THE SMALL ARMS PROBLEM AS ARMS CONTROL: A POLICY-DRIVEN RESEARCH AGENDA

A. INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of 2012, the problems associated with the proliferation, availability and misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALW) remained a key issue on the global policy agenda. Loose weapons were leaking out of failed states, a variety of armed groups were creating armed violence, and deaths from crime using SALW were on the rise. So were the efforts to solve these problems at the local, national, regional and global levels- the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms (PoA)\(^2\), the negotiations for an Arms Trade Treaty, the development of International Small Arms Control Standards, and the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development. Thanks to a vibrant epistemic community\(^3\) producing hundreds of studies, the research on SALW- its causes, effects and solutions- is there to serve these efforts. Conducting surveys to establish empirical baseline data is now the norm. Research using experimental and control groups to empirically test hypothetical policy options has been established. Data analysis to establish statistically verifiable effects from SALW programs and policies has become a required part of policy research. The use of valid and reliable indicators is a necessary

---

\(^1\) Note from author. During the period 1992 to 2001, I had a front-row seat to most of the events that shaped the epistemic community that emerged around the problems associated with the proliferation, availability and misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALW). I was the UN consultant to the development of the UN Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA) (1992-94). I developed a hand grenade buy-back program for the UN in El Salvador (1995). I was the UN consultant to the first UN Panel of Experts on Small Arms (1996-97). I was a co-founder of the International Action Network on Small Arms (1998). From 1994-97 I was a consultant to the Government of Canada, which played a critical role in the development of the small arms issue. Finally, I was the UN consultant to the UN Conference on SALW and wrote the first draft of the UN Programme of Action on SALW (PoA)(2000-2001). Throughout this period I directed a major SALW research effort at the Monterey Institute of International Studies. With this experience in mind, I chose to write parts of this chapter in the first person, not to herald my efforts but to include commentary and evidence that may not appear elsewhere in the literature.

\(^2\) The full title of this UN document is the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. http://www.poa-iss.org/poa/poa.aspx

\(^3\) The term epistemic community is defined as “a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area” Peter Haas, “Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination.” International Organization, Vol. 46, No. 1, Knowledge, Power, and International Policy Coordination. (Winter, 1992), pp. 1-35. In this chapter the epistemic community includes civil society organizations, international organizations, policy organizations within governments, research organizations or think tanks, and academics.
part of this hypothesis testing. The full range of research methods from different academic disciplines is being employed by the SALW epistemic community to establish the causes and effects of SALW proliferation, availability and misuse that can then be used to develop effective policies and programs.

When the problems associated with SALW first surfaced in the early 1990s, research on SALW looked quite different. In the first ten years of researching SALW (1991-2000) baseline data did not exist, the epistemic community grew very slowly, and what passed for research in many cases was either atheoretical or little more than the researcher’s (or advocate’s) favorite theory as to what should be done to solve the problems related to SALW. In some cases research was being conducted on armed violence that met the strict requirements of social science research (e.g., anthropology, criminology, public health). However this research was not connected most of the time to the growing knowledge based on efforts within the United Nations, which was driving the policy (and later) the SALW research agenda.

We now have a better understanding of how and why the small arms epistemic community was formed.4 While these histories are referenced in this chapter, the main focus will be to explore how the formation and activities of this epistemic community shaped the types of research, data generation and analysis that accompanied the growth of this community, and how it shaped the significant increase in the quality and quantity of research by Small Arms Survey, the Bonn International Center for Conversion, UNDP governments and others, after the PoA was signed in 2001.

B. IN THE BEGINNING

The early research on SALW was concerned mainly with why the SALW problem was new and global in scope. In 1994 Klare gave nine reasons that more or less gained a quick consensus:\(^5\)

- Breakup of the former Soviet Union and the Yugoslav Federation into separate states
- Ethnic warfare within the successor states of the former Soviet Union and the Yugoslav Federation
- Breakdown of central government authority in Russia and the other former Soviet republics
- Diminished superpower control over “proxy forces” in internal Third World conflicts
- Surplus stocks of light weapons
- Proliferation of ethnic, tribal and religious conflicts
- Growing social, political, and economic disorder within societies
- Growing importance of nonstate actors
- Growing vibrancy of the global underground economy

In addition the introduction of the concept of ‘human security” in 1994 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)\(^6\) served to confirm that interstate conflict with its focus on national security had been diminished by intrastate conflict and the focus on the security of individuals within a state. The ethnic and intra-state conflicts masked by the Cold War began to surface as armed conflicts requiring only small arms and light weapons, not major conventional weapons. Some wars generated by the strategic Cold War rivalry began to end in Central America and Africa, but these wars left in their wake massive accumulations of weapons not collected by the parties to the conflicts. Major manufacturers of small arms, especially in the former Soviet Union, continued to manufacture at Cold War levels, creating huge inventories of weapons. This surplus began to find its way to newly emerging armed conflicts. Most importantly, as with major conventional arms, there were no global controls on either the trade in or use of SALW.

As of 1992 the situation was one of increased availability of small arms and light weapons, little in the way of policy tools to regulate it, and growing evidence of serious negative effects. It was not until 1993 that articles began to appear that characterized this

---


problem as different from those related to the conventional arms trade. Differences included the size, cost, portability and lack of accountability of this class of weapon. In 1994 the first major conference was held to address the new problem, under the auspices of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It was chaired by Michael Klare, an old hand from the conventional arms trade research community and arguably the most influential voice in warning of new challenges and threats based on the proliferation, diffusion and negative effects from SALW. Most of those present at this meeting were from this conventional arms trade community, mainly from the U.S. and Europe, and began to realize that much of what they knew about the control of the conventional arms trade would not apply to this new challenge.

