Light Weapons and International Security: A Canadian Perspective

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In recent years, the global proliferation of conventional weapons has earned a prominent, if not central, place on the increasingly crowded post-Cold War international security agenda. But while public, academic and governmental awareness of the problems associated with the proliferation of conventional weapons is growing, the diffusion of *light weapons* (a sub-set of conventional armaments) remains a seriously underexamined phenomenon. This is somewhat surprising given that ninety percent of all deaths and injuries sustained in the course of intra-state conflicts since 1993 were the result of direct fire from light weapons.[1] For those interested in addressing the light weapons problem, it is also quite disturbing; for, as one recent study concludes, "before efforts to limit light weapons are likely to be effective, the issue itself must receive significantly more national and international attention."[2] Simply stated, unless and until the ubiquity, ready availability and continuing proliferation of light weapons is recognized as a serious impediment to democratization, development, good governance and peacebuilding it is unlikely that serious steps will be taken to develop a comprehensive strategy for dealing with this problem.

In light of these considerations, the purpose of this study is twofold: to provide an overview to the causes and consequences of the ready availability and continuing proliferation of light weapons, and to develop a framework for thinking about practical, sustainable and realistic measures to address this problem. It begins with a discussion of the nature of light weapons, and then proceeds to develop the following four propositions:

1. The ready availability and continuing proliferation of light weapons pose serious challenges to development, democratization, good governance, and other aspects of "human security";

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[1] Swadesh Rana, *Small Arms and Intra-State Conflicts* (New York: United Nations, 1995), 1. It should be noted that intra-state conflicts are by far the most common form of armed conflict in the contemporary world.

[2] Susannah L. Dyer and Natalie J. Goldring, "Controlling Global Light Weapons Transfers: Working Toward Policy Options", paper prepared for the Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association, San Diego, CA, 16-20 April 1996, 1.

2. Underpinning the diffusion of light weapons is a complex ecology of causation that includes the failure of states to provide adequate security against threats of organised or unstructured violence, the persistence of militarised cultural forms, the increased availability of light weapons on the international market, and the absence of any generally agreed international norm limiting the rights of states to acquire such weapons;

3. To be effective, political measures will have to address both the supply and demand sides of the light weapons equation; and

4. Canada can play an important, if modest, role in mobilising the international community to deal with the light weapons problem.

Terms and Definitions

There are four definitions of light weapons currently in use, none of which is entirely satisfactory. First, light weapons can be defined by exclusion — that is, as "those weapons not covered in existing data collections on major weapons" such as SIPRI and the UN Conventional Arms Register.[3] Second, they can be defined as *weapons carried by infantry*. While this definition covers armaments such as pistols, grenade launchers and light rocket launchers, "it excludes an enormous range of weapons also excluded by the [SIPRI and UN] registers, such as heavy machine guns, and even the lightest antiaircraft artillery. . . ."[4] Third, light weapons can be defined as those *transported by animals and light vehicles*.[5] This definition covers heavy machine guns and some artillery, as well as recoilless rifles and light-to-medium mortars, but does not provide for a clear conceptual distinction between light weapons and major conventional weapons systems. Finally, light weapons can be defined as the *weapons used in internecine conflict* — that is, as the weapons that are actually responsible for the death and destruction associated with intra-state and inter-communal violence. On this definition, light weapons can include anything from handguns to 152mm howitzers and even aircraft.

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[3] These four definitions are reviewed in Aaron Karp, "The Arms Trade Revolution: the Major Impact of Small Arms," *Washington Quarterly* 17:4 (Autumn 1994), 71.

[4] *Ibid*.

[5] In 1983, NATO adopted a variation of this definition which defined light weapons as "all crew-portable direct fire weapons of a calibre less than 50mm [with] a secondary capability to defeat light armour and helicopters." Preface, *Jane's Infantry Weapons 1992-93*, 182.

Because it is difficult to resolve conclusively the tensions between these various definitional approaches, this paper adopts a broad conceptualization of light weapons. Thus:

> ***Light weapons*** **are defined to include all armaments that fall below the threshold of major conventional weapons systems (which are understood to include those weapons encompassed by the seven categories of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms: battle tanks, armoured combat vehicles, large calibre artillery, combat aircraft, attack helicopters, warships, and missiles/launchers)**.[6]

At one end of the scale, this definition encompasses personal weapons such as assault rifles, light machine guns and landmines. At the other end, it includes recoilless rifles, mortars, light artillery and even some missile systems. Obviously, this classification is provisional and open to debate; but it does provide a starting point from which one can begin to address the light weapons problem.[7] Figure 1 provides a list of some common types of light weapons.

Light weapons can be found at every point along the continuum of technological complexity. At one extreme, light weapons can be highly sophisticated, embodying increasingly advanced (and lethal) technologies. The most important developments in this respect include: reductions in size and weight; improvements in target acquisition; increased rate of fire; "improved ballistic and terminal effects of projectiles"; "improvements in affordability, simplicity and ruggedness"; and reduced maintenance requirements.[8] At the other end of the continuum, light weapons can be simple in the extreme. The AK-47, for example, has fewer than thirty moving parts, and is so simple that it can be used and maintained by a 10-year-old child. Although it is important not to discount the impact of technological developments on the destructiveness of individual light

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[6] Regarding the UN Register see Edward Laurance, *et al*., *Arms Watch* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Malcolm Chalmers, *et al*., (eds.), *Developing the UN Register of Conventional Arms* (Bradford: Bradford University, 1994).

