It has been said that there is nothing small or light about small and light weapons. There are 639 million of these weapons in circulation and 8 million more are produced every year. More than half a million people each year, or 10,000 each week, are killed by small arms. Most victims are civilians and at least a third of them are killed in countries at peace.

Small arms and light weapons defined
Most writing on small arms and light weapons uses as its point of departure the definition developed by the Report of the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms (UN General Assembly, 1997). The most comprehensive assessment of the global trade, global stockpiles, and global impacts of small arms and light weapons is the Small Arms Survey. The survey defines small arms and light weapons as follows:

- **Small Arms**: revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles, and carbines, assault rifles, sub-machine guns, and light machine guns;
- **Light Weapons**: heavy machine guns, hand-held under barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers of anti-tank and anti-aircraft missile systems, and mortars of less than 100mm caliber.

The main problem with this definition from the point of view of studying the small arms/terrorism link is that it excludes explosives, an increasingly popular tool of terrorist groups and insurgents, whether used by suicide bombers or in improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The original report of the UN Panel of Experts recognized the importance of explosives as a weapon of war and terror, but did not include them in their definitions of small arms or light weapons. Until research on explosives receives as much attention as analysis of small arms and light weapons, not enough will be known about the channels through which they are disseminated to non-state actors.

What is terrorism?
Terrorism is a tactic, not an ideology. Terrorist attacks are generally, but not exclusively, aimed at civilian populations and are designed to instill fear and provoke reactions from the targeted group or nation. The United Nations General Assembly has defined terrorism quite broadly, as "criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular person for political purposes." The definition further notes that these acts are "in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, or other nature that may be invoked to justify them."

Different agencies within the US government use different definitions of terrorism. For example, the Pentagon defines it as the unlawful use of - or threatened use of - force or violence against individuals or property to coerce or intimidate governments or societies, often to achieve political, religious, or ideological objectives. By contrast, the CIA defines terrorism as "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience."

Given these conflicting definitions, this article will address the supply of small arms and light weapons to non-state actors, a category that includes terrorists, insurgent groups, and paramilitary forces. This choice is reinforced by the fact that most non-state actors, terrorists or not, use similar channels of finance and distribution to acquire
small arms and light weapons.

Challenges to small arms control
Efforts to curb the distribution of small arms and light weapons to non-state groups face daunting challenges.

First and foremost, the millions of military-style firearms, man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS), light mortars, grenades, and other small arms and light weapons in existing stockpiles make it virtually impossible to keep these weapons out of the hands of militias, insurgents, terrorists, and other non-state actors. The absence of uniform regulations on arms brokering, dealing, and shipping comprise another set of obstacles to curbing the trade. Finding ways to cut off funding that comes from techniques like “resource for weapons” swaps is also a considerable task.

Working on all of these fronts - stockpile reduction and security, coordinated international regulation of brokers, shippers, and arms dealers, and tracking and monitoring systems that may eventually be used to cut off financing and transfers of illicit small arms and light weapons at the source - should make it considerably harder and more expensive to get hold of small arms and light weapons.

It will not stop the flow entirely. But even slowing the flow of these deadly weapons can have important long-term consequences. To the extent that restricting proliferation of small arms and light weapons increases the time needed for non-state actors to get these tools of war, it may increase the time and space available to negotiate peaceful resolutions of disputes and develop alternative solutions to the problems that fuel the spread of small arms in the first place.

Countries attending the recent review conference on small arms made no new commitments to actions aimed at limiting the trade beyond what they had proposed at the original 2001 conference on the subject. But there are still many ways to pursue curbs. Here, we discuss a few of the proposed solutions. None are being offered as the answer; rather each is part of an array of measures designed at least to make acquisition of small arms and light weapons more difficult for terrorists, warlords, insurgents, and other non-state actors.

Reduce global stockpiles and improve stockpile security
As long as there are hundreds of thousands or millions of small arms and light weapons stockpiled and ready to be accessed by brokers or seized or bought by terrorists, slowing down the flow of these weapons will be difficult, if not impossible.

The United Nations has done some work on disarming combatants in the wake of conflicts, under the rubric of Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reconstruction (DDR). [For more on DDR, see Disarmament and Development, an ECAAR paper produced in 2000.] States like Mali, El Salvador, South Africa, Mozambique, and Albania have put considerable energy into gun destruction and buyback programs. But so far these efforts have only scratched the surface of what needs to be done to significantly reduce global stockpiles. More concerted, far better funded efforts are needed.

One bill in the US Congress, the Lugar-Obama bill, would make $33 million in funding available in FY 2007 to help destroy the most dangerous small arms and light weapons around the globe. The legislation is modeled on the successful Nunn-Lugar program for destroying and securing “loose” nuclear weapons. Other suggestions have included that organizations like NATO or possibly the European Union require states to destroy surplus small arms and light weapons as a condition of membership.
The $33 million proposed in the Lugar-Obama bill would quadruple current US government spending for the destruction of small arms and light weapons. The proposed investment under Lugar-Obama would also exceed all US government spending for these purposes “to date,” which has been just $27 million according to a State Department fact sheet on the subject of small arms and light weapons. The State Department’s headline for the fact sheet is somewhat misleading, noting only that “US Spent $27 Million to Destroy Small Arms, Light Weapons.” Only later, in the body of the text, does it note, “To date [emphasis added] the United States has provided a total of over $27 million to destroy approximately 900,000 small arms and light weapons and over 80 million pieces of ammunition in 25 countries.”