The book emanating from this 1994 conference is a good first look at the state of research at that time. First, most authors brought with them previous research and knowledge, mainly from the arms control/disarmament community, that might apply to the new SALW problem. The first two chapters were by Aaron Karp, recently director of the SIPRI Arms Trade Project, and Michael Klare. Both could be characterized as sounding the alarm that addressing SALW will be very different from the trade in major conventional weapons. R.T Naylor, an economist specializing in global black markets, applied his knowledge to the illicit trafficking in arms. Four chapters were written by area specialists who illuminated the role of SALW in fueling armed conflict in four regions: Angola, South Asia, Russia and the other former Soviet states, and Colombia. In each case data on various aspects of SALW production, exports, etc. were presented. As for solutions, the chapter by Husbands “Controlling Transfers of Light Arms” presented a series of questions which could shape efforts to control the trade in and misuse of SALW. In my case, I was serving as consultant to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms process. My big pitch was transparency, a reality that I already knew from the first two years of the Register was highly unlikely to work for SALW. Interestingly there was no summary by the editors as to what all this information meant and no way forward. For example, Klare states that in regard to his ten changes in the international system creating

---

7. In his chapter in this book, “The Structure and Operation of the Modern Arms Black Market,” Naylor has no footnotes. Rather, he has “A Note on Sources” at the end in which he states that we know very little about this topic, calling his chapter a “theoretical” one.
demand for SALW, “it is impossible to produce any statistics to confirm this hypothesis,” only “anecdotal evidence to lend it considerable validity.” Smith suggests controlling ammunition as a promising solution. Husbands suggest that controls should be based on the stage of the conflict. But the main outcome of the book was a call for more research, that began to occur soon after this conference.

In 1995, The British-American Security Information Council (based in London and Washington) received a large multi-year grant from the Ford Foundation for the Project on Light Weapons, work that played a major role in the development of the epistemic community. The major outputs of this effort were papers by an expanding list of researchers, some from the developing world and especially conflict zones (e.g., Pakistan, the Balkans). In October 1995 BASIC co-sponsored a meeting with the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, the Indian Pugwash Society and the Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis (Indian government-sponsored institute). It covered more ground than did the Cambridge meeting in 1994, to include South Africa and a major chapter on SALW from a sociological perspective. The book from this conference was published in December 1995. It made transparent a great deal of data on the types of weapons being used in intrastate conflicts, where they come from, and the dynamics of weapons flows. It also produced a study of the synergy between the arms and the drug trade. The editors declared in the summary that “formulating the current state of the “disease” in this way would provide a helpful roadmap for future research and political action. It also contained some of the initial policy prescriptions for addressing the SALW problem: increased transparency, oversight, control (e.g., improving domestic gun control, eliminating or restricting certain types of weapons). The chapter by Brady “Collecting and Organising Data on the Manufacture of, and Trade in Light Weapons” revealed the paucity of data and the magnitude of the effort required to develop such a database. The Project Director Natalie Goldring testified before the United Nations expert committee on small arms in June 1996. One of BASIC’s goals was

---

8 It would be years before the policy community took up this suggestion.
to create a network of researchers (a major component of an epistemic community). She reported that by 1996 there were 200 people in the network and 45 projects.\textsuperscript{11}

In September 1996, I and the late Sarah Meek wrote *The New Field of Micro-Disarmament: Addressing the Proliferation and Buildup of Small Arms and Light Weapons*.\textsuperscript{12} It was based on the research described above as well as the work of the Program for Arms Control, Disarmament and Conversion (PACDC) at the Monterey Institute for International Studies. It was published by BICC under its mandate mandate of exploring the question of surplus weapons. This mandate produced work on demobilization, weapons collection and the SALW problem. It was the first book that was not an edited book and as such became the “bible” for the growing movement toward action to stem the proliferation and misuse of SALW. It contained a history of UN action up to that time, as well as an in-depth effort to shape a definition of the types of weapons included in a definition of SALW. Based on research conducted in El Salvador in March 1995, the book suggested that the best way to define SALW is to list all the weapons turned in as part of the conclusion of peace operations by the UN. An Appendix listed the complete inventory of weapons used by both sides in the war in El Salvador.

This book also promoted the idea that the extensive research by the domestic gun violence research community in the United States may have some applicability in other contexts. One of PACDC’s major research projects was assessing the policy tool of gun buy-backs, and this research was included in the book. It should be noted however that very little research had been conducted to test the hypothesis that weapons collection leads to lower violence. As a matter fact, what evidence there was indicated the opposite. It was a classic example of the research attitude that dominated this period, that is, something has to be done, even if we do not have the evidence at hand that it will work.

\textsuperscript{11} Personal observation of author.
In November 1996 the Canadian government published a bibliography of works on SALW. Part A, “United Nations, Regional Organizations and Other International Arrangements, listed 12 items. The second section, entitled “Scholarly Studies,” listed 5 items in 1993, 6 in 1994, 9 in 1995, and 38 for 1996. The aforementioned books *Lethal Commerce* and *Light Weapons and International Security* accounted for most of the publications in 1995. But by 1996 a true epistemic community was forming. A key factor was another major project implemented by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research in Geneva, entitled “Disarmament and Conflict Resolution Project” directed by Virginia Gamba. This project produced 11 case studies of UN Peacekeeping Operations and the role that disarmament played in each. As with the BASIC project, it provided a platform for research on SALW and brought in additional members to the epistemic community on SALW, who later became key members of the SALW epistemic community, e.g., Peter Batchelor, Eric Berman, Virginia Gamba, Chris Smith, Sarah Meek. There was a conclusion to the study written by Virginia Gamba and Jakki Pogeiter, mainly concerning disarmament during peace processes. It was a typically descriptive UN project that only minimally contributed to addressing the growing concern with the negative effects of SALW, and it was rarely cited after its publication.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) also played a major role in this beginning period of knowledge generation on SALW. In 1992, HRW was very active in the anti-personnel landmine (APL) campaign. In 1993 the book *Landmines: A Deadly Legacy* was published and was quickly seen as the bible on APL. It showed how APLs were used, described the global production and trade in landmines, the medical and social consequences of APLs, mine clearance, the legal issues in establishing a global solution, and case studies from seven countries. This is a body of knowledge that would not be developed for SALW until the end of the decade.

