

NORM-BUILDING IN SECURITY SPACES:  
THE EMERGENCE OF THE LIGHT  
WEAPONS PROBLEMATIC

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KEITH KRAUSE

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Keith Krause is a professor of International Politics at the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva. His research has concentrated to date on two areas: conventional arms transfers and arms control, and multilateralism and the United Nations. He has published a book, *Arms and the State* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), and articles in *International Studies Quarterly*, *Arms Control*, and *International Journal*, as well as having contributed chapters to a dozen edited volumes, including the *Encyclopedia of Arms Control and Disarmament*. He is also the co-editor (with Michael C. Williams) of *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases* (University of Minnesota Press) and (with W. Andy Knight) *State-Society and the UN System* (UN University Press, 1995).

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# NORM-BUILDING IN SECURITY SPACES: THE EMERGENCE OF THE LIGHT WEAPONS PROBLEMATIC

KEITH KRAUSE

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The importance of norm development in world politics, and the role of non-state actors in their creation, have received increased attention in recent international relations scholarship. Terms such as “global civil society,” “transnational social movements,” “world civic politics,” “transnational civil society,” “issue-networks,” and “epistemic communities,” have all found favour with different groups of scholars as means by which to describe and study norm change and non-state actors.<sup>2</sup> The problematic for these scholars emerges from a (broadly

1. As this is a preliminary draft, please do not quote or cited it without my permission. This draft draws upon portions of a previous paper on “The Challenge of Small Arms and Light Weapons,” prepared for the Third International Security Forum, Zurich, 20 October 1998, and was previously presented at the British International Studies Association Conference, Sussex, December 1998.
2. The terms are from, respectively: Ronnie Lipschutz, “Reconstructing World Politics: The Emergence of Global Civil Society,” *Millennium*, 21:3 (Winter 1992), 389-420”; Ronnie Lipschutz, *Global Civil Society and Global Environmental Governance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); Jackie Smith, Charles Chatfield and Ron Pagnucco, eds., *Transnational So-*

defined) constructivist understanding of world politics, in which shared understandings play a central role in *constituting* (empowering) the actors of world politics, in endowing them with interests, and in generating the structure within which they operate.

Within this literature, one can distinguish two strands of scholarship, differentiated by their analytic orientation and focus. The first, which includes scholars such as Martha Finnemore, Kathryn Sikkink and Richard Price, tends to examine the role that normative understandings play in the determination of state interests and subsequent state actions. As Martha Finnemore puts it, "we cannot understand what states want without understanding the international social structure of which they are a part."<sup>3</sup> The latter, including scholars such as Paul Wapner, Ronnie Lipschutz and Jackie Smith, is more interested in the role and place of non-state actors within this social structure: as Lipschutz puts it, "what I analyse here...is better understood as a transnational system of rules, principles, norms, and practices, oriented around a very large number of often dissimilar actors."<sup>4</sup> Both groups (but to different degrees) take the existence of some form of international (transnational, global) society as an ontological given, and hence challenge methodological individualist or rationalist accounts of international politics associated with neo-realist and neo-liberal theories.

Until recently this scholarship remained outside of the empirical domain of rationalist work: it focused on "low political" environmental or human rights issues, with case studies of such topics as international whaling, human rights in Latin America and Western Europe, the abolition of apartheid, protection of the ozone layer or the world's

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- cial Movements and Global Politics: Solidarity Beyond the State* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997); Paul Wapner, "Environmental Activism and World Civic Politics," *World Politics*, 47 (April 1995), 311-340. Paul Wapner, *Environmental Activism and World Civic Politics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); Richard Price, "Reversing the Gun Sights: Transnational Civil Society Targets Land Mines," *International Organization*, 52:3 (Summer 1998), 613-644; Kathryn Sikkink, "Human Rights, Principled Issue Networks and Sovereignty in Latin America," *International Organization*, 47:3 (1993), 411-441. Emanuel Adler and Peter Haas, "Conclusion: Epistemic Communities, World Order, and the Creation of a Reflective Research Program," *International Organization*, 46 (Winter 1992), 367-390.
3. Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 2.
  4. Lipschutz, *Global Civil Society*, 1.