[7] As Jasjit Singh has argued, there is a pressing need for a common and authoritative definition of light weapons, as well as a classification system that would allow one to distinguish between more and less "destabilizing" weapons. The upcoming UN Expert Group on Small Arms could provide a useful forum for developing such a definition and classificatory system. See Jasjit Singh, "Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons," paper presented at the Eighth Regional Disarmament Meeting in the Asia-Pacific Region, Kathmandu, 21-24 February 1996.

[8] See Swadesh Rana, *Small Arms and Intra-State Conflicts,* Research Paper No. 34 (New York and Geneva: UNIDIR, 1995), 7.

weapons, it is clear that the most troubling of these armaments are clustered at the "low-tech" end of the technological continuum. Such "mature" light weapons have the following characteristics:[9]

- they are based on simple, widely-diffused technologies;
- they do not require much skill to operate; and
- they are exceedingly durable, requiring only basic field maintenance.

Measured in terms of social impact, the light weapons problem is primarily (though not exclusively) a problem of such *mature* weapons technologies. Unlike major conventional weapons systems and advanced-technology light weapons, "mature light weapons" do not require elaborate logistical and maintenance support. As a result, they are commonly used by insurgent groups, paramilitary formations and criminal organizations that lack the logistical infrastructure of well-developed military forces. These characteristics, however, also make mature light weapons the preferred armaments of state security forces engaged in "low-intensity" conflict, internal security operations, and routine policing. Not surprisingly, the attractiveness of mature light weapons to both state and non-state actors has made them the principal instruments of destruction employed in both major and minor armed conflicts around the world. The wars in Rwanda, ex-Yugoslavia, Angola, Mozambique and Somalia, to cite just a few examples, were fought almost exclusively with light weapons based on mature technologies. For these reasons, in the remainder of this article the term "light weapons" will refer exclusively to *mature* light weapons.

FIGURE 1

Some Common Light Weapons

- Assault Rifles
- Machine Guns
- Light Anti-Tank Weapons
- Light Mortars
- Shoulder Fired Anti-Aircraft Missiles
- Landmines

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[9] For a further elaboration of this concept James Keeley, Nancy J. Pearson-Mackie and Shawn MacWha, "Weapons of Mass Destruction as Mature Technologies: Implications for Control, Verification and Confidence-Building," a report prepared for the Verification Research Unit of the Department of Foreign Affairs, 5 November 1993.

The Consequences of the Ready Availability and Widespread Diffusion of Light Weapons

The light weapons problem is actually a set of five conceptually distinct (though practically interrelated) problems. These can be summarized as follows:

- Easy access to light weapons undermines both traditional and modern institutions of "human security";[10]
- Light weapons can play an important role in creating and sustaining a "culture of violence";
- Easy access to light weapons can help sustain authoritarian governments and thwart progress toward democratic governance;
- Certain types of light weapons are widely believed to be "inhumane," either because they are "indiscriminate" or because they cause "needless human suffering";
- The use of certain types of light weapons (landmines, for example) can undermine efforts at post-conflict peacebuilding and economic reconstruction.

The deleterious effect of the ready availability of light weapons on human security is clearly evident in many parts of the world. In the long run, of course, persons and communities can only be secured from the threat of violence if they are able to develop sustainable institutions of public order, conflict mediation, good governance and national defence. Easy access to arms, however, can undermine both traditional and modern institutional arrangements capable of performing such functions. The ready availability of weapons makes it far too easy for sub-state groups to seek remedy for grievances through the application of violence/terror against persons, communities or the institutions through which human security is provided.[11] Typically, this results in one of two outcomes: either the institutions collapse, or the state attempts to buttress them through the use of its police, paramilitary and military forces. In either case, there is great potential for increased localized violence and heightened insecurity.

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[10] See Christopher Louise, *The Social Impacts of Light Weapons Availability and Proliferation*, 3-5. For a discussion of the concept of "human security" see Government of Canada, *Canada in the World* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 1995), 25; United Nations, *Human Development Report 1994* (New York: United Nations, 1994), 22-40; and Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighbourhood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 80.

[11] For a discussion of this phenomenon in the African context see Daniel Volman, "The Light Weapons Trade in Africa," paper presented at the International Studies Association Annual Meeting, San Diego, CA, 17 April 1996; and Joseph P. Smaldone, "Military Burden, Conflict and Arms Control in Sub-Saharan Africa: Puzzles, Paradoxes and Prescriptions," paper presented to the 38th annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, Orlando, FL, 3-6 November 1995.

Another consequence of light weapons proliferation and protracted social conflict has been the emergence in many parts of the world of a "culture of violence" that is inimical to sustainable human security.[12] In societies where such a culture has taken hold, normative perceptions of human dignity are eroded, "inviting widespread acts of rape, torture and other forms of repression."[13] Such societies also seem to be prone to "cultural militarization" — that is, to the transformation of culture in ways that render violent responses to social problems normal and unexceptional. Cultural militarization marginalizes non-violent strategies for conflict resolution, ultimately leading to the brutalization of society and the weakening of human security institutions.

The diffusion of light weapons can also thwart progress toward democratic governance. "Especially in states with weak 'national' identities, religious, ethnic, racial or cultural minorities can, by dominating or controlling the institutions of violence, entrench their positions and thwart the emergence of more pluralist or representative politics."[14] While the security of such states is always based on some combination of coercion *and* consent, ready access to arms (especially at times of unrest) can lead to an increased dependence on fear and violence as instruments of political control.