---

13. Canada. *Small Arms and Light Weapons: An Annotated Bibliography*
While serving as a consultant to the UN Register panel of experts, I met Ken Anderson, one of the four executive editors of *A Deadly Legacy*, who had just been appointed Director of The Arms Project of HRW. Their mandate was “monitoring and seeking to prevent arms transfers to governments or organizations that either grossly violate internationally recognized human rights or grossly violate the laws of war.” After this consultation I was appointed to the international advisory committee of the Arms Project and remained so throughout the 1990s. I had a front-row seat as the field research of HRW staff began to produce the first serious look at the impact of the proliferation, trade and misuse of SALW at the ground level. The first study to become public was “Arming Genocide in Rwanda” in the September/October issue of *Foreign Affairs*. It was written by Stephen Goose and investigative reporter Frank Smyth. It was the first time that we saw actual documents proving that France, Egypt and South Africa played a role in arming the perpetrators of genocide and sparked a UN Commission of Inquiry. Other HRW studies followed in quick succession on India, Sudan, Angola and Burundi. The focus of the HRW work was on naming and shaming national governments, not just the nefarious brokers and “merchants of death.” The independent and neutral status of HRW gave these reports credibility and they became compelling evidence used by the epistemic community moving toward a global solution.

These early days of generating knowledge on the SALW problem were marked by several characteristics. First, rarely was the work evidence-based. Second, the scant evidence produced focused on only one small part of the problem. Knowledge about weapons collection programs would be an illustrative example. Third, there were very few testable propositions put forth. Pieces of the puzzle were illuminated but those causal propositions that would guide policy aimed at reducing the negative effects of SALW were missing. Fourth, there was an almost total absence of experts from academia, where hypotheses and valid and reliable data are at least talked about, if not always practiced. Little of what passed for research would earn tenure or promotion in academe.

---

16. Stephen Goose was the Washington director.
17. HRW 1992
18. I am indebted to Keityh Krause for these observations.
C. ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

To this point in the evolution of knowledge, we have shown that the main sources of knowledge on SALW issues were a variety of NGOs and individuals with a policy focus. The number of experts in the epistemic community was growing. In parallel to this knowledge production, the United Nations assumed the role of prime mover of not only action but also the knowledge that was to be developed to support this action. So it is appropriate here to outline the United Nations role in addressing the problems related to the proliferation, availability and misuse of SALW. I will focus on what I see as the several UN actions that had the most influence on the research undertaken in this period.  

UN involvement with SALW started with the peacekeeping operations in Central America at the start of the 1990s; the United Nations Observation Group in Central America (ONUCA) and the United Nations Observer Group in El Salvador (ONUSAL). Both of these operations involved disarming armed groups and collecting weapons as a part of their mandate of the peace agreements. These operations, conducted mainly by uniformed peacekeepers, also highlighted the explicit connection between disarmament and development. The concept of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) was developed here. The UN Development Program (UNDP) played a major role in the rebuilding of the police force as well as integrating ex-combatants from both sides. In the process a great deal of knowledge was generated and eventually used for the now well-developed UNDDR standards.

This experience became very useful in Mali in 1994-96, where the major development work of UNDP and other development agencies and donor states had ground to a halt due to armed violence perpetrated on the population by the Toureg minority. Under a 1994

---

19. Further on in this decade, in the run-up to the UN Conference on small arms, member states began producing knowledge in the form of detailed policy prescriptions for both regional efforts and what would become the PoA. However, prior to 1999 Canada was the only country producing research that was used by the epistemic community in any serious way.

20. The UN peacekeeping mission in Namibia (1988-1991) had a demobilization component but there were no lessons learned from that mission relating to SALW that were carried forth into the 1990s. It was not even a case study in the previously mentioned UNIDIR project.

UN General Assembly Resolution, which called for states suffering from the effects of SALW to ask for UN assistance, a new Malian government did so and a fact-finding mission was dispatched from the UN. This led to the collection of over 3000 weapons by the UNDP in March 1996 and the integration into Malian society of the Toureg fighters, sparking a re-start of development programs.\textsuperscript{22} This was the first such collection outside of a formal peace operation and set the stage for many more to come. More importantly it was seen as a success and the general approach of ending armed conflict by bringing combatants into society and collecting and destroying their arms became a preferred solution, if not a norm. It also sparked a major research effort on the voluntary collection of weapons, especially at the Monterey Institute of International Studies Program on Arms Control Disarmament and Conversion.\textsuperscript{23}

In January 1995, then-UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali presented his Supplement to an Agenda for Peace. He called on the international community to “concentrate on what might be called ‘micro-disarmament’\textsuperscript{24}. By this I mean practical disarmament in the context of the conflicts the United Nations is actually dealing with and of the weapons, most of them light weapons that are actually killing people in the hundreds of thousands.”\textsuperscript{25}

In essence the UNSG had created the political rationale and mandate for research and action on SALW. This call prompted a UN General Assembly Resolution which established a UN Panel of Experts (UN Small Arms Panel) to answer three main questions:

---

\textsuperscript{22} For an account of the Mali case see Mugumya, G. \textit{Exchanging Weapons for Development in Mali: Weapon Collection Programmes Assessed by Local People}. UNIDIR, 2004.