forests, or the creation and activities of international institutions such as the ICRC or UNESCO.<sup>5</sup> Only rarely did these authors tackle “high” security issues, and then often from a peace research perspective.<sup>6</sup> But the success of the International Campaign to Ban Land Mines, reflected in the process leading up to the 1997 Ottawa Treaty banning the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel land mines, suggested that transnational activism could challenge and change how states determined their interests on issues of direct national security concern.<sup>7</sup> Whether this was the result of a unique constellation of actors and circumstances, or whether it reflects a durable change in the politics of security policy, is one of the questions this paper addresses.

My goal is to focus on the emergent transnational coalition to combat the proliferation of small arms and light weapons to bring another case study from the “high politics” realm to bear on the question of how norms emerge in world politics. Since the issue is in its nascent stages, a full-blown study of changes in state policy, or of the emergence of new institutions of global governance (treaties, organizations, etc.) that codify or reflect changed normative understandings cannot be undertaken (although both have occurred). Instead, I focus on four more preliminary goals:

- to highlight how changes in the “conceptual horizon” of international security policy have been a necessary condition for the emergence of the issue of small arms and light weapons;

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5. In addition to the works cited above, see M.J. Peterson, “Whalers, Cetologists, Environmentalists and the International Management of Whaling,” *International Organization*, 46:1 (Winter 1992), 147-186; Ronald Mitchell, “Discourse and Sovereignty: Interests, Science and Morality in the Regulation of Whaling,” *Global Governance*, 4:3 (July-September 1998), 275-293; Audie Klotz, *Norms in International Relations: The Struggle Against Apartheid* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Karen Litfin, *Ozone Discourses: Science and Politics in Global Environmental Cooperation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

6. For some exceptions, see Emmanuel Adler, “The Emergence of Cooperation: National Epistemic Communities and the International Evolution of the Idea of Nuclear Arms Control,” *International Organization*, 46:1 (Winter 1992), 101-46.; Jackie Smith, “Social Movements and International Negotiations: Framing the Nonproliferation Debate,” unpublished paper presented at the 1995 ISA conference, Chicago; David Atwood, “Mobilizing Around the United Nations Special Sessions on Disarmament,” in Smith, et al, 141-158.

7. Of course, this was arguably the goal of anti-nuclear movements throughout the Cold War, but evidence of direct influence on state policies and interests is notoriously difficult to pin down in this area.

- to chart the development of an international campaign to address the issue and to examine the nature of the coalition that has emerged;
- to show how different framings of the issue have produced different (and conflicting) policy prescriptions and foci for action;
- to highlight the leadership and entrepreneurship role of certain states and NGOs, and to examine the complex relationship between states and non-state actors, including the state strategies of cooptation and selectivity.

These four issues cannot be fully developed in this paper, but I hope to show how coalition-building among and between states and NGOs, and different “framings” of the issue by these coalitions (in particular, in the development, human rights/humanitarian and conflict/disarmament communities), challenges a simple picture of the relationship between states and non-state actors in global civil society. I also argue that although “moral entrepreneurship” can be shown to play a significant role in this campaign, it is impossible to reduce the emergence and development of an NGO campaign simply to the self-interested action of particular states or NGOs. Rather, the appearance of the issue of small arms and light weapons on the international security agenda can only be understood in the context of changed understandings of security that have taken hold in the foreign and security policy bureaucracies of various states. Only against this shifted “normative” backdrop can the increased force and influence of the arguments of “moral entrepreneurs” be understood. Finally, and somewhat more ambitiously, this paper will set out an agenda for future research to track the development of this issue over the next few years, in order to contribute to our understanding of transnational action and normative development in world politics.

