
Chapter 5

Seminar held on 1st March 2001

Humanitarianism Under Threat: The Humanitarian Impacts of Small Arms¹

Speakers: Eric G. Berman and Robert Muggah

In October 2000 the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IASC's) Reference Group on Small Arms (RGSA) contracted the Small Arms Survey (SAS), a Geneva-based NGO, to undertake a formal comparative study on the impacts of small arms on civilians. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Office for Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) all contributed resources toward a four-month assessment. Through broad-based consultations with stakeholders, two SAS consultants, Eric G.

¹ The Geneva Forum would like to thank the Small Arms Survey for permission to reprint this chapter from part of its Special Report, *Humanitarianism Under Threat: The Humanitarian Impacts of Small Arms and Light Weapons*, by Eric G. Berman and Robert Muggah, published in July 2001. The questions and comments at the end of this chapter are taken from the authors' Geneva Forum presentation of 1st March 2001.

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Berman and Robert Muggah, sought to define and systematize the pathways linking the availability, threat and use of small arms on civil society as well as on both humanitarian and development agencies. In attempting to describe the problem, the consultants also sought to operationalize a conceptual framework that might inform the humanitarian community regarding methods of measuring the scope and magnitude of the impacts.

Overview of the Study

The broad objectives of the study are to determine the humanitarian impacts of small arms on civilian populations and humanitarian and development agencies seeking to provide relief and long-term assistance to vulnerable groups. The discourse on small arms, then, has been deliberately shifted away from abstract discussions on broad threats to “international peace and security” to a focus on their individuated human impacts. In this way, the consultants sought to document and capture the role small arms play in the practice of warfare, rather than the narrative of warfare. In other words, the study attempts to reflect the reality of the human costs attributable to small arms - rather than the more normative aspects of arms control.

Humanitarian impacts were provisionally defined in the Terms of Reference (ToR) as “the short and long-term effects of armed violence taking place immediately prior to, during and following from complex, human-made (multi-causal) humanitarian emergencies”. The definition also considers the enduring social and economic consequences of armed violence - particularly in relation to how they undermine sustainable development. To this end, the consultants sought to determine a range of comparative indicators that usefully “measure” the (dimensions of the) threats that unregulated access to small arms pose to civilian populations and the relief and development communities as a whole.

Primary indicators include death and injury resulting from small arms and light weapons. Secondary indicators consist of forced displacement (both cross-border and internal) in addition to declining access to entitlements, particularly among vulnerable groups. Moreover, the study aims to illustrate how small arms availability is inhibiting the activities of relief and development agencies in the field. Specifically, the consultants sought to illustrate in what way humanitarian and development workers are being targeted, how the militarization of refugee and internally displaced person (IDP) camps adversely affect day-to-day operations and the manner in which arms-related insecurity presents significant opportunity costs to the carrying-out of agency mandates.

Although the study is global in scope, the RGSA proposed that two or three countries be visited in order to elaborate the varied dimensions of the problem. It was agreed, by consensus, that Kenya, Colombia and East Timor be visited. It was also decided that the principal output of the initiative would include a report ('study', hereafter) assessing the global impacts of small arms. The study outlines a preliminary conceptual framework to enable policy makers to consider, and therefore better address, the humanitarian impacts of small arms. Furthermore, it demonstrates that despite some early doubts, a vast amount of relevant and useful data is currently available within agencies themselves.

An additional output of the study relates to the process of data accumulation itself. In consulting a wide cross-section of humanitarian and development workers with regards to the problem of small arms, important gains were made in sensitizing operational workers in the field to the needs of generating systematic and continuous information on arms-related insecurity. In this regard, a broad network of researchers were brought together, if indirectly, to shed light on the issue. It is anticipated that these process-related gains will mobilize further interest and action on the issue at the field-level.

