reform.

Few of these concerns are completely novel; most have been acknowledged as important elements in conflict resolution since the late 1990s or earlier. What has changed is their absorption within the ever-expanding small arms project. With broadening has come new sources of enthusiasm and creativity. Small arms research and policy is far richer as a result, drawing closer to the causes and manifestations of gun-violence.

At its most ambitious, broadening emphasizes not just on the direct effects of small arms proliferation – death, destruction and insecurity – but the indirect effects as well. Instead of focusing exclusively on gun homicides and war casualties, broadening encourages the field to devote attention to displacement of refugees, malnutrition, decline of medical and social services and economic welfare. Since small arms are ubiquitous in armed conflict, almost any aspect of armed conflict is related to their presence.

Indirect effects are an important part of the small arms problematique. But they also work like an intellectual narcotic. The leap is irresistibly liberating, transforming a relatively narrow phenomenon into a comprehensive approach to human security. The broader agenda also pushes up numbers, assuring media coverage and official attention. In the best publicized case, a major study concluded that *direct* war fatalities in the Congo between 1998 and 2004 probably numbered under 100,000, but approximately 3.8 million people died altogether, victims of the *indirect* consequences and chaos of the fighting.³⁶ When progress on issues like small arms transfers and technical advances is frustratingly slow, indirect effects offer a way to keep international attention focused close by. But they also push small arms into the background. Instead of encouraging activists and policy-makers to deal primarily with small arms *per se*, the wider perspective compels them to deal with the much more intractable challenges of conflict resolution, peace building and state consolidation.

To analysts, relief officials and activists who approach these issues from a background in small arms proliferation, it might appear as if their purview is growing. This undoubtedly is true over the short run, but in the long run the transformation is more likely to auger the decline of international small arms activity. With its priorities spread among a continuously growing catalogue of concerns, the original impulse of controlling small arms proliferation is bound to dissipate. As the resources previously allocated for small arms proliferation go to other issues, it is not mere feasible, but likely, that the salience of small arms will decline.

As an analytical approach, indirect effects transform small arms from a specific phenomenon into an approach for dealing with wider and more fundamental issues of global policy. As a lens for viewing other, related issues, small arms are extremely useful. But intellectual lenses are only approaches to insight, not a target for action themselves. By *instrumentalizing* small arms, broader approaches reduce the attention devoted to small arms themselves. The risk is identical to that encountered by studies and policy on conventional arms transfers in the 1980s and early 1990s. That field shifted from a principal concern with transfers of major weapon systems in and of themselves, to using arms transfers as an intellectual lens for better understanding related issues. It was the beginning of the end of traditional arms trade studies, a blow from which that field never recovered.³⁷ Ironically, as traditional arms trade work declined, many experts migrated to small arms studies, hoping to recover the lost momentum of the parent field. Unless self-conscious attention is devoted to restoring the core of small arms studies and policy-making, it risks the same fate.

It is imperative that this field should cultivate new sources of inspiration. It will be enriched and enlivened by broadening. But it is equally essential that broadening does not come at the expense of deepening. If the original impulse, the determination to diminish the basic problem of small arms proliferation, is allowed to weaken, the field cannot prosper. Broader interests must not be suppressed, but nor can they serve as a substitute for original motives. Important in and of their own right, related issues will make vital contributions, but there is no guarantee that these campaigns will affect small arms as well. Accomplishments in related issues are no substitute for progress in the original field.

There is no alternative, in other words, to renewed commitment to dealing with small arms proliferation *per se*. It must broaden, but it also must deepen.

Real Goals for a Real World: Minimalist and Maximalist

Above all, the small arms project requires clear objectives. If it fails to articulate goals of its own, adversaries – with invidious intent – will impute goals for it. More fundamentally, the lack of explicit goals endangers the long-term survival of small arms activism. Without goals to provide motivation and unity, the project risks drift and incoherence. Only with goals, finally, is there any way to evaluate the project's achievements and progress, the most fundamental justification for further support. Explicit goals, in other words, provide insulation against the caprices of political fashion and intellectual trends.

Goals are not risk-free. Time and again it has been convenient for small arms activists to raise the movement's ambiguity as a shield against attacks from the political extremes. It allows the movement to sympathize with bold ambitions without having to make a real commitment. Ambiguity also has facilitated adaptation, making it easy for small arms projects to metamorphosize into broader programs for conflict resolution. A typical example is the evolution of small arms disarmament. Originally conceived as a discrete project, it has become a component of more ambitious programs for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration is a typical example. A more rigorously defined small arms project may not be able to reach out as broadly. With a clearer identity, however, it gains commitment and intensity.