## Small Arms and Light Weapons and Human Security

### *The Changed International Context*

Despite the fact that small arms and light weapons account for the overwhelming majority of deaths in conflicts since 1945, they remained off the arms control agenda throughout the Cold War, for essentially three reasons. First, until the process of decolonization had been completed, military-style light weapons were not widely disseminated beyond national armed forces, and most post-colonial states did not



possess large arsenals. There were exceptions: independence wars in such places as Algeria, civil wars in states such as Nigeria (Biafra), insurgencies in countries such as Malaysia, and of course the Vietnam war, illustrated the importance of light weapons in conflict. But in general their effects were confined to particular conflict zones, and not seen as a problem with spillover effects and potentially harmful consequences regionally or globally.<sup>8</sup> Second, the instruments of non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament emerged to cope with the threat posed by nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. Although these issues were not the exclusive preserve of the superpowers (witness the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention and other multilateral instruments), progress in arms control was driven by superpower concerns with maintaining stability and reducing the risk that conflicts would escalate to a global level. Since the conflicts in which small arms and light weapons were used posed few such risks, they could be ignored.

The third reason was a general reluctance to tackle conventional weapons (including light weapons) issues at all: many policy-makers argued up until the early 1990s that “conventional weapons are not a proliferation issue.”<sup>9</sup> Behind this was the belief that states’ right to self-defence (and to determine the means to achieve their security) legitimized the possession of most types of conventional weapons, and prevented them from being “stigmatized” as nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction could be. Similarly, various types of small arms and light weapons were deemed to have legitimate civilian uses, reflected in national regulation (gun control) policies.<sup>10</sup> This construction of the “normative space” of security policy meant that it was

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8. This argument rests on an empirical claim about the total volume of small arms and light weapons in circulation that is impossible to verify at this point. Attempts to gather reliable data on production, dissemination and stockpiles of light weapons are, however, beginning.

9. This argument was made directly to me by a highly-placed Canadian official in 1992, and is relevant given the dramatic shift in Canadian policy on this issue.

10. Attempts to tackle conventional arms transfers (such as in the Middle East, or in the ill-fated Conventional Arms Transfer Talks of the Carter Administration) also foundered on the rocks of superpower and commercial rivalry. For an overview see Keith Krause, “Controlling the Arms Trade since 1945,” in Richard Dean Burns, editor, *Encyclopedia of Arms Control and Disarmament*, vol. II (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1993), 1021-1039.

not possible to find an entry point by which such issues could be addressed (other than on an extremely limited scale), thus effectively “disempowering” those actors who might have been willing to consider such issues as important ones for the international community to address.<sup>11</sup>

The confluence of several factors in the early 1990s led to a reassessment of these elements of the Cold War non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament regime, and allowed small arms and light weapons to emerge as a multilateral policy problem. Perhaps the most important stimulus was the changed matrix of conflicts in the post-Cold War world, in which communal and internal conflicts assumed a much higher profile than inter-state ones. Communal conflicts are by no means new, but their increased profile meant greater attention was paid to the small arms and light weapons that fuelled them. Related to this was the expansion of multilateral peace and security operations to include such conflicts. In Cambodia, El Salvador, Somalia, Haiti, Rwanda, Angola, Mozambique and elsewhere, the UN and regional organizations launched peacekeeping and post-conflict peace-building operations that differed radically from the Cold War neutral interpositionary and supervisory model. The problems that weapons flows to combatants posed for successful peacekeeping and peace maintenance operations, and the problems that weapons stocks posed for post-conflict peace building, were made uncomfortably clear in many of these cases.<sup>12</sup> In addition, large weapons stocks in private hands were seen as posing a serious threat to those states embarking upon an economic or post-authoritarian political transition.