Light weapons proliferation and localized violence can also polarize societies and intensify inter-communal violence. The conventional wisdom with respect to so-called "ethnic conflicts" is that they are simply the "product of 'deep-seated hatreds' or 'ancient animosities' that have been unleashed by the collapse of authoritarian structures that had previously contained them."[15] Increasingly, however, theoretical and practical research indicates that such an interpretation does not capture the true dynamics of "communal violence." More serious analyses of persistent and violent inter-communal conflict reveal that the roots of such conflicts are to be found in political activities that heighten the salience of certain ascriptive identities (tribal, racial,

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[12] See Kumar Rupesinghe and Marcial Rubio C. (eds.), *The Culture of Violence* (Tokyo: United Nations University, 1994).

[13] Christopher Louise, *The Social Impacts of Light Weapons Availability and Proliferation*, 19.

[14] Krause, *et al*., *Constraining Conventional Proliferation: A Role for Canada*, a report prepared for the Non-Proliferation, Arms Control and Disarmament Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Canada, March 1996, 100.

[15] Human Rights Watch, *Playing the "Communal Card": Communal Violence and Human Rights* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1995), vii.

linguistic or religious) so that they overwhelm more complex and cross-cutting forms of identity. These political activities can take two broad forms. First, they can assume the shape of state policy. All too often, when governments are faced with a crisis in legitimacy they will "play the communal card," presenting themselves as the instrument of a particular ethnic, racial or religious group.[16] This leads to the differential treatment of communal groups and ultimately to the evolution of identity patterns which emphasize a single ascriptive form (e.g., "ethnicity") over others.[17] Second, these political activities can take the shape of localized violence. Violent assaults on persons and communities play an important role in the crystallization of group identities, which are the basic constitutive elements of communal conflict. The important point here is that such identities are constructed, not primordial. The selective distribution of light weapons by the state is a key element in the process of identity construction, as is the widespread use of such weapons by one communal group against another.[18]

The light weapons problem also has a directly "humanitarian" dimension. Some types of light weapons are considered especially problematic because they are widely accepted as being "intrinsically inhumane" in nature. Conceptually and historically, such weapons have been set apart by two distinguishing characteristics. First, when used as intended, "inhumane weapons" are indiscriminate — that is, they are "of a nature to strike military objectives and civilian objects without distinction."[19] Second, when used as intended, they are "of a nature to cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering."[20] Examples of such weapons include certain types

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[16] Colonial policy also influenced the evolution of ascriptive identities in the developing world. See Rene Lemarchand, *Burundi: Ethnocide as Discourse and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[17] Human Rights Watch, *op cit.*

[18] The role of light weapons in creating communal conflict is perhaps best illustrated in the case of Rwanda and Burundi. See Rene Lemarchand, *op cit.*, and Human Rights Watch, *op cit*.

[19] The phrase "when used as intended" is meant to convey the idea that, regardless of how these weapons are used, they will cause indiscriminate and/or unnecessary destruction. The concept is found in several of the principal instruments of international humanitarian law, including: (a) the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, (b) the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, and (c) the two Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949. For a helpful summary of the history of humanitarian principles in this context see Eric Prokosch, *The Technology of Killing: A Military and Political History of Antipersonnel Weapons* (London: Zed Books, 1996), ch. 6; and Louise Doswald-Beck and Peter Herby, "Land Mines: A Critical Examination of Existing Legal Instruments", in *Landmines and the CCW Review Conference*, UNIDIR Newsletter 28/29 December 1994/May 1995, 5-7.

[20] I Protocol additional to the Geneva Conventions, Part III, Section I, Article 35.

of munitions (e.g., expanding bullets), antipersonnel landmines, fuel-air explosives and blinding weapons. It is important to note that while some types of light weapons are widely perceived to be *intrinsically* inhumane, all light weapons can be used in an inhumane fashion.

Finally, the ready availability of light weapons can prolong social conflict and undermine efforts at post-conflict peacebuilding. The prevailing view in this regard is that, while light weapons do not lead directly to the outbreak of armed conflicts, they do play a major role in "prolonging conflicts, in increasing their intensity and destructiveness, and in making them more intractable and difficult to resolve."[21] Moreover, the devastation caused by these weapons often undermines efforts at post-conflict peacebuilding. This is especially true of weapons such as antipersonnel landmines, which can persist long after the cessation of hostilities.

Causal Factors Contributing to the Proliferation of Light Weapons

Perhaps the fundamental element of the web of causation underpinning light weapons proliferation is the absence in many parts of the world of durable political institutions capable of meeting basic human security needs.[22] Especially problematic is the inability of many states to secure persons and communal groups against threats of organized and/or unstructured violence. The "failure" of political institutions in this respect can take one of two forms. First, states may be inept, weak or underdeveloped and thus unable to exercise an effective and sustainable monopoly over the use of organized violence. These states are ill-equipped to contain either inter-group violence or criminal violence. In these societies, the erosion of state-oriented institutions of power results in a political vacuum in which social conflict, lawlessness and criminal activity can fester and flourish. Ultimately, this can lead to localized violence and a growing perception that the state is unable to provide persons or communities with an adequate degree of security against threats of organized or unstructured violence.

Second, states themselves may pose a threat to individuals or communal groups. This is particularly true of authoritarian states that have been captured by a specific communal group or faction, or that enjoy only narrow political support. In such cases, the institutions of organized

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[21] Daniel Volman, "The Light Weapons Trade in Africa", 9.