General Concerns and Key Findings

People are directly affected by small arms use before, during and after conflict

Small arms directly kill well over 300,000 people in conflict each year (with at least three times that many injured), and affect millions more through terror and suffering. Though small arms and light weapons are often associated with armed warfare, such as in Colombia, firearm-related killings are also increasingly occurring outside of the immediate context of conflict - with rising banditry, armed assault and violence in areas experiencing a high availability. People living in pre and post-conflict environments demonstrate similar forms of vulnerability to firearm-related homicide and assault. The explicit targeting of civilians during conflict and in post-conflict contexts, in contravention of international humanitarian law (IHL), is common.

All manner of weaponry are being used in situations of conflict, crime and systemic insecurity

The virulence of conflict and violence is increasing as a result of newly introduced technology. Military-style automatic and semi-automatic weapons (e.g. AK-47s, G-3s, Galils, AR-15s, grenade-launchers) are the most commonly used weapons in Kenya, and are killing and injuring people there and throughout the African continent. "Armas cortes," or short-barreled weapons (e.g. .32, .38 specials, 9mm revolvers and pistols), are overwhelmingly used in atrocities and common crime throughout Colombia, and killing and affecting people throughout Latin America. In East Timor, small arms have only rarely been used in armed confrontations since the country's recent independence

from Indonesia, though the threat remains. In West Timor, however, the threat or use of small arms is on the rise. Both classes of weapons are used indiscriminately by civilians, guerrillas, militia and paramilitary forces - as well as by the states under consideration - in “conflict-like” situations as well as in criminal violence.

The impacts of small arms go well beyond the casualties claimed by the bullets

Small arms availability and use have a broad range of secondary impacts - from forced migration (across borders and internal) to the collapse of household entitlements and access to basic needs. There is ample evidence emerging from Kenya, Colombia and East Timor, that the mere threat of small arms availability and use affects household and individual decision-making regarding (forced) migration and the pursuit of employment or rural livelihoods. In Colombia, for example, there is a strong correlation between the incidence of firearm-related massacres or “political killings” and forced displacement. Testimonial evidence gathered from the field suggests that small arms play a significant role in undermining socio-economic development because assets are frequently seized and families violently dismantled.

The effects of small arms undermine development processes - from the micro to the macro levels

At the macro-economic level, small arms availability undermines social and economic development. Firearm-related insecurity partly conditions foreign direct investment and can shape the allocation of budgetary resources among and between government departments. Furthermore, arms-related insecurity affects UN and NGO spending priorities. At the micro-economic level, the use of small arms and threat of firearm-related violence

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affects the labor, production and transfer (inheritance) entitlements of individuals - both directly (e.g. homicide and injury) and indirectly (e.g. undermining public services and the destruction of common property resources). More difficult to measure, small arms have an emboldening effect on those who possess them, particularly children and young men, encouraging “cultures of violence” and creating (negative) multiplying effects (“violence multipliers”) in conflict and non-conflict affected societies.

Humanitarian and development agencies are exposed to and made vulnerable by unprecedented small arms availability and use

The nature of humanitarian and development work is changing - taking place amid internal rather than cross-border conflict and ostensibly tied to an economy of warfare. Increasingly, civilians, and those who are seen to protect and assist them, are regarded as legitimate targets for extortion, threat, theft, rape and brutality. For example, the current firearm-homicide rate for UN civilian staff is between 17-25 per 100,000 - firearm-related homicide rates that are analogous to those experienced by civilians in the top ten most dangerous countries in the world. The current security arrangements for UN staff are woefully inadequate. They are premised on a system designed over two decades ago for an operational reality that no longer exists. Institutional responses within the UN to redress insecurity, while laudable, are inappropriately designed, applied or enforced.

Refugee and IDP camp militarization, at the site of temporary asylum or resettlement, is a growing phenomenon

Arms are made available by ex-combatants, local dealers and active militias - though arms availability (and use) is also generated by perceived insecurity among refugees, IDPs and host

communities themselves. Though not endemic to all situations of return or resettlement, arms-related insecurity affects camps in a variety of ways: in terms of domestic violence, intra-communal violence and tensions between refugees or IDPs and host communities. The trafficking of small arms to and from camps also affect the communities located “in transit” as well as humanitarian and development agencies seeking to protect displacees.