Behind this lurked the apparent increase in the global traffic in small arms and light weapons. Although precise figures are impossible to obtain, it is clear that the end of the Cold War and many of its

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11. This follows the constructivist account of Wendt and Duvall, in which “the powers and interests of agents, and therefore their system of interaction, are only possible in virtue of the social structure in which they are embedded.” Alexander Wendt and Raymond Duvall, “Institutions and International Order,” in Ernst-Otto Czempiel and James Rosenau, *Global Changes and Theoretical Challenges: Approaches to World Politics for the 1990s* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1989), 59.

12. For example, the UN Institute for Disarmament Research undertook a major study, “Managing Arms in Peace Processes” that examined thirteen different case studies, including Cambodia, Haiti, Mozambique, Liberia and the former Yugoslavia.

associated conflicts (such as in Afghanistan, Angola, Mozambique, and the Horn of Africa) released a veritable flood of weapons that were easily available at extremely low cost for transport anywhere in the world.<sup>13</sup> Weak control mechanisms in the countries of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe also contributed to this problem. With the steady rise of global trade and consequent proportionate reduction of close customs controls on shipments, and the development of sophisticated means of redirecting and concealing illicit international trade (through transshipment, money-laundering and corruption circuits), this meant that weapons became a hot and profitable commodity. In some places they even became a “blank cheque”—because its bearer can be paid on demand any amount requested.<sup>14</sup>

The success or failure of efforts to place small arms and light weapons on the international security tracked these changes. As far back as 1979, Amnesty International attempted to launch a project and campaign on small arms and light weapons, with little success. At various points, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute also considered tracking small arms and light weapons flows, but decided against this due both to the difficulty of gathering information, and the relatively small audience for it.<sup>15</sup> There was, in short no normative “space” either among states or interested NGOs in which such initiatives could be pursued. By contrast, one can chart an explosion of interest in small arms and light weapons issues in the mid-1990s, beginning with the publication of various studies and

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13. According to the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, the trade in small arms and light weapons represents perhaps 13 percent of the total conventional arms trade, which would place it at about 2-3 billion dollars per year. According to some estimates, up to 40 percent of this might be black (or grey) market transactions. ACDA figures cited in the preface to Jeffrey Boutwell, et al, *Lethal Commerce* (Cambridge, Mass.: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1995). See also Abdel Fatau Musah and Robert Castle, “Eastern Europe’s Arsenal on the Loose: Managing Light Weapons Flows to Conflict Zones,” BASIC occasional papers on International Security Issues, 26, May 1998.

14. Ernie Regehr, “Military Despair: The Politics of Small Arms,” *New Routes*, 4/97, 3.

15. Information on Amnesty efforts from Brian Wood, NISAT and Amnesty International, London, and for SIPRI, from Herbert Wulf and Ian Anthony. Further details of these efforts will be included subsequently, and information on any other early efforts to tackle small arms and light weapons will be gratefully accepted.

reports detailing the scope and nature of the problem. Before explaining the details of this explosion of interest, however, it is worth emphasizing the crucial conditioning factor that permitted this explosion: a changed conception of the scope and nature of “security.”

### *Light Weapons and Human Security*

Whether or not small arms and light weapons represent an issue at all for the international community depends entirely on how one conceives of “threats to international security.” Under the Cold War inter-state arms control regime, for example, small arms and light weapons represent an insignificant threat: the risk of interstate war due to light weapons proliferation is virtually zero and the resources devoted to these arms (compared to major conventional weapons systems) was minimal. They did, however, probably account for the majority of conflict casualties, and a very large percentage of these casualties were non-combatants.<sup>16</sup> But attempts to reduce the destructiveness of conventional war were marginal, and confined to such instruments as the Geneva Conventions and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (dealing with, *inter alia*, such things as dum-dum bullets and blinding lasers) Within this particular understanding of the purposes and motivations for arms control and non-proliferation efforts (reducing the risk of war, reducing its destructiveness should it break out, and redirecting the resources devoted to armaments to other ends<sup>17</sup>), the issue of small arms and light weapons had little chance to gain support, or to win the attention of interested “moral entrepreneurs,” most of whom focused on the nuclear threat.<sup>18</sup>

The emergence of a set of “societal” or “human” security concerns that focus on communities or individuals within the state

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16. According to the most widely cited estimate, more than 80 percent of people killed in wars since 1990 have been civilians, almost all of whom died from small arms or light weapons. Figure from Oxfam, cited in “UK Aid Agencies Call on G8 to Control Arms Trade,” *Reuters*, 13 May 1998. There are good reasons to think this estimate of civilian casualties is too high, but the number is unlikely to be below about 60 percent.