\textsuperscript{23} Five years of research led to the publication \textit{Tackling Small Arms and Light Weapons: A Practical Guide for Collection and Destruction}. Bonn International Center for Conversion and Program on Security and Development: Monterey Institute of International Studies. February 2000.

\textsuperscript{24} I was a consultant for the UN at that time. We received a call from the Secretary-General’s office asking if the phrase “micro-disarmament” had ever been used before. It had not. The phrase then began to be used and in the process confused many stakeholders in the SALW efforts. It basically disappeared after several years.

“The General Assembly Resolution 50/70B of 12 December 1995 requested the Secretary General to prepare, with the assistance of a group of qualified governmental experts, a report on:

(a) The types of small arms and light weapons actually being used in conflicts being dealt with by the United Nations;

(b) The nature and causes of the excessive and destabilizing accumulation and transfer of small arms and light weapons, including their illicit production and trade;

(c) The ways and means to prevent and reduce the excessive and destabilizing accumulation and transfer of small arms and light weapons, in particular as they cause or exacerbate conflict.

As the consultant to this UN group of experts, my responsibility was to write a draft that answered the above questions. The sources were replies from member States (based on an invitation to do so from the Secretary General), the panelists themselves, other UN bodies, and the “research community.” This experience gave me a comprehensive picture of the state of knowledge regarding the issues related to SALW, as well as how the UN would be a major factor in the next few years of knowledge-generation.

Replies from States are by definition political. While they contain many ideas and observations, they hardly pass for knowledge, at least in 1995-96. They were important because they could be incorporated into the draft of the panel, adding legitimacy to the final product. As for the panelists, the expertise varied significantly. For example, the four military officers in the group were charged with developing the “Weapons in Use Section.”26 Others were selected simply because they were from regions of conflict, and often did not have expertise related to SALW. Others were general arms control diplomats. However, in the end most of the knowledge contributed from these experts was sourced from the ministries and departments of their respective governments.

The Secretariat arranged for six academic researchers to testify at the first session in June 1996: Ian Anthony, SIPRI; Natalie Goldring, BASIC Project on Light Weapons; Michael Klare, Hampshire College; Andrew Latham, York University; Andrew Pierre, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; and R.T Naylor, McGill University. Collectively they presented the latest information on the illicit arms trade, causes of excessive

---

26. This definition has more or less remained as the consensus definition.
accumulations of small arms, the global trade in SALW and the emerging global network of researchers on SALW. The Secretary of the panel refused to invite NGOs for fear that the testimony would be political and not “academic.” This decision prevented Human Rights Watch, among others, from adding their extensive field knowledge that could have been used by the panel. One piece of data from non-panel experts was used in the final report. It was a chart showing the production and possession of assault rifles from 1945-1990. Not to be denied was the National Rifle Association, who went to the Secretary General to secure a spot to officially testify. In a foretaste of what was to come later, their testimony contained no evidence and was a political call for no restrictions on US citizens to bear arms as a Constitutional right. Three additional sessions were held in South Africa, El Salvador and Nepal. Sixty-four experts testified, ten of whom were from academia or research institutions. Most of this research was archived and never utilized by the panel. Copies were given to each State representative and its use is undetermined.

The most telling revelation that would shape SALW research was the question of data. No database on SALW ever came even close to the data generated by SIPRI or the US government for major conventional weapons systems. There was some hope from the research community that the UN could develop such a database. However, the proceedings of the UN Small Arms Panel demonstrated that this would not happen. The first task of the Panel seemed straightforward, to document types of small arms and light weapons actually being used in conflicts being dealt with by the United Nations. UN DPKO was asked to provide this information, which was sent on 13 September 1996. It contained data for 16 locations where the UN worked and appeared as an Annex to the various drafts of the Panel report. Midway through the year that the Panel deliberated, a Panel member noted that there some mistakes in the Annex. When I checked I noted that

27. The ground rules in place at that time prevented the consultant or anyone else from using information that did not come from scheduled witnesses at the sessions in New York, or the three sessions held outside of New York: El Salvador, South Africa, Nepal and Tokyo.
29. I made several attempts to use some of this evidence from the regional workshops and was denied by the Secretariat.
30. SIPRI Arms Trade Register; US Government *World Military Expenditures and Arms Trade* (WMEAT).
the data on weapons used in the El Salvador contained gross errors. Mainly, there were no weapons listed used by the Salvadoran government forces, only the FMLN!\textsuperscript{31} No hand grenades were listed. I contacted the PKO person responsible for this report and was told that it was compiled by a summer intern from public sources. When asked why the various PKO headquarters were not asked for the data, I was told it was not in the UNDPKO mandate to do so. And that is the main point of the story. The UN has never been allowed by member States to collect, let alone analyze, data related to security matters that came from independent sources. Researchers were going to have to create data without the help of the UN.

\textit{Tackling the SALW Problem in the First Committee}

The work of the UN Small Arms Panel, the Mali mission, and the UNIDIR research project was situated in the First Committee (Disarmament and International Security) of the General Assembly. This was a committee who rarely talked about anything but weapons of mass destruction, especially during the Cold War. The emergence of the SALW as a problem caught the arms control and disarmament experts and delegates to the First Committee unprepared. As noted above, the knowledge was scarce. But more important was the nature of the problem, especially the connection between the effects of SALW and development. The final report of the UN Small Arms Panel restricted its recommendations to SALW, thereby reinforcing and promoting most of the academic work based on arms control and disarmament solutions. There was no mention of lowering the demand for SALW, dealing with human rights violations associated with SALW, the impact on children and child soldiers, the strain of public health systems, etc. By the time the UN Conference on Small Arms process convened in 2000, there was a growing consensus that the solutions to SALW problems involved more than arms control and disarmament. This problem revealed itself even more at the Conference.