As analysts have noted elsewhere, a visionary small arms program must follow the guns.³⁸ So far, the field has devoted most of its energy to the illicit trade, not because it is the most dangerous aspect of small arms proliferation, but because it is the only aspect on which states could agree to work together. To be sure, the black market is a dangerous source of weaponry, potentially highly destabilizing. But the preoccupation with the black market is a political choice based on the needs of states. It reflects the instrumental priorities of governments rather than the intrinsic significance of the black market. Other problems, including legal weapons, theft, catastrophic loss and technological escalation are equal or more serious dangers.

Although the statistics are rudimentary, it appears that the vast majority of the world's small arms are legally owned, and the majority of international and domestic transfers are conducted in complete legality.³⁹ Whether or not legally owned small arms are involved in most of the world's gun crime, their involvement is clear. Most of the world's war death and injury appears to be caused by legally transferred and owned weaponry. As targets of theft, moreover, legal small arms easily become illegal. When whole arsenals are lost – as happens with surprising regularity – the results are catastrophic. Wars in the Caucasus, Kosovo, Macedonia and Iraq today were shaped by such catastrophic losses.

Small arms policy should focus not only on illegal and legally owned weaponry, but also on the most deadly categories of weapons. The burgeoning arms race between police and criminals around the world is one symptom of the revolutionary

changes brought by the proliferation of fully automatic small arms. A serious small arms policy must also provide tools to slow or halt the flow of automatic and semi-automatic firearms.

A fully effective, international small arms policy will require a more ambitious agenda and more confrontational activism, pressing states to change policies rather than facilitating existing official predispositions. Even as it rises to the challenge, though, the small arms community must accept the inherent limits of political institutions. Action to restrain legal ownership or state stockpiles will cross red lines which many governments will try to maintain. Any agenda that includes abolition, whether literally or even metaphorically, will flounder in the United Nations, where the rule of consensus decision-making suppresses everything to the lowest common denominator. A policy based on abolition will die in any forum where the United States can cast a deciding vote.⁴⁰ Any policy based on mandatory transparency will not survive the scrutiny of the governments of China, India and much of the Middle East.

Fortunately there is much more that can be accomplished without crossing these red lines. The range of proposals that can be advanced through the United Nations constitutes a *minimal agenda* for global reform. Drawn from ideas already under discussion, possible elements of a minimal international small arms agenda include:

- Universal, standardized marking of all newly manufactured small arms, light weapons and ammunition.
- Universal registration of private and official small arms and light weapons.
- Require secure storage and continuous, personalized responsibility for all private and official small arms, light weapons and ammunition.
- Require the destruction of surplus official weapons and ammunition.
- Limit the number and types of weapons allowed to civilian buyers.

By assuring better control over all small arms, this kind of minimal program would discourage theft, illegal sales and diversion to illicit users. It would reduce the most pathological aspects of small arms proliferation. A minimal program like this is no panacea for small arms violence, but it would far surpass the effects of current initiatives. Nor is this program the last word; much more creative possibilities and approaches tailored to regional needs can easily be imagined. In recent years, several countries have already implemented similar packages, such as Australia, Canada and South Africa. The specifics can vary; the vision does not.

An agenda targeting guns generally would mark a major departure for international efforts to deal with small arms proliferation. It would transform a community that previously worked to make small arms possession safer into a movement dedicated to reversing proliferation. Such proposals also would reduce the pervasive ambiguity of current campaigns. In their clarity is an alternative to the false expectations and exaggerated burdens created by abolitionist art.

Such an agenda does not approach abolition. Even the most comprehensive reforms like those listed above would leave enormous numbers of small arms in official stockpiles and private hands. But even so modest a proposal is guaranteed to

arouse controversy. Whether it were enacted through national action, regional or global mandates, it would require governments to bear a far greater responsibility on these issues than most have had to face before. Such reforms are imaginable only through the dedicated effort of national and international NGOs working in close cooperation.