17. Thomas Schelling and Morton Halperin, *Strategy and Arms Control* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1961), 2); *Daedalus*, special issue on arms control, 89:4 (Fall 1960).

18. For a recent statement that remains within this traditional arms control logic, see Ian Anthony, “Causes of the Conventional Arms Trade with Reference to the Transfers of Small Arms,” n.d.

changed this equation.<sup>19</sup> Many human security concerns—understood as achieving freedom from fear by evacuating the threat of violence from social, political and economic life at local, national, regional, and international levels—implicate small arms and light weapons, including such issues as promoting and safeguarding human rights (security from state violence), protecting minorities (from communal violence or repression, fighting organized crime and random violence, combatting terrorism (from domestic or international sources) and ensuring economic security (protection of property, extortion). These security concerns are often very different from, or even opposed to, the traditional security concerns of states and regimes (security from small-scale or communal violence, security against a predatory state, development assistance versus military spending, and so forth).<sup>20</sup> It is relatively easy to show that for contemporary policy-makers, “societal security” issues have come to rival inter-state security concerns. For example, some states in Latin America feel threatened by the drugs-arms nexus, in which the illicit traffic in armaments feeds the autonomous of drug lords, who have completely supplanted state authority in some areas. In other regions (sub-Saharan Africa, for example), the easy availability of weapons undermines efforts at post-conflict reconstruction and economic development, putting the efforts of the international community at risk. In still others, rampant criminality (in slums and inner cities) threatens to destroy the social and community fabric, breeding a culture of violence that sooner or later poses insurmountable problems for public policy.

Whether or not these human security concerns are more or less important than classic state and regime security concerns, and whether or not small arms and light weapons thus represent a legitimate object of state interest, is not an academic question: the test is how much attention each issue receives from policy-makers, how seriously

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19. I should note parenthetically that this definition of human or societal security is not that used by Barry Buzan, Ole Waever et al., who focus on threats to the *identity* of a society, from whatever source. See Ole Wæver, Barry Buzan, Morten Kelstrup and Pierre Lemaitre, *Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe* (London: Frances Pinter, 1993), chapters 1-3.

20. I am here critiquing both the traditional state-centric security literature, and that which attempts to shift the focus, especially in the so-called Third World, to issues of *regime* security. See Keith Krause, “The Third World Security Predicament: State Making, Regional Conflict and the International System,” *Review of International Studies*, 24:1 (January 1998), 125-136.

decision-makers treat different threats, and what the risks and costs are associated with different problems. As I will discuss below, the greater high-level attention that is being devoted to the consequences of unchecked light weapons proliferation can be used to illustrate how changed conceptions of security affect the definition of state interests.<sup>21</sup> More importantly, however, this broader conception has opened up a space in which new coalitions of states and states and non-state actors can form to pursue policies consonant with this new understanding of their interests. A changed “norm” concerning how states should conceptualize security is a necessary condition for the emergence of these coalitions.