\textit{Impact of the UN Conference on Research}

\textsuperscript{31} At exactly the same time my publication \textit{The New Field of Micro-Disarmament} (Bonn International Center for Conversion) was published. I had a chart entitled “Weapons collected during the disarmament process in El Salvador” that contained a valid list, based on documents of ONUSAL which I researched there in 1995. This list contained 53 types of weapons, the PKO list contained 20.
The report of the UN Small Arms Panel was delivered to the UNGA on 27 August 1997. At the General Assembly session that fall the UNGA passed resolution A/RES/52/38 J 8 January 1998.

It called on the UNSG to solicit Member State “views on the recommendation (of the UN Small Arms Panel) concerning the convening of an international conference on the illicit arms trade in all its aspects in time for consideration by the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. It “Further requests the Secretary-General to prepare a report, with the assistance of a group of governmental experts to be nominated by him in 1998 on the basis of equitable geographical representation, (a) on the progress made in the implementation of the recommendations of the report on small arms and (b) on further actions recommended to be taken, to be submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session.”

From this date on research on SALW took a decidedly policy direction as it was clear there would be a Conference. Once again States would be providing data on SALW as well as their ideas for the Conference. The NGO community began focusing on policy options and approaches to be included in the Program of Action that was to be the outcome of the Conference. A second UN Panel of Experts on SALW was appointed and met from May 1998 to August 1999, issuing its final report in 1999. Their mandate was to develop an agenda for the Conference, which did not materialize. Therefore, the epistemic community accelerated its drive to shape the outcome of the Conference. On 12 January 1999, the UNGA passed a resolution stating that it has decided “to convene an international conference on the illicit arms trade in all its aspects no later than 2001.”

Particularly important at this point is the work of a group known as Biting the Bullet. Funded by the UK government, they began developing policy papers on a variety of topics that would be covered in the document to be negotiated.

D. THE NGO MOVEMENT TO ADDRESS THE SALW PROBLEM TAKES OFF

Both knowledge generation and global action on SALW accelerated as a result of two key events in December 1997. Early that month, the landmine convention had its launch.

32 As with the first panel, the consultant, Owen Greene, was an academic, demonstrating some synergy between the various members of the growing epistemic community and the UN.
33 A/53/77E
34 The three organizations of Biting the Bullet were Saferworld, BASIC and International Alert. Owen Greene of Bradford University was also a key contributor. The Biting the Bullet project, in the run up to the 2001 UN Conference, brought together government experts, academics and civil society to discuss and put forward innovative solutions to the multidimensional problem of small arms proliferation.
funding pledge and signing conference in Ottawa, Canada. On the last day of that conference, the NGOs of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) had what could be called a celebration of their success with short papers and discussion relating to lessons learned and the way forward. I had been asked by the Canadian government to write a short paper, the last one of the day, on how the SALW problem could be addressed given the approach and methods used in the campaign leading up to the launch of the landmines convention.

At the end of this meeting, Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy was interviewed on television and announced that the next target in his human security foreign policy was the proliferation of SALW. At the meeting itself, Mr. Cornelio Sommaruga, President of the ICRC, stated that “the landmine issue is but a part of a phenomenon of increasing concern to the ICRC: the virtually unrestricted flow of vast quantities of weapons, particularly small arms, throughout the world and their consistent use in flagrant violation of the norms of international humanitarian law.” Combined these two men had signaled the beginning of a major campaign.

Before my presentation at the NGO day, in which I proposed a Convention on the Prevention of the Indiscriminate and Unlawful Use of Light Weapons, I was informed that Axworthy would like to see me. I had been working as a consultant with the Canadian Foreign Ministry on the small arms issue for the past year. We had a fifteen minute conversation in which he promised financial support for a campaign organization of NGOs similar to the ICBL, once a critical mass of NGOs came on board for a campaign. I said I would accept this challenge and take it to a meeting of the key NGOs to take place in a week in Washington.

Knowledge
The Washington meeting took place on 10 December 1997. It was previously scheduled as a follow-on conference arranged by Michael Klare to take stock of what we knew

---

about the SALW issue four years after the 1994 conference that led to *Lethal Commerce*. As for knowledge, Klare’s statement captured the moment. “Now, four years after the 1994 Academy meeting, it can be said that much of the necessary research has been completed. While not every gap in our knowledge has been closed, much more has been learned about the nature, scope, and consequences of the light weapons trade. …But most of all, we now possess a sufficiently thorough assessment of the trade to begin the vital task of devising effective control measures.” 36 The edited book containing the papers presented at this conference, *Light Weapons and Civil Conflict,* 37 served as a credible assessment of what was known at that time. Klare’s opening chapter identified four sources of data that have been developed in the past four years: National government data; field research, incident reports, and information collected in the course of peacekeeping operations. He also cited the books that had been published since 1994 as well as the work on the 1996-97 UN Small Arms Panel. 38 His major findings from this period included:

- Close and symbiotic relationship between SALW trafficking and contemporary forms of violent conflict
- “Internal arms races” in weak and divided societies
- Internal arms races made possible by worldwide surplus and easy availability of SALW
  - Even small amounts of SALW can be destabilizing
  - SALW flow through wide variety of channels, not only the black market

The book from this conference also included chapters on transparency, early warning, the link between domestic laws and international controls, regional studies from Africa, South Asia, work by the World Bank, international humanitarian law, international law enforcement and a final chapter with policy recommendations.