[22] This was one of the principal findings of the UN's Advisory Mission on the Control and Collection of Light Weapons in the Sahel-Sahara Subregion. See Ivor Richard Fung, "Control and Collection of Light Weapons in the Sahel-Sahara Subregion: A Mission's Report," 2.

violence (whether police, paramilitary or military) constitute the regime's first and often most effective material line of defence against those who would seek to challenge the social and political power of the dominant group. In either of these situations, persons/groups tend to look away from the state for their basic security needs. They also tend to turn to light weapons as the principal instrument for securing themselves against the threat of violence.

While important, however, the lack of durable human security institutions cannot in itself fully account for the proliferation of light weapons; certain cultural forms, too, can generate powerful pressures to acquire armaments. In this respect, both "traditional gun cultures" and "militarized cultures" can be seen as particularly important factors driving proliferation. In the case of the former, the acquisition of light weapons is motivated by a historical and deeply-rooted sociological association of "manhood" with the possession of firearms. In the latter case, a social premium comes to be placed on the possession of arms as a consequence of the militarization of society that often accompanies protracted social conflict.[23] Whatever the roots and specific nature of the gun culture, once established, this particular cultural form provides a powerful and independent impetus to proliferation. This suggests that in certain social contexts, creating or restoring durable institutions of human security may not in itself address the proliferation problem. Greater attention needs to be paid to the role of culture in driving proliferation, and to the effects of cultural differences on non-proliferation strategies.

A third element of the ecology of causation underpinning the proliferation of light weapons is the increased availability of these weapons in recent years. "Somewhat paradoxically, unusually large volumes of light weapons have been released into the small arms market as an unintended fallout of recent progress in three of the most welcome political trends in the post-Cold War world: i.e., disarmament, demilitarization and the negotiated conclusion of some long-standing intra-state conflicts."[24] The end of the Cold War in Europe was particularly problematic in this respect as it released huge quantities of surplus light weapons onto the global arms market. The dissolution of the East German *Volksarmee*, to take but one example, rendered surplus over 295,000 tons of weapons, including one million handguns and 26,346 rocket-propelled

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[23] Both of these cultural forms see the possession of weapons as emblematic of "manliness." For an interesting discussion of "militarized masculinity" see Jacklyn Cock, *Women and War in South Africa* (Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1991).

[24] Swadesh Rana, *Small Arms and Intra-State Conflicts*, 12-13.

grenades.[25] Because controls were lax and economic incentives high, many of these weapons were stolen and subsequently sold to various combatant parties in ex-Yugoslavia and elsewhere.

A fourth factor contributing to the proliferation of light weapons is the fact that in many countries existing export and import controls are either poorly suited to controlling the flow of light weapons or are inadequately enforced. Aaron Karp has argued:

> The regulatory systems of most arms exporting countries were designed primarily to control exports of major weapons and secondarily to deal with the flow of advanced technology. While most countries have regulations that can be applied to the exports of small and light weapons, few governments apply these rules with much zeal. For too long it was assumed that small arms were inconsequential; it is becoming increasingly evident that, in reality, they are the most dangerous of all.[26]

This problem is compounded in many parts of the world by the presence of "weak," "underdeveloped" or "failed" states which are generally unable to monitor and/or control the activities of their citizens.

A fifth factor contributing to the proliferation of light weapons is the existence of numerous and diverse channels of supply. These include, but are not limited to:

- Overt state-to-state transfers (grants and sales);
- Covert state transfers ("gray market" transfers to states and non-state actors);
- Commercial sales;
- Domestic production (state and non-state sectors);
- Black market transfers;
- Leaks from state arsenals (theft, capture, illegal sales);
- Leaks during post-conflict demobilization; and
- Leaks from covert "pipelines" (such as those established to supply the Afghan Mujahadeen during the 1980s).

Feeding light weapons into this highly variegated supply network is a wide range of producers. As a recent UNIDIR report notes, "at present, nearly 300 companies in over 50 countries

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[25] *International Herald Tribune*, 8 February 1994.

[26] Aaron Karp, "Small Arms – The New Major Weapons," in Jeffrey Boutwell, *et al*., (eds.), *Lethal Commerce*, 25.

worldwide are actively manufacturing [light weapons] equipment and accessories."[27] While first- and second-tier arms producing countries continue to manufacture and export light weapons, in recent years there has been a dramatic increase in the activities of the so-called "third-tier" arms producing nations.[28] Production in the developing world has expanded dramatically as countries such as China, India, Brazil and Egypt have sought to develop a domestic light weapons industry or to capture a larger share of the global market.[29]

Finally, the proliferation of light weapons in recent years has been greatly facilitated by the absence of any generally agreed international norm limiting the rights of states to acquire such weapons. For major conventional weapons, there is a common understanding of the nature and limits of these rights: states are entitled to acquire such weapons for self-defence, but must not engage in acquisitions that are "excessive and destablizing." While in principle this norm also applies to light weapons, in practice the operational content of the phrase "excessive and destabilizing" has not been developed in ways that would make it directly relevant to armaments such as assault rifles or mortars.[30] Indeed, no concerted effort has been made to articulate the defining characteristics of an "excessive and destabilizing" transfer of light weapons. As a result, unlike the situation with respect to major conventional weapons, there is no common and authoritative understanding of the legitimate limits of the light weapons trade. The lack of such a generally agreed and operationally well-developed norm makes it exceedingly difficult to devise and implement effective non-proliferation measures.