### *The Creation of “Expert” Knowledge*

A second necessary condition for the emergence of collective action on any issue is the development of an “expert” consensus that a problem exists, along with attempts to trace its rough contours. Beginning in 1993, one can find a veritable explosion of short studies, sponsored by major national and international NGOs such as the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the British-American Security Information Council (BASIC), Human Rights Watch, Pugwash, and the UN Institute for Disarmament Research.<sup>22</sup> The most useful bibliography of sources on small arms and light weapons identifies three publications on this topic in 1993, six in 1994, 39 in 1995, 38

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21. One ought also to note the way in which the discourse of human security is being used as a rallying point for a new coalition of like-minded states, spear-headed by Canada and Norway, around these issues. See Lloyd Axworthy and Knut Vollebaek, “Now for a New Diplomacy to Fashion a Humane World,” *International Herald Tribune*, 21 October 1998, and the text of the “Norway-Canada Partnership for Action” (Lysoen Declaration). Plans to hold a “Lysoen II” meeting with 11 like-minded states are underway for May 1999.

22. Key contributions would include: Jeffrey Boutwell, et al, *Lethal Commerce* (Cambridge, Mass.: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1995); Jasjit Singh, ed., *Light Weapons and International Security* (Indian Pugwash Society and British American Security Information Council, 1995); Christopher Louise, “The Social Impacts of Light Weapons Availability and Proliferation,” Discussion Paper 59, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, March 1995 (this report was done in conjunction with International Alert), the series of studies in the UN Institute for Disarmament Research project, “Managing Arms in Peace Processes,” and the various BASIC occasional papers on light weapons issues.

in 1996, 26 in 1997, and 37 up to September 1998.<sup>23</sup> Although not all are of equal weight or substance, the trend documented is clear.

Two “kinds” of expert knowledge were invoked by these various studies: that of arms controllers, and that of field researchers. Among the first contributions to the debate, for example, one finds an article by Aaron Karp in *Arms Control Today* in September 1993, Karp being a researcher who had previously worked on conventional weapons trade issues. The same is true of researchers such as Edward Laurance, Michael Klare, or Nathalie Goldring.<sup>24</sup> Many (if not most) of these contributions were analytic, not descriptive, and their principle argument was that the model or paradigm governing our thinking about the arms trade was inappropriate to the case of small arms and light weapons, and that it would lead analysts to downplay the importance of the light weapons problem, overestimate difficulties in controlling them, or obscure the nature of the trade.<sup>25</sup> The second kind of expert knowledge, that of field researchers, was advanced in the context of case studies of particular zones of conflict, such as Northern Pakistan and Afghanistan, Somalia, Colombia, Rwanda, or Southern Africa.<sup>26</sup> These researchers did not tend to be members of the existing conventional arms trade and arms control “epistemic community,” and their expert credentials rested on information presented in such studies, which although often anecdotal and unsystematic, did highlight the devastating consequences of the proliferation of light weapons in different areas of the world.<sup>27</sup>

23. See *Small Arms and Light Weapons: An Annotated Bibliography* and *Small Arms and Light Weapons: An Annotated Bibliography, update 1996-1998*, (Ottawa: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, November 1996 and September 1998). The “unit” of counting is basically an article or book chapter, hence edited collections are counted as many entries. The list may be incomplete, but it certainly captures all the major publications, and well documents the trend.

24. This list is not meant to be exhaustive, nor to single out particular individuals, who are offered as examples only.

25. See in particular Aaron Karp, “Arming Ethnic Conflict,” *Arms Control Today*, (September 1993), 8, and Michael Klare, “Light Weapons Diffusion and Global Violence in the Post-Cold War Era,” in Singh, ed., *Light Weapons and International Security*.

26. Contributors to this literature included Chris Smith, Tara Kartha, Jacklyn Cock, Clement Adibe and Jakkie Potgeiter, Alex Vines, Kathi Austin, and Steve Goose and Frank Smyth.