More ambitious reforms, designed not to reduce but to minimize or even eliminate the role of firearms in society, can only be achieved at the state level. The experience of the states that have tried to implement such reforms – such as Australia, Brazil and the United Kingdom – illustrates the possibilities. But it is also obvious that many countries never will enact similar proposals. This explains why such goals can only be sought selectively. While a minimalist agenda can be promoted through the United Nations, a *maximalist agenda* can only be pursued regionally or country by country. But it would only be possible with the active support of other countries, if only to prevent smuggling. Possible elements of national small arms agendas include:

- Prohibit the sale or transfer to private owners of new automatic and semi-automatic weapons.
- Prohibit private ownership of automatic and semi-automatic rifles and shotguns.
- Prohibit private ownership of handguns.
- Transform the right of gun ownership into a contingent privilege.

The maximalist agenda is a reminder of how little has happened since small arms re-emerged as a major international issue in the 1990s. Dramatic new proposals cannot be accomplished through the United Nations or any other universal membership international organization. They must be enacted at the national or regional level. It is no accident that the countries to succeed in the most ambitious reforms have done so through purely national campaigns.⁴¹ Consequently, the most far-reaching reforms of small arms ownership must start with a concomitant reform of activist organizations and research institutes. These must shift their focus from international institutions to national campaigns. Because international consensus tends to inhibit progress on small arms, organizational, financial and analytical support should be channeled down the most promising *national* paths.

Conclusion: Beyond the United Nations

Perhaps the most profound lesson of the years since the small arms issue has returned to international politics is its fundamental importance. More than any other aspect of international security, this one continuously touches people. It directly affects the lives of millions every year, whether through death and injury, war and crime, dislocation and malnutrition, or through fear and intimidation. It indirectly affects far more, imposing the weight of choices never considered, of investment not made, of good not achieved.

A second and more subtle lesson is that venue matters; *where* small arms policy gets done is a synonym for *what* gets done. The tacit assumption that the United Nations is

the most natural place to pursue small arms issues fundamentally shaped the nature of the global response. The choice of venues led to the emphasis not on small arms *per se*, but rather on the illegal trade. The most aggressive measures to limit the evils of small arms occurred in specific countries through national campaigns. It follows that national campaigns, rather than international consensus, should be the primary emphasis of future efforts to restrain and reverse small arms proliferation.

It is ironic that small arms issues continue to be addressed largely through the lens of the modern state. Except for parts of Africa and a few other places, small arms almost never endanger the security of states. Because they rarely challenge the authority of the state, they could be overlooked so long as international affairs were dominated by traditional notions of stability. The shift away from the exclusive preoccupation with the state, to embrace the effects of international affairs on individuals, catapulted small arms from the extreme periphery to the very center of concern. Yet the state remains the primary channel and focus of small arms activism, a direct result of the habit of addressing the issue through the narrow blinkers of the United Nations.

Faster progress on small arms issues requires distance from Reuterswård's shadow. It demands control over the small arms agenda. Rather than accepting goals asserted by art and adversaries, small arms activism needs a stronger dedication to its core principles. This calls for deepening the small arms agenda, reacting to the pathetic pace of change not just by expanding the agenda, but also through renewed commitment to the basic problem of weapons proliferation. This can be achieved only by shifting the fulcrum of action, away from international institutions, toward the national governments. If guns are the problem, the solutions can only lie with the authorities that control them. Those authorities are almost exclusively agencies of the state. It is with them that the prospects for change are greatest. It is there that attention should be concentrated.

The role of the international community is strongest on the periphery of small arms proliferation. While the United Nations cannot do much about the global spread of more sophisticated firearms, it is the best place to deal with related pathologies such as internecine war, displacement of refugees, human rights abuse, state consolidation, and the threat of genocide.

On the core issues of small arms proliferation, the best role for the United Nations is not lighting the way forward – this is plainly beyond its reach – but clearing the path of obstructions. Rather than wobbling beneath the full weight of change, the United Nations can contribute more by keeping the international community from becoming an impediment to change. Above all, it can promote an environment favoring restraint, in which countries are encouraged to develop controls tailored to distinct national priorities. But the burden of transformation will continue to lie with national governments, the ones who actually control and regulate the guns.

NOTES

1. David Biggs, 'United Nations Contributions to the Process', *Disarmament Forum*, No.2 (2000), pp.25–26.
2. One of the few authors who tried to arouse interest in small arms transfers before the fall of the Berlin Wall was Michael Klare, *American Arms Supermarket* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1984).