Despite Klare’s optimism, in retrospect the existing knowledge in was inadequate for an appropriate and effective policy response. It was yet another example of the epistemic

---

community’s growing concern at the continuing revelations of death and destruction from SALW. “Something must be done” was the watchword. This is of course the classic divide between the “research” community and the “policy” community. When do you have to move forward with the “dirty data” that exists? Can you afford to wait for the evidence while the damage mounts? The fact that the “research” community had become almost synonymous with the “policy” community explains why the lack of knowledge did not impede the policy move forward.

As we now know, Klare’s assessment of the state of knowledge was far off the mark. We knew enough to say something should be done about the negative effects of the proliferation, availability and misuse, but little more. Also, Klare came from a tradition of focusing on the trade as the primary cause of these negative effects. But he ignored his own “diffusion” model which correctly focuses on weapons already in place in a conflict zone. And, like most of the epistemic community at that time (1998), we had not made a dent in addressing the other causal factors of armed violence, especially the demand for SALW as a focus of policy work.

Forming a global NGO effort
The year that followed this conference (1998) was critical in further developing the epistemic community, both from the NGO perspective as well as action taken by the UN and regional organizations. Much of the UN effort has been covered already in this chapter. As for the NGO effort, the Washington meeting on 10 December 1997 was crucial. For my part I reported the offer from Axworthy and also volunteered to establish a website that would begin to put the work of NGOs in one place, as a precursor for the development of a more formal international NGO and the presumed campaign that would promote global action. The website PrepCom (Preparatory Committee for an

---

41. Attending this meeting was a Who’s Who of the SALW epistemic community. Also attending was Canadian Bob Lawson, the director of the landmine effort for Canada. His advice was instrumental in the policy outcome of this meeting.
International Campaign on Small Arms) was hosted at my institute. It consisted of one employee, William Godnick, and several graduate assistants. The mandate was to convince as many NGOs to join this initial effort on line, with the goal of a formal meeting of NGOs funded by the government of Canada to follow.

In January, The Monterey Institute launched the website PrepCom. Members at launch included the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC), British American Security Information Council (BASIC), Canadian Council for International Peace and Security, Arms Sales Monitoring Project at The Federation of American Scientists, Human Rights Watch - Arms Project, International Alert, Pax Christi Flanders, Pax Christi International, International Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIOS), Program for Arms Control, Disarmament and Conversion (PACDC), Project Ploughshares, and Saferworld. Not coincidentally there was already considerable interaction among these NGOs and they had developed most of the knowledge on SALW.

By April there were over 30 members of PrepCom and Foreign Minister Axworthy agreed to fund a face-to-face meeting of these NGOs. This was held in August 1998 in Canada, hosted by Project Ploughshares, where the NGOs formed the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA). A larger formational meeting was held in October in Brussels and IANSA was formally launched in May 1999.42

The rapid expansion of PrepCom and then IANSA had several implications for the development of SALW knowledge. First, each NGO joining the network brought with them knowledge gained by their own work. Second, much of this knowledge came from parts of the world that had not participated in the initial knowledge generation (up to December 1997). Third, these new members of the epistemic community broadened the focus of the knowledge to include how SALW availability and misuse related to economic, political and social development, crime, and public health. And finally, these NGOs were exposed for the first time to the extensive knowledge on SALW, mainly generated by the other NGOs of PrepCom.

42. The details of the IANSA formational process is detailed in Krause, pp.17-23, and Garcia, pp. 49-51.
THE BALANCE SHEET IN 2000: WHAT WE KNEW AND WHAT WE KNEW WE DIDN’T KNOW

Despite the fact that NGOs and others had declared (in late 1997) “we know enough to start solving the problems” associated with SALW, a more sober assessment reveals there was quite a bit of knowledge yet to be developed. In late 1999 the Small Arms Survey project was launched at the Graduate Institute for International and Development Studies in Geneva. It was founded on the premise that much more information and analysis on the SALW issue was needed. “The future success of efforts to deal with small arms and light weapons depends in large part on the development of accurate information concerning the global flow of these weapons and on reliable analyses of the causes and consequences of their proliferation.” Recognizing the need to address these complex issues, the Swiss government agreed, in conjunction with other interested governments, to support the Small Arms Survey project in 1999.43 In the first edition of the Survey in 2001, the introduction stated that

“governmental and non-governmental efforts have been galvanized to counter the proliferation and destabilizing accumulation of small arms and light weapons in recent years. Yet effective long-term policy requires reliable and comprehensive information and analysis on all aspects of the problem- something that has been relatively rare to date. The Survey is intended to fill this gap”

In essence the subsequent work of the Small Arms Survey is a statement as to what was missing as of 1999. Here are some key missing elements in the research conducted up to 1999.

Focus mainly on the tools of violence

Throughout this period the research focus was on the tools of violence, small arms and light weapons. The naysayers kept up a constant stream of dialogue that we must also address the root causes of the problem of armed violence, all the way through the deliberations that led to the Programme of Action. There are several reasons why the focus was on the tools. First, the consequences of SALW availability became visible early on. A good example was the phrase “ninety percent of the casualties from SALW

43. Small Arms Survey website.
are women, children and older men.” I cited this phrase many times myself, as a way to get attention to this problem. It was a central theme in the campaign film made by PrepCom. In essence it became a competition to see which tool caused the most human damage, landmines or SALW. We now know, through a significant amount of research, that casualties are not fixed and vary from conflict to conflict.

Secondly, the SALW issue was first addressed in the First Committee of the General Assembly, and still is. This is a disarmament and arms control committee, where arms control experts preside. There was no mandate to develop anything other than a solution focusing on the arms themselves.

