

Forum: Disarmament Commission

Issue: Effective management and control of stockpiles to reduce accumulation of surplus weapons

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Introduction

A recent report of the Secretary General to the Security Council (UNSC) identified stockpile management as one of the "most acute small arms problems" and suggested that destroying obsolete weapons was far better than continued storage (Press). The threat of poor management of weapons stockpiles has been made evident with the growing black market for small arms. Surplus weapons from production lines end up feeding criminals and equipping the world's worst terrorists with the arms. Unfortunately, many countries aren't even aware that they have stockpile management problems, allowing their accumulation of weapons in government stockpiles flow into the illegal arms trade.

Currently, only around a quarter of the United Nations member states have laws regulating arms brokers, many of these laws are weak and not fully implemented. This allows black markets and grey markets to flourish and small arms to be traded all around to world. As terrorists and other extremist groups reach to targets further territories, it is necessary to reduce surplus weapons in order to suppress the flow of weapons into the hands of these terrorists.

The current Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, referred to simply as the Program of Action(PoA), was formulated at the Small Arms Review Conference in 2001. It creates a set of guidelines to prevent the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons, splitting its suggestions into national, regional, and global efforts. The Program of Actions acts as a crucial piece towards allowing all countries around the world to effectively management their weapons stockpiles in order to reduce the number of surplus weapons flowing into the black market.

Definition of Key Terms

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)

As defined by the UN Panel of Governmental Experts, Small Arms and Light Weapons consists of handguns, rifles, and shotguns while light weapons consists of grenade launchers, mortars, and other medium-caliber weapons.

Man-Portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADS or MPADS)

As defined by the Small Arms Survey, MANPADS are shoulder launched missiles capable of destroying low flying planes and helicopters, designed to be operated by a single individual or a small crew.

Black market

The trade of goods or services which are in violation of national or international laws and without official government consent. The black market may also include corrupt government officials acting for personal gain.

Grey market

The trade of goods or services, which, while legal, are unauthorized and unofficial.

Arms brokering

Arms brokering is facilitating and negotiating arms deals and trades and also includes related activities such as the transport, financial services, and logistics of arms purchasing and selling.

Background

Mismanagement of weapons stockpiles over the past few decades have resulted in massive amounts of surplus weapons in warehouses around the world. Although some of these stockpiles may include weapons that are obsolete, they still pose a threat when introduced into the black market. These surplus weapons are used by armed terrorists and drug cartels, providing them with weapons and ammunition. In the late 20th century and early 21st century, many African countries were in the middle of bloody civil wars, killing hundreds and thousands of civilians and displacing millions more. Countries such as Sierra Leone, Sudan, Liberia, and many others faced rebel groups, many of which were armed by AK-47s which had been acquired through the black market. Tens of thousands of people are killed or wounded every year in conflicts fought with these weapons.

Laws and regulations

Currently, although 50 Member States had reported that brokering was covered by existing export control laws and 30 Member States reported that they were developing brokering controls, much more is needed to be done in order for all States to have adequate regulations regarding illicit brokering in place. Many of the existing laws regarding this issue are weak and poorly implemented, allowing the illicit trade of small arms to flourish.

The past decade

Despite the decades of civil wars in Africa fueled by surplus weapons from around the world, awareness on this issue has been mediocre until recent years. In a 2005, a study found that only 99 governments have standards and procedures for managing their stockpiles while only 64 claimed that they conducted regular reviews of their stockpiles (Schroeder). During the 1990s, horrific civil wars were fought primarily with small arms and light

weapons. This led to the convening of a 1996 UN Panel of Governmental Experts to develop an agenda to address the excessive accumulation of small arms. This eventually led to the UN Small Arms Conference in 2001, where countries adopted the "Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects." States were later required to report on their progress in their implementation of the Programme of Action, or PoA during the biennial meetings. In 2008, the third biennial meeting resulted in a document with three main topics, international cooperation and assistance, illicit brokering, and stockpile management and surplus disposal.

The current Programme of Action

The PoA was created by the United Nations Small Arms Conference in 2001. Since its adoption, there have been one Review conference and Biennial Meetings where states discuss the progress of implementation of the program of action. The PoA recommends a number of measures which states should implement in order to eradicate the illicit small arms trade. It calls for states to implement certain measures at a national, regional, and international level, providing numerous suggestions which states should abide by. Regarding stockpile management, the PoA calls for a set of standards and procedures which are to be made appropriate to the locations of the stockpiles. It also calls for physical security measures, and extensive staff training in order to ensure the safety of the stockpiles.

Stockpile management

Effective stockpile management calls for regular checks on stock and sufficient security to ensure none of the weapons falls into the wrong hands. In countries like the United States, surplus weapons are actually sold to the public, similar to other surplus goods. However, in many other countries, surplus weapons fall into the hands of terrorists, drug cartels, and other armed group. Standards for stockpile management needs to be improved before any progress on the reduction of surplus weapons can be made.

Destruction of surplus

The most obvious solution to eliminating existing surplus is to destroy the surplus weapons and ammunition. Many of the weapons left over from the Cold War, including millions of rounds of ammunition, in countries such as Albania and Ukraine have been destroyed by an international effort. Many of the countries possessing large stockpiles of weapons from past conflicts lack knowledge on proper disposal methods and an international effort has been called upon, promoting international cooperation in destroying existing weapon stockpiles. However, as the arms industry continues to grow and weapons manufacturers continue to produce weapons, there will be an endless cycle of production and destruction, until a long term solution can be implemented.