Humanitarian and development agencies are obstructed by small arms availability and use

Among humanitarian and development agencies themselves, small arms availability and use are threatening their operations, stakeholders, beneficiaries and local investments. Though these opportunity costs are vast, they are difficult to measure with precision. Very generally, development gains are undermined and program costs are ballooning. At a minimum, costs relating to transportation of aid and personnel are increasing and the quality of program implementation, monitoring and evaluation is undermined. Furthermore, surplus expenditures on security measures and communication infrastructure to mitigate armed threats severely curtail the scale of operations and affect the morale of personnel. Alarming, a rapidly growing number of agencies are completely unable or unwilling to operate in areas where arms are widely available and used.

Central Recommendations

Broaden the Small Arms Debate to Encompass Humanitarian and Developmental Concerns

A humanitarian and development focus, to complement the prevailing disarmament perspective, is encouraged for advocacy

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on small arms. The dialogue and language on small arms, then, should seek to reflect - as clearly and thoroughly as possible - the short and long-term human costs of their availability and use. The scale and dimensions of these “human costs” are deceptive - and extend well beyond death, firearm-related injury and violations of international humanitarian law (IHL). The insecurity generated by the widespread availability and use of small arms undermines social and economic development, post-conflict reconstruction and basic human rights. In this way, framing the “effects” dimension of small arms is of parallel importance to political and traditional security perspectives - and serves to reposition people to the center of the dialogue on arms control.

Undertake Focused Empirical Studies (for Advocacy Purposes)

Advocacy and pro-active campaigners would do well to consider how the Landmine Campaign developed rigorous empirical material on the “effects” of such weapons in order to mobilize a broad constituency around the issue. Though the issue is not as clean-cut or neatly defined as the Landmine Campaign - much of the latter’s success was generated out of a comprehensive humanitarian advocacy strategy based on accumulating irrefutable evidence from the field. The Landmine campaign began with the accumulation of focused studies to inform a broad advocacy strategy rather than the other way around. It sought to prioritize trends and impacts on vulnerable groups rather than numbers on the ground. In this way, country-specific studies appraising the relationships between firearm-related insecurity and development would contribute to the definition of priorities for campaigners and donors alike. In order to make a compelling case for the “human costs” of small arms, such studies should seek to assemble primary and time-series data on, *inter alia*, firearm-related mortality and morbidity, forced displacement, access of individuals to basic

health and education services in arms-affected societies and declining foreign and local investment in insecure regions.

Support Non-Governmental and Governmental Data-Collection Capacities

If further evaluations of the humanitarian impacts of small arms are to be undertaken, it is vital that case-specific material is gathered, research supported, and that government, field agency and non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives are sensitized to the importance of collecting and reporting on small arms-related impacts. Of equal, if not greater, importance, reliable information-gathering sources and databases need to be supported to ensure that ongoing surveillance of key indicators (e.g. data on mortality and morbidity or forced displacement) is maintained over time. Over the long-term, support for surveillance and monitoring should also enhance the capacities of countries to respond to the problem of small arms in a comprehensive manner. Ultimately, if intelligent domestic policy is to be made on containing small arms and their impacts, donor states and multilateral agencies should support the development of such initiatives. What is more, the strengthening of such capacities has the added benefit of indirectly supporting the work of a variety of IASC members -particularly in relation to their programs not directly tied to small arms.

Enhance Institutional Memory on the Impacts of Small Arms

Procedural efforts to improve, systematize and consolidate data-collection in the field would go a long way in encouraging norm building at the agency-level regarding the impacts of small arms. At a minimum, field security officers (FSOs) and/or (newly) designated “security personnel” should be supported and given responsibility (and held accountable) to collect ongoing data on small arms-related insecurity at the country level. Humanitarian

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and development agencies should reflect on and appraise the particular way small arms affect the fulfillment of their mandates. In this regard, institutional memory could be vastly improved at both the national and field levels through systematic and comparative indicators that are monitored over time.