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[27] Swadesh Rana, *Small Arms and Intra-State Conflicts*, 4. Christopher Louise calculates 252 manufacturers in 69 countries. See Christopher Louise, *The Social Impacts of Light Weapons Availability and Proliferation*, 7.

[28] For a discussion of the stratification of arms production into "tiers" see Keith Krause, *Arms and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[29] The scale of the light weapons trade is extraordinarily difficult to calculate. To begin with, attempts to measure the traffic in these weapons are frustrated by the fact that *official transfers* are not captured by any of the major analytic systems. Perhaps even more importantly, however, a large proportion of the global trade in light weapons is illicit or covert in nature. Despite these limitations, several observers have attempted to determine the extent of the trade. Estimates of the annual value of the light weapons trade range from $US1 billion - $US10 billion. These figures do not capture domestic industrial production, nor do they include the output of local "cottage" manufacturers. Regarding "homemade" guns see Swadesh Rana, *Small Arms and Intra-State Conflicts*, 5.

[30] "Excessive and destabilizing" is a shorthand for destabilizing in a regional context. The key here is that, to date, this phrase has been defined almost exclusively in terms of one type of excessive arms buildup: accumulations that can lead to the outbreak of armed conflict *across* borders. More work needs to be done to give this phrase content in an intra-state context.

Options for Addressing the Light Weapons Problem

In principle, it is possible to envisage a wide range of specific measures for dealing with the light weapons problem. Some of these measures are aimed at stemming the flow of such weapons; others at addressing the demand side of the light weapons equation. As indicated in Figure 2, these measures can be broken down into four broad strategies: norm-building, enhancing transparency, strengthening controls, and developing robust "human security" institutions. It is important to note that these measures are not mutually exclusive, and the most effective and sustainable strategy will be one that incorporates different measures to deal with particular elements of the light weapons problem. This being the case, the goal of the international community should be to weave these measures together into a comprehensive and synergistic package that addresses both the supply and demand sides of the light weapons equation.

Norm-Building

The first element of any effort to deal with the light weapons problem must be to develop a common understanding of the legitimate limits on the trade in these weapons; for, without such a norm, there can be no generally accepted benchmark against which light weapons acquisitions can be scrutinized.[31] In the area of major conventional weapons, the norm against which arms transfers are evaluated is "excessive and destabilizing,"

FIGURE 2

Options for Addressing the Light Weapons Problem

- Norm-building
- Enhancing Transparency Measures
- Strengthening Controls
- Developing the Institutions of "Human Security"

[31] Regarding the importance of norm-building to the process of developing non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament arrangements see Peggy Mason, *Compliance Enforcement: The Norm Consensus Issue*, Multilateral Institutions and Global Security Working Papers (Centre for International and Strategic Studies, York University, forthcoming).

where excessive refers to negative economic consequences and destabilizing refers to undesirable military-strategic consequences. While light weapons are a sub-set of conventional weapons (and therefore subject to this norm), there are two additional elements of the light weapons problem that will have to be part of any set of principles governing the trade in these weapons. First, there are the potential political consequences of light weapons proliferation: the ready availability of light weapons can undermine legitimate institutions of public order and good governance and can thwart progress toward democratization. Second, there are the humanitarian consequences of light weapons transfers: light weapons are deeply implicated in major violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. Unless these aspects of the light weapons problem are taken into consideration during the process of norm-building, it is unlikely that the resulting international norm will have much impact on the most serious aspects of the light weapons problem.

In theory, there are several ways to give content to the prohibitionary norm against "excessive and destabilizing" transfers that make it more relevant in the light weapons context. First, certain types of light weapons might be deemed impermissible on the basis of their nature or inherent characteristics. In the weapons of mass destruction context, such a norm already underpins the existing non-proliferation regimes dealing with nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. Such a blanket prohibition might also be developed in respect of certain categories of light weapons, with landmines and blinding weapons being the most likely candidates. The development of such a norm in the context of light weapons will almost certainly be linked to the perception that such weapons are "intrinsically inhumane." As was the case with chemical weapons (and increasingly with landmines), mobilizing the "public conscience" will likely be a crucial aspect of this process.

Second, light weapons transfers might be controlled on the basis of the nature of the recipients. At a minimum, this would involve limiting such transfers to properly constituted state authorities that have representative and legitimate governments and that are in compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law. A third method is to regulate light weapons transfers on the basis of the *use*s to which these weapons may or may not be put. Under this type of approach, light weapons would not be transferred where there were reasonable grounds to believe that they would be used against the civilian population in ways that contravened international human rights treaties and agreements. Finally, the light weapons trade might be controlled on the basis of the circumstances under which transfers would be prohibited. This

might involve a general prohibition against transfers to states under UN embargo or to regions of ongoing or imminent armed conflict or protracted social conflict.

Enhancing Transparency Measures

Another important element of any light weapons non-proliferation strategy must be to develop a more comprehensive and accurate picture of the global trade in these weapons. Enhanced transparency measures would be invaluable in this respect, providing a more complete understanding of the scope and nature of the light weapons proliferation problem.[32] It should be noted, however, that even the best transparency measures are likely to capture only overt and legal transfers; given the nature of these measures, they are unlikely to include black market transactions or covert state transfers. They are also unlikely to capture acquisitions involving non-state actors. This being the case, increased international cooperation on monitoring black and gray market transactions might also prove helpful. Support for NGO efforts to gather information on the production and trade of light weapons might prove useful in this connection.