The implication in the text is that the $27 million was spent in the five years between the 2001 UN conference on small arms and light weapons and the 2006 review conference, an average of just over $5 million per year. Even so, the US has spent more than any other country for these purposes, suggesting that there is ample room for other developed nations such as members of the European Union to make substantial additional investments in small arms destruction efforts.

As important as stockpile reductions are efforts to secure existing stockpiles so that they are not subject to looting and theft that ends up fueling the illicit market. A majority of nations have inadequate security over existing stocks of small arms and light weapons, a state of affairs that is almost an invitation to raid these stockpiles and use the weapons thus received to promote and sustain conflicts and abuses of human rights.

Crack down on brokers, shippers and arms dealers
The countries that control 90% of the world’s arms transfers are increasingly using private companies as arms brokers and shippers. Amnesty International is tracking this emerging phenomenon with concern. Absent improved legal and regulatory frameworks, Amnesty argues that this situation contributes to the “diversion and easy availability of such arms by those perpetrating serious violations of human rights . . . including those believed to engage in terrorism.”

Some of the recommendations put forward by Amnesty include the following:

- All countries should include brokering, transport, and dealing in weaponry in their national laws, including coverage of these activities when engaged in by their own citizens;
- Screening of brokers, shippers, and dealers every two years to determine whether they have violated laws relating to arms exports, trafficking, or money laundering, at which point their licenses should be revoked;
- Annual reports naming all brokers, shippers, and other transporters of arms, including an indication of what type of documentation they are using to legitimate their activities.

The importance of individual countries’ having their own strong laws was underscored on June 7, 2006 when Guus Kouwenhoven, a major player in the illicit timber trade, was sentenced to eight years in prison for breaking a UN arms embargo on Liberia. Global Witness, the NGO most involved in researching the trade in conflict diamonds, applauded the verdict as “precedent-setting” and indicated that it should serve as a model for other countries. Incredibly, some of these simple measures do not already exist. Clearly, implementation should make it much harder for terrorists, militias and other non-state groups to acquire diverted arms.

Mark and trace small arms and ammunition
Many of the new small arms and light weapons entering circulation are untraceable. Marking and tracing is a
potentially powerful tool for holding countries of origin accountable for their explicit support of illicit arms transfers to non-state groups. At a minimum, such countries can and should be called to account for their lax regulation of their own arms stockpiles, and/or their transfer of small arms to middleman or untrustworthy governments.

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Marking and tracing has received the most support (or, perhaps better put: the least resistance) of any of the measures put forward for the regulation of small arms and light weapons. This is in part because the parties likely to be held responsible are arms dealers or, on occasion, governments in the country of origin. Companies involved in the manufacture of small arms and light weapons would probably be the last on the list, unless they took the risky step of selling directly to the illicit market.

In December 2005 the United Nations General Assembly adopted an “international instrument to enable states to identify and trace, in a timely and reliable manner, illicit small arms and light weapons.” The instrument is an important step forward in international efforts to monitor the flow of small arms and light weapons, but it has a number of flaws. First, it is politically rather than legally binding, making it easier for states to decide not to participate in the marking and tracing regime. Second, it lacks clear language regarding the implementation, capacity building, or next steps needed to make the instrument effective. It also contains loopholes such as the exclusion of ammunition from its purview.

**Curb arms export financing**

The illicit trade in natural resources, including gemstones, precious metals, oil and timber, is an important source of funding for non-state actors. International authorities need to be able to track nations and groups engaged in “arms for resources” swaps, including governments and groups in the areas of origin, and states and organizations that serve as middlemen in these transactions.

One of the most promising and well-advanced efforts to deal with the use of resources to fund violence perpetrated by non-state groups is the Kimberley process on the certification that diamonds sold on the international market are not “conflict diamonds.” The process, supported by non-governmental organizations like Global Witness and Physicians for Human Rights, aims to produce a distinct system of marking rough diamonds so that their place of origin can be traced, and countries and non-state actors that are regular sources of conflict diamonds can be boycotted or otherwise regulated. As Global Witness spokesperson Susie Sanders noted in late 2005:

> [T]he Kimberley process has taken real steps to stop the trade in conflict diamonds, but the problem has not been solved. Governments must audit all sectors of the diamond trade and take credible action against members of the diamond industry that are known to trade in conflict diamonds.

**Promote an arms trade treaty**

Because there is currently no international agreement governing the export of conventional armaments - small or large - the arms trade has been described as the “orphan of arms control.”
Sarah Margon, the director of Oxfam, is blunt about the need for strict controls on small arms sales:
No one but a criminal would knowingly sell a gun to a murderer, yet governments can sell weapons to regimes
with a history of human rights violators or to countries where weapons will go to war criminals.
Oxfam, Amnesty International, the International Action Network on Small Arms, and other humanitarian
organizations are pushing for an International Arms Trade Treaty that would curb arms sales to human rights
abusers and regions of conflict.

The treaty got its start as an initiative of a group of Nobel Laureates led by current Costa Rican president [and
EPS Trustee -ed.] Oscar Arias, and was then picked up by NGOs. Over 50 nations have endorsed a set of “global
principles” which continues to be circulated for comment among interested governments and NGOs. The modus
operandi for pursuing the treaty will mirror the successful effort to create an international agreement banning the
export and deployment of anti-personnel land mines. The land mines treaty was promoted by a “coalition of the
willing” - key states that endorsed the treaty outside of the UN’s disarmament machinery and then invited other
nations to sign on.

Given the unwillingness of many UN member states to even endorse binding measures for the much smaller
reforms mentioned earlier in this section, the Arms Trade Treaty is clearly a long-term undertaking.

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