3. The latter was especially important, establishing the precedent for international oversight of arms exports and national supervision through export licenses. The *Treaty of Peace between the Allied and Associated Powers and Austria; Protocol, Declaration and Special Declaration*, signed in St. Germain-en-Laye, 10 September 1919, was ratified by Austria, acknowledging its defeat in the war, but failed to come into effect with other countries. See Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *The Arms Trade with the Third World* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1971), pp.90–132.
4. Jo L. Husbands and Anne Hessing Cahn, 'The Conventional Arms Transfers Talks: An Experiment in Mutual Arms Restraint', in Thomas Ohlson (ed.), *Arms Transfers Limitations and Third World Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp.110–125; and Keith Krause, 'Controlling the Arms Trade since 1945', in *Encyclopedia of Arms Control and Disarmament*, Vol.II (New York: Scribner's, 1993), pp.1021–1039.
5. The most systematic comparative study is David B. Kopel, *The Samurai, the Mountie, and the Cowboy: Should America Adopt the Gun Controls of Other Democracies?* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1992). Also see Martin Killias, John van Kesteren and Martin Rindlisbacher, 'Guns, Violent Crime and Suicide in 21 Countries', *Canadian Journal of Criminology* (October 2001), pp.429–447.
6. In the United States, the best-documented country, 44 million new guns were sold to non-military customers from 1899 to 1945. During the years 1946 to 1998, sales more than quadrupled as 203.5 million new non-military guns were sold on its domestic market. *Commerce in Firearms in the United States, February 2000* (Washington, DC: Department of the Treasury, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms, 2000), pp.A3–A5.
7. The United Kingdom banned private ownership of automatic rifles after the 1987 Hungerford massacre, but crime reports leave no doubt that they are back. 'Journey of AK47 from War Zone to a Killing in the Shires', *The Times*, 27 August 2005.
8. Elli Kytömäki and Valerie Yankey-Wayne, *Implementing the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons: Analysis of the Reports Submitted by States in 2003* (Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research and Small Arms Survey, October 2004), pp.48–73, 87–99.
9. *Ibid.*, pp.120–138.
10. *Report of the Open-ended Working Group to Negotiate an International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons*, A/60/88 (New York: United Nations, 27 June 2005).
11. Keith Krause, 'Multilateral Diplomacy, Norm Building and UN Conferences: The Case of Small Arms and Light Weapons', *Global Governance* (April–June 2002), pp.247–263.
12. *Small Arms: Report of the Secretary-General*, S/2005/69 (New York: United Nations, 7 February 2005).
13. Helen Hughes, 'Small Arms: Monitoring the UN Action Programme', in *Verification Yearbook 2004* (London: Vertic, 2005), pp.131–133.
14. *Small Arms Survey 2004* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.12.
15. Jofi Joseph, 'The Proliferation Security Initiative: Can Interdiction Stop Proliferation?' *Arms Control Today* (June 2004); and *Container Security*, GAO-03-770 (Washington, DC: US Government Accounting Office, July 2003).
16. *Taming the Arsenal: Small Arms and Light Weapons in Bulgaria* (London: Saferworld, March 2005); *Living with the Legacy: Small Arms and Light Weapons in Republic of Serbia* (London: Saferworld, March 2005).
17. The change in priorities can be dated with some precision between two academic conferences. At a workshop on the arms trade at Columbia University in November 1993, small arms issues were barely mentioned. At a similar conference at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in February 1994, they were the dominant topic. The conference papers are collected in Robert E. Harkavy and Stephanie G. Neuman (eds.), 'The Arms Trade: Problems and Prospects in the Post-Cold War World', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol.535 (September 1994); and Jeffrey Boutwell et al. (eds.), *Lethal Commerce* (Cambridge, MA: The American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1995).
18. Suzette R. Grillot and Molly E. Hanna, 'Exposing the Small Arms Movement', unpublished manuscript, 2005; and Aaron Karp, 'Small Arms and the Revenge of the State', *Contemporary Security Policy* (August 2001), pp.121–129.
19. Stefan Brem, 'Too Much Too Soon? NGOs and Middle Powers in Need for More Coordination on Small Arms Activities', in Kenneth R. Rutherford et al. (eds.), *Reframing the Agenda* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), ch.3.
20. Silvia Cattaneo and Keith Krause, 'A Voice for Whom: Legitimacy and Advocacy in the International Action Network on Small Arms', unpublished paper, March 2004.