In addition to providing a more accurate picture of the global trade in light weapons, transparency measures might also play an important role in stemming this trade. The argument advanced in this respect is that if transparency instruments and mechanisms become more prevalent and begin to generate significant data on light weapons flows, then it will become possible to measure these flows against the appropriate international norm, and, if necessary, to take remedial action. Three broad uses of the data made available through transparency measures have been suggested.[33] First, such data would enhance the ability of national and international NGOs to put pressure on states to alter national policy. Second, transparency data could be used in the context of "consultative mechanisms" designed to air concerns regarding the acquisition of certain types of weapons. The argument in this connection is not that transparency measures by themselves would restrain the trade in light weapons, but that they will contribute to the emergence of a "cooperative security environment in which restraint may be more likely."[34] Third, transparency data might enhance the capability of the UN and regional organizations to

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[32] For an excellent discussion of transparency in the light weapons context see Edward Laurance, "Addressing the Negative Consequences of Light Weapons Trafficking: Opportunities for Transparency and Restraint," in Jeffrey Boutwell, *et al*. (eds.), *Lethal Commerce*, 140-157. See also, Dyer and Goldring, "Analysing Policy Proposals to Limit Light Weapons Transfers," 127-129.

[33] Edward Laurance, *ibid.*, 149-155.

[34] *Ibid*., 150.

deal with undesirable transfers of light weapons by providing early warning of suspicious accumulations of these weapons.

To date, measures to render conventional weapons transfers more transparent have focused primarily on the seven categories of major weapons included in the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms. As light weapons are not captured in any of these categories, in its current form the Register is not directly relevant to the trade in these armaments. The Register does, however, provide potentially useful models and precedents for future measures.

From this starting point, three basic approaches to transparency in light arms transfers have been identified in the academic literature. These include:

- expanding the UN Register to capture transfers of light weapons;
- developing a UN (or global) register exclusively for light weapons; and
- developing regional registers.

Although there is some support for expanding the UN Register to encompass transfers of light weapons, the Register is not the best instrument to deal with the light weapons problem. The principal reason for this is that the existing UN Register is essentially a mechanism for promoting "regional peace and security"; its *raison d'etre* is to help reduce the possibility of armed conflict across international borders by placing limits on "excessive and destabilizing" transfers of weapons. This explains the focus on major conventional weapons such as tanks and combat aircraft, which are generally held to have the greatest potential to be "destabilizing" in a military-strategic sense. This being the case, if light weapons were to be included in the UN Register, a case would have to be made that these weapons pose a threat to regional stability. While there are cases where accumulations of such weapons can be "excessive and destabilizing" in traditional military-strategic terms, on balance the negative consequences of light weapons are more likely to be social, political, economic and/or humanitarian. As Edward Laurance has concluded, this makes it difficult to argue that light weapons should be included in the UN Register.[35]

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[35] A further complicating factor is that any effort to broaden the UN Register to include light weapons might well impede efforts to enhance the effectiveness of the Register with respect to major conventional weapons.

A somewhat more promising approach would be to develop a parallel global register dealing exclusively with light weapons. Such a register, which might or might not be organized under UN auspices, could either encompass the entire class of light weapons or deal only with specific types of weapons deemed to be particularly problematic (e.g., landmines). While promising, however, to date little political support has developed for such a global approach.

A final approach to transparency is that of *regional registers*. This approach is recommended by several considerations. First, as the light weapons problem is often regional or sub-regional in nature, more geographically focused processes of transparency are likely to be more effective than universal or global measures. Second, in some parts of the world, political support for regional light weapons registers has already begun to develop. Both the OAS and ASEAN, for example, have discussed the possibility of establishing such a register.[36] Finally, because they are the product of indigenous processes, regional registers are more likely to give rise to shared non-proliferation norms that reflect local concerns and sensitivities. This will likely have the effect of enhancing the legitimacy and effectiveness of the register process.

Strengthening Controls

Controls are those regulatory measures that are intended to limit the quantity or quality of weapons in "circulation" (both internationally and domestically). While there are important differences in context, measures designed to control major conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction offer a useful point of departure for developing controls to be applied to light weapons.[37] Based on the history of non-proliferation efforts in these areas, three sets of potential control strategies can be identified:

- export controls, border controls and other regulatory measures;
- production bans; and
- conditional technology access measures.

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[36] Dyer and Goldring, "Analyzing Policy Proposals to Limit Light Weapons Transfers," 128.

[37] For an overview of the differences between major conventional weapons systems and light weapons in this context, see Christopher Smith, "Light Weapons: The Forgotten Dimension of the International Arms Trade," in Centre for Defence Studies (ed.), *Brassey's Defence Yearbook 1994* (London: Brassey's, 1994).

The simplest and perhaps most practicable set of control measures can be grouped under the heading of *export controls*, *border controls and other regulatory measures*.[38] To start, states could address the light weapons problem by taking unilateral measures to enhance the regulation and control of light weapons exports. In many cases this would involve nothing more than enforcing more vigorously existing legislation and regulations, and applying "codes of conduct" developed in connection with major conventional weapons systems to light weapons. Second, governments could amend national policies that currently encourage the "cascading" or selling of light weapons as an inexpensive alternative to their destruction. Third, states could tighten up domestic gun control legislation, and take steps to ensure the security of national holdings against theft or unauthorized sale.[39] Finally, states could take steps to improve and harmonize *multilateral* export control systems in fora such as the so-called "small group on arms" within the Wassenaar Arrangement.