Encourage Information-Sharing on Small Arms Among Stakeholders

Efforts should be made to collect and share existing information between national public institutions, UN agencies, international and indigenous NGOs and “faith-based organizations” where possible and appropriate. Traditional intelligence-gathering techniques employed by humanitarian and development agencies could also be adapted to incorporate small arms-related issues such as domestic and regional legislation on weapons, production and leakage of small arms and the impact of collection and destruction programs. Continuous and time-series data - on firearm-related mortality, armed assault and banditry among the civilian population and personnel - should be integrated or “mainstreamed” into program considerations. Such information can provide critical early warning indicators and allow humanitarian agencies to assess risks and vulnerabilities in the field and plan appropriately for contingencies.

Build Anti-Weapon Norms and Encourage Transparency

The consultants note that there are clear instances where armed insecurity is so endemic that a modicum of physical protection is required for UN personnel and or stakeholders in the field. Nevertheless, it is strongly urged that the UN continue to adopt clear and transparent norms discouraging weapons use in its field activities. Symbols and emblems condemning the possession of small arms - such as those produced by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the UNHCR

- are often effective in inculcating norms of non-possession. At a minimum, efforts should be undertaken to discourage the presence of arms in day-to-day activities and (where possible) to find alternative solutions (e.g. other than military presence or private security) to addressing systemic forms of insecurity. Furthermore, UN entities would do well to consider supporting a logistical transparency and oversight regime to ensure that relief and development-aid infrastructure is not being used (indirectly) to facilitate arms proliferation or purchasing.

Consider Non-Traditional Approaches to Disarmament

Given that small arms proliferation and possession cannot be singularly regulated by supply-side controls, humanitarian and development agencies would do well to begin considering alternative approaches to arms control. The UNDP has already advanced the concept of “weapons for development” - an approach that implicitly acknowledges the importance of security as a pre-condition for sustainable development. The UNHCR and UNICEF, on the other hand, have sought to reduce vulnerabilities of their primary stakeholders by introducing programs that reduce their exposure to firearm-related incidents. What these initiatives have in common is a focus on demand-related incentives for firearms. These approaches should be supported and analyzed - with a view of possible replication in areas where arms are being used to devastating effect.

Questions and Comments

Q: Launching the results of a study before the humanitarian problem is completely resolved could be misleading. Facts and knowledge about past events may change dramatically over a short period of time, as incorrect information and reports are dispelled. This was the case in East Timor, where

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prior to the peak of the conflict in 1999, the media were describing numbers of deaths in the tens of thousands. Later, more credible sources put the estimate closer to 1,000 to 3,000. Governments may also modify official facts and figures, either to the benefit or detriment of accurate public knowledge. Shouldn't the researcher present the most recent, balanced account of a humanitarian crisis?

A: We do have to be very careful about initial media reports. The numbers often are inflated. Certainly the initial numbers, 10,000 massacred in the period leading up to the consultation, are widely exaggerated. The numbers 1,000 to 3,000 are commonly used. The Head of the Human Rights Unit believed it to be closer to 800 to 1,000.

I would also like to speak about the efforts to disarm the militia. In the case of Indonesia, many in the government are exhibiting good will in trying to tackle the problem. The problem is not on the same scale as that of eastern Zaire back in the mid-1990s, where tens of thousands of heavily armed and well-trained troops, including Interahamwe and former armed forces of the government of Rwanda, were crossing from Cyangugu to Bukavu and then on to Goma. However, even the efforts of the Indonesian government to disarm the militia have not been effective. The question is whether or not the will is there to disarm. The fact that citizens in West Timor have been targeted has not necessarily helped the government of Indonesia. According to a recent report from NGOs in the field, the militia continues to act with impunity to this day, and they are armed, both inside and outside the camps.