21. *Global Action to Stop Gun Violence: Second Biennial Meeting of States 11–15 July 2005: Report* (London: IANSA, 2005), p.5.
22. In a field crowded with overheated rhetoric, a uniquely persuasive examination of the role of art in warfare is Peter Paret, *Imagined Battles: Reflections of War in European Art* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). On the impact of *Guernica*, see Gijs Van Hensbergen, *Guernica: The Biography of a Twentieth-century Icon* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2004), and Russell Martin, *Picasso's War: The Destruction of Guernica, and the Masterpiece that Changed the World* (New York: Dutton, 2002).
23. Denise Chong, *The Girl in the Picture: The Story of Kim Phuc, the Photograph, and the Vietnam War* (New York: Viking, 2000). The belief that the photo contributed to end of the war is challenged in a widely reproduced essay by Ronald N. Timberlake, 'The Myth of the Girl in the Photo' <<http://www.warbirdforum.com/vphoto.htm>>, November 1997. The role of war photography in general is examined more systematically in Frances Fralin, *The Indelible Image: Photographs of War, 1846 to the Present* (New York: Abrams, 1985), and Jorge Lewinski, *The Camera at War: A History of War Photography from 1848 to the Present Day* (London: Allen, 1978).
24. 'Shooting Gallery: An Introduction to Guns in Contemporary Art', *Small Arms Survey 2005: Weapons at War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.143–157.
25. Reprinted in Carl Fredrik Reuterswård, *Stil är bedrägeri* [Style is Deception] (Värnamo, Sverige: Area, 2004), p.39.
26. Günter Grass, 'Der Knoten im Revolverlauf' (Chancelrey Garden speech, 22 August 2005), *Günter Grass Stiftung Brnen* <<http://www.guenter-grass.de>>; Eckhard Fuhr, 'Die Gnade der totalen Niederlage', *Die Welt*, 23 August 2005.
27. A useful summary of these accusations is Marjorie Ann Browne, *The United Nations and 'Gun Control'* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 7 April 2005). Also see the allegations by Wayne R. LaPierre in his debate with Rebecca Peters, King's College, London, 12 October 2004. Transcript available at <http://www.iansa.org/action/nra_debate.htm>.
28. One of the most sophisticated articulations of this perspective is David B. Kopel, Paul Gallant and Joanne D. Eisen, 'Microdisarmament: The Consequences for Public Safety and Human Rights', *University of Missouri at Kansas City Law Review*, Vol.73, No.4 (2005), pp.1–45.
29. This refrain was a common theme of national reports to the First Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, New York, 7–11 July 2003, available at <<http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/databases.htm>>.
30. Among the most influential works on political framing are George Lakoff, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*, second edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); and George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, second edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
31. Paul Eavis quoted in 'UN Arms Plan Misses Mark, Anti-gun Network Says', *Reuters*, 12 July 2005. Also see Richard Norton-Taylor, 'UN Arms Trade Deal Toothless, Say Critics', *The Guardian*, 14 July 2005. *International Small Arms Action 2005* (London: Bite the Bullet, 2005), pp.11, 315.
32. *Missing Pieces: Directions for Reducing Gun Violence through the UN Process on Small Arms Control* (Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, July 2005), pp.9, 118.
33. A useful assessment of the latter is Olivia Bosch and Peter van Ham (eds.), *Global Non-Proliferation and Counter-Terrorism: The Impact of UNSCR 1540* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2005).
34. Claire Applegarth, 'Divisions Foil NPT Review Conference', *Arms Control Today* (June 2005).
35. Steve Smith, 'The Contested Concept of Security', in Ken Booth (ed.), *Critical Security Studies and World Politics* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005), pp.55–58.
36. *Mortality in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Results from a Nationwide Survey, Conducted April–June 2004* (New York: International Rescue Committee, December 2004). A similar methodology is applied more rigorously in Les Roberts *et al.*, 'Mortality Before and After the 2003 Invasion of Iraq: Cluster Sample Survey', *The Lancet*, 29 October 2004, pp.1857–1864.
37. The transformation of arms trade studies is a theme of Keith Krause, *Arms and the State: Patterns of Military Production and Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
38. Notably *Missing Pieces: Directions for Reducing Gun Violence through the UN Process on Small Arms Control* (Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, July 2005).
39. This theme has been developed in the annual stockpiles and transfers chapters of *The Small Arms Survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, annual).
40. Abigail A. Kohn, *Shooters: Myths and Realities of America's Gun Cultures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.136–139.
41. For an example, see Aaron Karp, 'Dunblane and the International Politics of Gun Control', in Stuart Nagel (ed.), *Policymaking and Peace* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003), ch.8.