As one recent report on constraining conventional proliferation notes,[40] export controls and other regulations could be targeted at:

- specific types of light weapons (e.g., landmines);
- specific recipients (e.g., authoritarian regimes);
- specific types of use (e.g., to suppress human rights or prolong a conflict); and
- specific sets of circumstances (e.g., festering communal conflict).

To date, the general practice around the globe has been to assume that all light weapons exports are legitimate and permissible, *except* those that fulfil certain conditions. A potentially useful variation on this theme — and one that deserves serious attention from both scholars and policy-makers — is to proscribe *all* transfers of light weapons, except those that are likely to contribute materially to human security, democratization, or good governance. Such an approach would shift the "burden of proof" to those proposing the transfer of light weapons, forcing them to

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[38] These typically include legislated restrictions, restrictions on types of weapons, restrictions on certain countries, export licences, end-use certificates and cabinet or ministerial level approval. See Ian Anthony (ed.), *Arms Exports Regulations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[39] An example of this latter type of initiative is the South African "Arms and Ammunition Act," which contains provisions intended to reduce the likelihood that weapons will be stolen and used by persons other than the licence holder. Swadesh Rana, *Small Arms and Intra-State Conflict*, 18.

[40] See Krause *et al*., *Constraining Conventional Proliferation: A Role for Canada*, 154.

demonstrate the beneficial effects of such a transaction. As potential recipients would have to "qualify" to receive light weapons, the flow of these weapons could be more effectively controlled.

In addition to covering the actual weapons, export controls and other regulations might also be applied to ammunition. A pathbreaking United Nations Research Institute for Social Development discussion paper argues:

> Another possibility [for control] is to exploit the only aspect of light weapons that does not have an indefinite lifespan: ammunition. The continued effectiveness of light weapons is dependent on a plentiful supply of ammunition. This is particularly the case for those weapons that are characterized by rapid rates of fire. Many countries produce ammunition under licence and many of the same countries are major economic aid recipients. This invites the issue of aid conditionality and the use of aid as a lever to restrain laissez-faire approaches to ammunition exports.[41]

A second set of control measures would be to *ban production* of certain types of weapons. "The prospects for success in these measures are greatest when international norms against particular weapons and their effects have been established."[42] In contrast to bans on the production of chemical and biological weapons, to date the manufacture of very few conventional weapons has been banned, although under international humanitarian law the *use* of certain types of armaments and munitions (e.g., expanding or dum-dum bullets) is prohibited. Banning production of specific categories of light weapons, however, is an increasingly attractive and realistic policy option for many states. A number of governments, for example, have declared unilateral moratoria on the manufacture of antipersonnel landmines. In the future, unilateral and multilateral bans on the production and stockpiling of specific categories of light weapons (such as landmines, blinding weapons and fuel-air explosives) are likely to become an increasingly important instrument for controlling light weapons proliferation.

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41 Christopher Louise, *The Social Impacts of Light Weapons Availability and Proliferation*, 20.

42 Dyer and Goldring, "Analysing Policy Proposals to Limit Light Weapons Transfers", 131.

Finally, *aid conditionality* might be used to help constrain the flow of light weapons.[43] Exclusively supply-side constraints on light weapons proliferation are becoming increasingly difficult to implement because of the "mature" nature of much of the relevant technology, because of the large number of manufacturers, and because of the existence of diverse channels of supply. These factors suggest that measures to control light weapons proliferation must in part be based on some form of cooperative arrangement between suppliers and recipients in which various inducements are used to encourage potential recipients to limit their demand for weapons. The most widely discussed approach of this nature would see access to official development assistance, World Bank lending, credits from the International Monetary Fund and other international financial institutions (IFIs), tied to levels of military expenditure (and especially capital investment in light weapons). There are two basic variations on this theme. First, threats to reduce development assistance can be used to *deter* "excessive" levels of light weapons procurement. However, as the proliferation of light weapons is often driven by various failures in the area of human security, such coercive approaches are unlikely to prove very effective. Faced with threats of organized or unstructured violence, persons, communities and states will take whatever steps they deem necessary to arm themselves, even at the risk of losing development assistance. Nor are such approaches likely to have much effect on countries that have access to private credit markets (and that do not, therefore, need to borrow from IFIs).

Another approach would be to use promises of increased levels of aid to *encourage* states to engage in "appropriate" patterns of light weapons procurement. To be most effective, such positive inducements would require sustained assistance in dealing with the conditions underpinning the proliferation of light weapons. These inducements, if provided on a "security first" basis (which would involve assistance being directed in the first instance to developing institutions of "human security"), could help catalyze efforts to reduce demand for light weapons by addressing the factors giving rise to protracted social conflict. The UN Advisory Mission on the Control and Collection of Light Weapons in the Sahel-Sahara Subregion has emphasized the importance of such a "security first" approach, arguing that human security is an essential precondition for structural development. Of particular importance in this respect is the availability of direct assistance for post-conflict disarmament and demobilization measures aimed at reducing the likelihood that new conflicts will erupt into violence.

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[43] The concept of aid conditionality has become increasingly acceptable since first mooted by the IMF in 1989. See Nicole Ball, "Development Assistance and Military Reform," *International Security Digest*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1993); and Robert Miller (ed.), *Aid as Peacemaker: Canadian Development Assistance and Third World Conflict* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1992).