**Effects**

Because the SALW issue was “owned” (at least in the UN) by the arms control and disarmament element of the epistemic community, the only type of effects really researched were those related to the mandate established in the UNGA resolution establishing the first UN Small Arms Panel of Experts, especially the phrase “excessive and destabilizing accumulations.” This phrase was borrowed from the UNGA resolution establishing the UN Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA), where it was indeed appropriate. UNROCA was concerned with buildups of major conventional weapons, and was designed in reaction to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait with major conventional weapons in 1990. Those promoting a SALW solution most often mentioned the role of SALW in initiating or exacerbating conflict and conflict resolution, and rarely the impact of SALW proliferation, availability and misuse on development, human rights abuses, children, etc. As a result, these other effects were only slightly mentioned in the PoA. It was only after the PoA in 2001 that organizations such as UNDP, the Small Arms Survey

44. It was always clear that the casualties from SALW were much greater than landmines. But as a colleague from the Landmine Survivors Network once told me after a speech I gave, it is inappropriate on humanitarian grounds to make such comparisons.

45. In my role of consultant to the government of Canada, I recommended this phrase which then was submitted by Canada to the UNGA. This is yet another example of the arms trade control epistemic community burdening the development of a new epistemic community dealing with a qualitatively different set of problems associated with SALW.

and the human rights NGOs conducted research and implemented policy approaches that would focus on these other effects (e.g., the Arms Trade Treaty, Geneva Declaration of Armed Violence and Development).

**Demand**

Almost no research was conducted prior to 1998-99 on the demand factors, why armed groups and criminals needed or wanted the tools of violence in the first place. A quick look at the research on efforts to reduce firearms in a crime context would show that such factors are critical to policy development. This aspect of SALW research was only taken up by the *Small Arms Survey* in 2006⁴⁷.

**Gun violence research in the United States and Canada**

Due mainly to political factors, the significant body of research on gun violence in the US rarely was utilized or referenced by the emerging global SALW epistemic community.⁴⁸ This is not to say that this research would have been useful, but that it was rarely considered or entered the general debate. Many NGOs in the US developed grass roots and local remedies to fight gun violence, but this knowledge and experience rarely entered the discussions at the global level.⁴⁹ One reason for this was the fact that from the beginning of the formation of IANSA in January 1998, there was tension between those from the domestic gun control community and those focusing on armed conflict. Also, the United Nations was reluctant to engage with the pro-gun groups in the US, who had created a global campaign against global action on SALW.⁵⁰ Also, during this period the assumed major source of casualties from SALW was in civil and intra-state conflict.

---


⁴⁹. Particularly noteworthy was the work of the members of the HELP Network, which was very active during the 1990s.

Slowly these wars ended and today the majority of casualties are from crime, especially in post-conflict and fragile state contexts. Not surprisingly, the research on gun violence from the US, and other developed countries (e.g UK, Australia) became more utilized. The Small Arms Survey eventually took this up in 200451.

**Research Methods**

There were some serious gaps in the methods used to generate knowledge on SALW. One was survey research, mainly due to the lack of capacity in most states where armed violence was occurring. There were exceptions to this, especially in developed states, and developing states such as South Africa, El Salvador, Brazil and a few others. Use of survey data became a high priority from 2000 on, especially given the development of the Internet and other electronic means of collecting and publishing survey data.

Another missing methodology was that of comparative case studies. Most of the case studies were one-off and little effort was made to tie them together in a theoretical manner. These studies did produce hypotheses to be tested but they were mainly used as part of the effort to fashion a solution to the problem in a particular case. By 2000 many case studies existed that had generated a lot of data and generated many hypotheses but very little research was drawing conclusions across cases.

Quantitative data analysis was rarely seen in this period. There was a lack of comparable cross national data sets.52 This was due to the fact that the epistemic community was very focused on policy options and there was almost a total lack of scholarly work in peer-reviewed journals. Such work did exist but in disciplines such as criminology and anthropology that had not been seen as important enough for the research institutes, governments, NGOs and IGOs seized by the effort to control and prevent the negative effects from SALW.

---

52. BASIC as well as Project PrepCom attempted to do this but could not convince the holders of data to either develop it or release it to one organization. This was one of the Small Arms Survey’s primary goals and informed much of their initial work.
Lack of participation by developing country researchers

With very few exceptions, research during this period was conducted by researchers from the north. One reason was the lack of capacity, especially in the early stages. Several experts from the south were called upon early in this period of research, but very few were added as of 1999. One exception was the deliberations in the UN, where regional diversity was mandated in UNGA resolutions. The UN Panel on Small Arms received input from 72 people during its year-long deliberations leading to the report in August 1997, 53 of whom were from the south. As pointed out earlier, most of this testimony remain unpublished and contributed little to the development of the epistemic community.

South Africa was a significant exception to this finding. First, the government had developed in the apartheid period a large and effective, although repressive, police force. In the post-apartheid period, when South Africa was reconnecting to the world that had shunned the former regime, they found that they had an asset that was well suited to generating and utilizing knowledge on SALW. For example, at the September 1996 regional meeting held by the UN Small Arms Panel, no less than 12 of the 35 experts invited were from the South African government, police and other agencies addressing small arms violence. All six independent experts and academics were from South Africa. The South African government began to use this expertise to assist other states in the region and eventually the continent, as they addressed SALW problems and prepared for regional and global action.

As early as 1995 the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) based in Pretoria, South Africa, was producing first-rate studies related to violence. They started an Arms Management Program which played a major role in developing evidence that began to shape actual policies and programs throughout Africa. They were one of the first research institutes to use survey research as well as maintain a data set on the use of SALW in crime. For example, a recent study by ISS, concluded that the use of weapons in burglaries and

53. See footnote **
house robbery have declined.\textsuperscript{54} It was that type of longitudinal analysis that was hard to come by in the 1990s. The work of ISS, the Centre for Conflict Resolution, and later SaferAfrica, as well as the South African government itself, combined to give South Africa an influential place in the global epistemic SALW community.