One account, anecdotal in nature but worthy of mention because it sheds light on the problem, occurred three weeks after the three UNHCR staff were killed in Atambua. The Indonesian government had invited the special representative of the UN Secretary General to come to Atambua to see the effect that weapons collection was having in the field. The special

representative himself did not go, but he sent a representative to witness the weapons that had been retaken in the police station. During the time they were there, the Vice President of Indonesia was there as well. An embarrassing incident ensued, whereby militia came in and attacked the police station in the presence of the UN staff, which had to hide. The militia repossessed many of the firearms present. This was September of 2000.

I do not believe this attack to have been orchestrated by the Indonesian government. I spoke to the people who were there and I read the report on this. There was an Indonesian military or security guard who promised to protect the UN staff, and I think he meant it. It turned out that no one was killed. But this incident demonstrates the challenge confronting attempts to control the militia and take back its weapons.

A: I should just highlight that, particularly in the cases of Kenya and Colombia, there have been a few attempts to disarm the groups. In Uganda right now, you have a situation where they are trying to disarm the Karamojong, and they are talking about a massive exercise involving 30,000 to 200,000 weapons. I should also mention the Nairobi Declaration of the past year. There have been great efforts by the various states in the region to start a dialogue on how to address this issue. So I think it is too early to say what the results will be. One can say that these initial actions are positive ones. As for the case of Colombia, I do not think they are in a position right now to disarm, although the progress made in the peace talks during the last few weeks suggests that we can start talking about that.

Q: Why have you chosen Kenya, Colombia and East Timor as research cases for your comparative study? Could you explain which criteria were used in selecting these three countries? I think it would have been worth looking at the Balkans, where you would have had more reasonable sources of information than in many other parts of the world. This

would have also given you the opportunity to study an industrialized region in conflict.

A: We wanted to have as many people involved as possible. This required numerous consultations, with many different actors. That was one key criterion, although I realize that Eric's report examines other parts of West Africa and Central Africa. One of the major aims of the report itself was to generate a process of sensitization, and bring people into a process of looking at this from a new perspective.

Another reason was obviously geographic. This study is very much global in focus. Although we focused the presentation on Kenya, Colombia and East Timor, the examples of Afghanistan and the Balkans are also considered throughout the study. I am not saying that Kenya, Colombia and East Timor are the best or the worst examples of how societies are affected, but these are the cases upon which we chose to focus.

A third reason would be the government support that existed, and the UN support as well. There is real interest among these states in looking at this process, and at the problem of small arms. All three of the states studied, to some extent, have demonstrated interest in the issue.

A final point is data availability. We had four months to visit three countries. Kenya, Colombia and East Timor are quite sophisticated countries. I had a certain amount of familiarity with Colombia and Kenya as well, so that facilitated the choices in a certain way.

The three criteria used to choose the case studies were that the selected regions embody the following characteristics: (a) countries of asylum and expulsion; (b) geographical representation; and (c) pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict situations. We wanted to find countries that would fit, to some extent, into those classifications.

Q: What factors prevent UN peacekeeping missions from attaining the goals of a lasting solution and a durable peace? What keeps them from conducting similar analyses of the impact of small arms in their humanitarian operations, and using these studies to plan future operations? These are the people that are in the field, located in the heart of conflict situations. They have the best access to data and the best chance to perform research about the situation on the ground.

A: Well, it is not just peacekeeping initiatives, but also, more broadly, a lack of institutional memory. One could point to turnover among the field security officers, and among those people in a duty station. Sometimes you can have a UN agency that has its own security officer. Different individuals and agencies may collect very different data, and they may not share it all the time. In addition, there is natural turnover. A UN peacekeeping operation may be present for some months, and then leave. There is often not enough thought about how to continue what was done, if anything was done. Improved understanding of the humanitarian situation is plagued by other problems, such as lack of direction, lack of follow-through, and lack of clear indicators and disaggregated data that could be used. This three-month initiative intends to sensitize people working in headquarters and in the field. There is a lot of interest out there. There are a lot of people out there who really care about this and want to contribute in a more meaningful way.