Although the preceding sections have described a number of practical control strategies that could be implemented to help stem the proliferation of light weapons, given the nature of the light weapons market it is unrealistic to suppose that by themselves these measures would ever be able to do more than slow the global trade in such weapons. This is not to suggest that control strategies are not worth pursuing. Indeed, the history of non-proliferation efforts in the areas of weapons of mass destruction and major conventional weapons systems strongly indicate that such approaches can exercise a powerful dampening effect on the flow of weapons and their enabling technologies. Rather, it is to argue that if the light weapons problem is to be addressed effectively, such control measures will have to be supplemented with a variety of security-enhancing measures, many of which fall under the broad heading of peacebuilding and democratic development.

Developing the Institutions of "Human Security"

As the UN Advisory Mission on the Control and Collection of Light Weapons in the Sahel-Sahara Subregion has concluded, any attempt to deal with the light weapons problem must begin with a recognition of the need to develop practical "security-building" measures capable of reducing levels of insecurity among persons and communities (before, during and after protracted social conflict). The resonance of the term "security-building" with concepts such as "peacebuilding" and "institution-building" is not accidental. A security-building strategy assumes that the security of persons and communities from threats of organised and unstructured violence is not a necessary concomitant of social, political or economic development. Indeed, some patterns of military and socio-economic development can actually generate threats to human security. Rather, security-building is a separate (though related) process, centred on the construction of durable or sustainable political institutions capable of enhancing human security by minimising the potential for inter-societal violence. It goes beyond simple state-building and/or institutional development to encompass:

- the development of military, paramilitary and police institutions and practices that do not threaten the security of persons or communal groups within society;
- the development of non-violent mechanisms for managing intra-societal conflict;
- the development of an effective capacity for law enforcement and the maintenance of public order, consistent with the norms of democracy and good governance; and
- practical "micro-disarmament" measures designed to reduce light weapons buildups both *before* violence erupts and after armed conflict has ended.

Broadly speaking, the development of human security institutions can be promoted in two ways. First, states themselves can take actions to enhance the security of persons and communities within their jurisdiction from threats of organized and unstructured violence. In this connection, the UN Advisory Mission on the Control and Collection of Light Weapons in the Sahel-Sahara Subregion has recommended that states take steps to improve internal controls over light weapons, tighten up domestic gun control legislation, and provide better training for their security forces. While a useful point of departure, however, these measures only begin to address the human security challenges underpinning the light weapons problem in many societies. In addition to these measures, remedial action will also have to involve serious efforts to reduce military spending, promote democratization, reform the armed forces and civil-military relations, effectively demobilize military forces (in post-conflict situations), and accelerate economic and social development. Second, the *international community* can assist states in developing durable human security institutions. This could involve a range of measures, including:

- training local police and security forces;
- providing assistance with respect to the implementation of post-conflict micro-disarmament programmes such gun buy-back schemes;
- development of *preventative* or pre-conflict micro-disarmament measures; and
- providing assistance with demobilization, retraining and resettlement of armed combatants.

Conclusion: A Role for Canada

Broadly speaking, it is possible to point to four strategies that Canada might pursue in connection with light weapons. First, Canada could contribute to the process of norm-building by promoting discussion of the legitimate limits of the right to acquire light weapons at various international fora. Given the practical limits of Canadian capacities and influence, of course, there is little it can do to advance this agenda unilaterally. However, Canada does have considerable experience working within multilateral fora, and, in conjunction with like-minded partners, could use its diplomatic capacities to catalyze the evolution of set of norms defining the limits of the legitimate trade in light weapons. Creative efforts to develop such norms could be pursued in both global and regional fora. Canada might also consider hosting an international conference on light weapons that would draw together government officials, academics and representatives of relevant non-governmental organizations from around the globe.

In a related vein, Canada should promote the development of regional transparency measures. By promoting such measures within the appropriate fora, Canada could help catalyze the development of shared non-proliferation norms that reflect local concerns and sensitivities. Canada's commitment to active multilateralism and cooperative approaches to international peace and security, as well as its participation in a wide range of multilateral institutions that bridge the North-South gap, makes it well suited to playing a facilitative role in this respect.

Canada could also help address the light weapons problem by actively promoting supply-side controls. To this end, Canada could provide assistance to "weak" states in order to help them improve their export and border controls, and to implement other regulatory measures. Canada might also work in both global and regional fora to promote production bans and conditional development assistance regimes. In addition to stemming the flow of light weapons, even modest efforts to enhance controls can help catalyse and sustain the domestic and international political momentum required to develop and implement more far-reaching measures in the future.

Finally, Canada might exercise political leverage to encourage the evolution of sustainable security practices and institutions. Practical measures might include the use of positive inducements to catalyse the development of durable human security institutions. They might also involve providing states with practical assistance in developing such institutions. Such sustainable human security practices could be promoted unilaterally or through multilateral institutions such as the UN, OAS, Commonwealth and la Francophonie.

Given the nature of the global arms market, the presence of "weak" states unable to enforce an effective monopoly over the instruments of violence, and the absence in many parts of the world of robust "human security" institutions, there is no simple way of addressing the causes and consequences of the ready availability and continuing proliferation of light weapons. There are, however, a range of policy responses — many of which have been used successfully to constrain the proliferation of both weapons of mass destruction and major conventional weapons — that, if implemented consistently and vigorously, could at least begin to ameliorate the problem. Canada should support as many of these solutions as is practical, recognizing that a balanced approach that addresses both the supply and demand dimensions of the problem is likely to be the most effective over time.

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