Late in this period (1999) the Brazilian NGO Viva Rio conducted groundbreaking work that became the standard for research in developing countries, where the impact of SALW was the greatest. In one case Viva Rio electronically coded the data from every gun confiscated by the Rio De Janeiro police, which only existed on paper. The analysis of these data determined that a significant percentage of the crime guns in Rio originated from outside Brazil, especially Paraguay. Further, many of these guns in Paraguay came from many countries of the world. Such evidence was crucial in convincing states at the UN Conference that the SALW issue was truly global in scope and needed a global solution.\textsuperscript{55}

Keith Krause, the founder of Small Arms Survey, offers three examples of “where subsequent knowledge overturned what ‘we’ thought in 2000.

a) It’s existing stocks not new net flows that fuelled most recent conflicts. Recirculation of these stocks is also important.

b) Ammunition is a big piece of the puzzle- neglected by almost all analysts in 2000.

c) Arms brokers were only one piece- and probably not the most important one- in the diversion chain, which almost always involved the complicity of state authorities including in the neighbouring countries.”\textsuperscript{56}

Krause also states that “the entire chain of SALW proliferation- from production to end use and recirculation was badly understood.\textsuperscript{57} Policymakers look for places in this chain to intervene. All that was possible in 2000 was to list them all and wait for further evidence to fashion policies and programs.


\textsuperscript{55} These data were presented to a workshop for states during the run-up to the UN Conference on small arms 2000-2001 as well as from the floor of the UNGA during a scheduled PrepCom. Personal observations of author.

\textsuperscript{56} Email correspondence with author, 15 March 2012.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
Finally, by 2000 the epistemic community had accomplished the goal of demonstrating that the SALW issue was distinct from that of the control of the trade in major conventional weapons, dominated by sovereign States. The problem reached far beyond traditional arms control and especially the First Committee of the UN. More importantly, the more factors other than the tools of violence themselves entered the debate, the harder it became to envision a solution to the problem with a global mechanism of some kind.

E. CONCLUSION

The evidence above indicates that by 2000 the epistemic community had grown from a small band of former conventional arms trade experts to a full range of diverse experts embedded in a new paradigm of how to fashion solutions to the growing problems associated with the proliferation, availability and misuse of SALW. We knew a great deal about the end result from using these weapons. We knew the types of weapons and we knew that a significant percentage of them were not the result of the traditional arms trade. We knew about the technical aspects of marking and tracing. We knew that there was a huge quantity of surplus weapons. We knew that there was more to solving this problem than people voluntarily turning in weapons.

But we also knew that meaningful data, rigorous research and the utilization of the full range of research methods on the SALW problem was lacking. In a sense the community had produced a multitude of “independent” variables” in isolation from each other; availability, lethality, uncontrolled brokers, poor national controls on possession, storage, exports, etc. Further, there was little evidence that these candidates for policy solutions were “causal” in any way. Additionally, there was great confusion as to the outputs and outcomes expected, the “dependent” variable. The important, and sometimes path-breaking, policy research of the 1990s had raised a number of questions and hypotheses that needed to be tested in a more rigorous research environment less beholden to the dictates of a policy community whose first priority was solving the problem now. The
small arms problem needed research that was more replicable, cumulative, and tested by peer review.\textsuperscript{58}

However, the epistemic community of this period did create the necessary knowledge for the movement toward solutions to the problems generated by the proliferation, availability and misuse of SALW. This movement toward solutions also included a growing number of regional efforts\textsuperscript{59}, as well as the development of the Firearms Protocol,\textsuperscript{60} which required national governments to begin gathering data to assist in generating positions on these agreements as well as the upcoming PoA. In larger States this knowledge was generated internally. Other States used the NGO community, the UN and the views of other States. The final element of a vibrant epistemic community was now in place, that is, the knowledge generated by those branches of national governments charged with taking a position on the full range of evolving policy solutions at the global, regional, national and local levels.

In their recent book \textit{Small Arms, Crime and Conflict}, Owen Greene and Nicholas Marsh, two of the leading researchers who started in the 1990s, summarized the 1990s. “The close linkages between the SALW research, policy and programming communities have also brought some disadvantages….relatively little was known by the beginning of this century, but the demand for quick conclusions was high. Highly provisional research findings have often been quickly taken up and disseminated by policy advocates without proper review or quality control. Policy processes have shaped research agenda, priorities and resources in ways that have left significant gaps and inadequately scrutinized assumptions.”

\textsuperscript{58} In 1999, Carolyn Lloyd, a Canadian doctoral student, produced a bibliography of the literature on small arms while in residence at the Monterey Institute. It had 175 entries, including those from the two bibliographies produced by the government of Canada. There were only six entries (3.4\%) from traditional academic peer-reviewed journals.

\textsuperscript{59} The Organization of American States, the European Union, the South African Development Community (SADC), ECOWAS and the OSCE are some examples.

\textsuperscript{60} The UN Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition (Firearms Protocol), was adopted in 2001 by the UNGA. Starting in 1995 the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice conducted surveys and regional meetings which resulted in the United Nations International Study on Firearm Regulation in 1999. Data from this research was rarely used by those developing the PoA. It was a classic case of the lack of collaboration in the UN system.
This review of the development of the SALW epistemic community and the knowledge it generated in the 1990s has set the stage for the remainder of this book. As indicated in various places in this chapter, what followed after 2000 very much reflected the findings and way forward depicted in this chapter. The research topics described above have been taken up, as well as other topics. New and improved research methods have emerged. It is to that research that we now turn.