Q: You have explained the humanitarian aspects of the impacts of small arms. Most of these impacts are related to the illicit aspects of small arms, such as illicit possession, illicit trafficking, and illicit trade, including diversion to non-state actors. Therefore, are you not really focusing on the humanitarian impact of the illicit side of small arms, rather than small arms *per se*?

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A: My background is in following the arms trade, and looking at the political side, including embargoes. It does not matter how these arms were obtained, so it's not just the illicit side that we are dealing with. Whatever arms are around, the problem being addressed is their effect. So, the study takes as a given fact that these weapons are there, and then asks: What are the broad implications of the presence of these weapons? We are not merely focusing on the illicit trade. That aspect is certainly important, and efforts to reduce the illicit trade are being handled multilaterally, bilaterally and unilaterally, by regional organizations. Those efforts are important, but this study is looking at the broad effect of all weapons.

Q: In this forum, both states and humanitarian organizations are represented. Could you tell us a little bit about your ideas with respect to how to use your findings and recommendations in the UN Preparatory Committee and the Conference? If you have any general or specific ideas, I think many people would appreciate this.

A: My understanding is that our findings and recommendations are going to be used by various agencies. There will be presentations at the Preparatory Committee, on the 21st and 22nd of March. A number of presentations, including our own, will be made in order to more thoroughly relate our findings to the diplomats there. Once the paper is finished, the document will be made public and circulated as widely as possible.

Q: I would rather like to hear how you think your report should be used.

A: After finishing the writing of this paper, we thought about it for a while. There are a lot of people and agencies that are operating in the field, and for a variety of reasons they feel under threat. What we are trying to do, as much as possible, is to report

their voices. For example, consider the landmines campaign. It started by drawing some regular data from the field. It did not overemphasize the numbers. There are always some extraordinary numeric figures that are circulated, but are relatively meaningless. We were trying to bring out some of the data, but also to bring out the voices encountered in the field. So, our hope is that this is a serious document. We did not want to produce a highly politicized document. We wanted to show the impact of what we saw in the field, and we hope that is the message conveyed.

A: There is good reason to be skeptical in this kind of process. I believe that we have really seen genuine interest, amongst the people we have been working with, to have this as a first step to publicizing the voices openly, and to obtaining as much feedback as possible from civil society and governments. We have this very well attended meeting here in Geneva, and I believe that more will come.

Q: What is the best measure to cope with the small arms problem? Since you have firsthand experience in countries experiencing small arms problems, I would appreciate it if you could share with us your opinion as to which approach would be the best for coping with the problem of small arms, either in a country-specific or a generalized way.

A: I will give you one example from my experience, having reviewed the disarmament and demobilization efforts in Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Cambodia, and Angola. Too often, demobilization and disarmament questions take a backseat to political concerns in peacekeeping missions. There is no follow-through. It is still too often “lip service.” Weapons are not actually destroyed, but they are often given back to the governments, or sometimes to the peacekeepers, who have often lost weapons. This is what happened in Sierra Leone. Much

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more serious international efforts, for getting those weapons, taking care of them, and making sure they are not re-circulated, represent one part of the answer to your question.

A: The methods and the ways to resolve the problem are obviously broad and distinct. A great message would be found in a strong response or measures from governments to reduce transfers and to destroy stockpiles. If we could get the arms out of circulation, at the highest possible level, this would be an extremely effective measure. But difficulties arise out of the host of root causes that determine why small arms are being used in different contexts. Causes range from inequality to poverty to policing and insecurity, and all these factors vary from place to place. Thus, another strong measure would be to really begin to explore the demand side. Why is there recourse to use of small arms in various societies? What are the different reasons and motives for it? Only then can you start to conceive of programs that look at both sides of the equation.