Responsibility of manufacturers

Another major issue is the responsibility of weapons manufacturers and weapons manufacturing companies. The PoA requires member states to outlaw the unauthorized manufacture, possession, stockpiling, and trade of small arms and light weapons. However, many of the weapons which have leaked into the black market originated

from authorized manufacturers, usually surplus weapons which have been left in government stockpiles. Manufacturers need to allow their weapons to be easily identified and traced back to their origin through an improved tracking system of all the weapons they produce.

Major Parties Involved

East Europe

After the fall of the Soviet Union, many of the newly independent states in Eastern Europe found themselves possessing massive weapon stockpiles, some even possessing nuclear weapons from the Cold War. The nuclear weapons were eventually returned to Russia however the numerous Cold War stockpiles still remain in many Eastern European nations. Tens of thousands of machine guns, assault rifles, and missiles were shipped from Ukraine to Africa in the late 1990s, including an infamous incident where 3000 AK-47 rifles and multiple machine guns and grenade launchers were shipped off to a rebel group in Sierra Leone (Weapons). The UN have established the South East Europe Small Arms Clearinghouse to assist these countries with the collection and destruction of illicit and surplus small arms. However, these stockpiles are still capable of providing munitions for future conflicts around the world.

Africa

Africa has been the center of many conflicts in the late 20th and early 21st century. Political instability and the diamond mines have caused many conflicts and civil wars to erupt over recent decades. The control of weapons stockpiles around the world is vital to maintain security in the African region. African nations have suggested that weapons manufacturing countries should take greater responsibility in regarding the spread of weapons. Certain countries in Africa, particularly Congo, Sudan, Liberia, and Sierra Leone have experienced the effects of endless civil wars. Furthermore, the gold and diamond mines in Africa have been linked to the acquisition of illegal weapons.

United States of America

As the world's largest arms exporter, the United States have taken an initiative in assisting countries around the world in destroying their surplus weapons. The United States plays a major role in global arms trade, exporting its latest weapons to its allies around the world. With the SALW Destruction Program, the US have assisted many countries in destroying their surplus weapons, many of them left behind from previous wars and conflicts. In the past few years, the Obama administration has stressed the importance of small arms controls, pursuing stronger regulations for the international transfer of conventional weapons.

United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA)

The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs was created in its current name in 2007, previously being run under names such as the Department for Disarmament Affairs and the Centre for Disarmament Affairs. UNODA's

main missions are to promote nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, strengthening disarmament regimes, and increasing disarmament efforts in the areas of conventional weapons, which includes small arms and light weapons.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Little has been done on this question until the past decade when the world realized the danger of terrorism and armed conflict in developing states. The adoption of the Program of Action was an important step towards promoting efficient stockpiling of small arms in particular. The surplus of small arms and light weapons are particularly dangerous as they are relatively easily imported and exported when compared to ballistic missiles and vehicles. The biennial meetings on the implementation of the PoA have acted as important stepping stones towards assisting nations with controlling their weapons manufacturers and efficient stockpile managing. Furthermore, a review conference, similar to the one that took place in 2006, is planned to take place in 2012. Hopefully, it will be more productive than the one in 2006, which was filled with disagreements, and produce another document, perhaps a revised program of action that will be even more effective than the current one.

There have recently been many efforts to destroy surplus small arms and light weapons, including the US's SALW destruction program, which boasts an impressive 27 million dollar pledge from Department of State to assist countries with technical assistance to destroy their surplus weapons. Recently, there have also been an expansion in treaties which regulate arms transfers. One crucial step was the expansion of the UN Conventional Arms Registers to include mortars between 75mm and 100mm in size and MANPADS. The increase in use of MANPADS by terrorists and other armed groups to destroy helicopters and low flying planes has been has escalated the warzone in the Middle East.

The PoA encouraged states to develop and implement disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs. In recent years, Many nations, NGOs, and UNOs, have committed millions of dollars to develop programs for hundreds of thousands of ex-combatants in the Great Lakes region of Africa to help decommission militia units and allow these former soldiers to be reintegrated into society.

Possible Solutions

- The major problem with this issue is the lack of a multilateral treaty which encompasses stockpile management in general. The PoA aims to eradicate the illicit trade small arms and light weapons, and only covers stockpile management on a side note. The issue of stockpile management is much broader than simply small arms and light weapons, even if SALWs are the most easily acquired through the black market.
- The first step towards solving the issue is to destroy existing surplus weapons in order to prevent them from leaking into the black market. Although this is only a short-term solution, it is effective in reducing existing

stockpiles. International cooperation for this is necessary as some countries lack the technology and funds to destroy their surplus stockpiles.

- Stockpile management staff needs to have sufficient training and regularly check upon stocks and track all the weapons moving in and out of the stockpiles. As previously mentioned, very few countries actually regularly check their stockpiles, which leads to weapons leaking into the black market. With regular checkups of stockpiles and increased security, even existing surplus weapons won't be as large of a threat. However, excessive stockpiling of weapons should not be suggested as destruction of these surplus weapons would be much more efficient in ridding them from the potential to become the weapons of terrorists.
- To clamp down at the root of the problem, manufacturers need to become more responsible for their weapons productions. Manufacturers should allow their weapons to be identified easily and allow stockpile managers to trace the weapon back to its manufacturer. Also, "reckless proliferation" has caused large amounts of surplus weapons, which then need to be destroyed. This seems like an awful waste of resources and needs to be dealt with.
- Perhaps a multilateral treaty regarding the proliferation of specific types of weapons similar to that of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT), could help countries reduce their stockpiles. This could also enforce certain regulations over the export and import of weapons, which could force the number of illicit brokers in a country to decrease.

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