27. I will assert, but not document, the existence of an epistemic community in the conventional arms transfer field that meets the criteria laid out by Adler

Special note must be taken of the role played by the United Nations in “marking” the terrain of small arms and light weapons, and contributing to the creation of “expert knowledge.” Work in this area has its roots in Secretary-General Boutros-Boutros Ghali’s invocation of the problem of “micro-disarmament” in his supplement to the *Agenda for Peace*, which called for exploration of “practical disarmament in the context of the conflicts the United Nations is dealing with and of the weapons, most of them light weapons, that are actually killing people in the hundreds of thousands.”<sup>28</sup> This in turn was catalysed both by the difficulties the UN faced in dealing with post-conflict disarmament in the context of its peacekeeping missions, and the specific initiative concerning demobilization, weapons collection and small arms control in Mali, which began in August 1994 and broadened to the Saharo-Sahelian region in 1995. One concrete initiative that followed this was the creation of an experts’ group (in November 1995) to examine the types of small arms and light weapons being used in conflicts, and “the nature and causes of the excessive and destabilizing accumulation and transfer of small arms and light weapons, including their illicit production and trade.”<sup>29</sup> This report played a central role in defining the nature of the problem (ie: what exactly were small arms and light weapons), setting some of its parameters (linkage between security and development, distinction between illicit and licit transfers, emphasis on weapons destruction, marking, etc).<sup>30</sup>

Three things are significant about this early interest in small arms and light weapons issues. First, the reshaping of the discursive terrain

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and Haas. For a relatively recent publication that is broadly representative of this community, see the special issue of *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 535 (September 1994) devoted to the arms trade.

28. *Supplement to an Agenda for Peace*, UN General Assembly document A/50/60, 25 January 1995, 14.

29. UN General Assembly Resolution 50/70B, 17 November 1995. The experts’ group report is UN General Assembly document 1/52/298.

30. Space does not allow me to highlight how this work contoured and demarcated the discursive terrain on which subsequent debates and initiatives could be discussed, but this can be seen as an example of what Martha Finnemore calls “supply-driven” innovations. Martha Finnemore, “International Organizations as Teachers of Norms: The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and Science Policy,” *International Organization*, 47:4 (Autumn 1993), 565-597.



of arms control/international security to deal with small arms and light weapons issues proceeded in tandem with attempts to uncover new “facts” about the world. Hence one cannot argue that the issue of small arms and light weapons rises on the international agenda *solely* because of a tangible change in the nature of weapons flows or their use in conflicts, or a change in the impact of small arms and light weapons proliferation on the security interests of major international actors. Very little, if anything, objectively changes in the early 1990s. Further, if one wanted to link the increasing interest in small arms and light weapons to such shifts as increases (relative) in communal conflicts, or in UN and multilateral interventions, it is impossible to explain therefore why the issue of small arms and light weapons has not *receded* off the international agenda as, for example, the number UN operations, or number of soldiers engaged in them, has declined.<sup>31</sup>

Second, the most important feature of the “new” expert community, its broadening beyond traditional arms controllers, was evident from the outset. For example, one of the most important (if not catalytic) research studies was sponsored by Human Rights Watch, an internationally-recognized human rights NGO that had hitherto done little work on arms and conflict issues. This study documented the role played outsiders in supplying arms to the Rwandan genocide and achieved a considerable profile, if measured by the subsequent launching of governmental or United Nations inquiries into arms transfers to the Great Lakes region.<sup>32</sup>

Third, although many of the contributions to the discussion offer policy suggestions of one sort or another, almost none can be characterized as *advocacy* in the formal sense—they were not part of, nor

31. For example, at the peak in 1993, there were more than 78,000 military and related personnel engaged in UN operations. By mid-1998, this had declined to only about 19,000 (plus 1,300 military observers and 2,700 civilian police). See <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/yir97/charts.htm>

32. Stephen D. Goose and Frank Smyth. “Arming Genocide in Rwanda.” *Foreign Affairs*, 73:5 (September/October 1994), 86-96; *Rearming with Impunity: International Support for the Perpetrators of the Rwandan Genocide*, a Human Rights Watch Arms Project report A704, 1995. Formal inquiries were launched by France and the United Nations Commission of Inquiry. See “Final Report of the International Commission of Inquiry (Rwanda),” S/1998/1096, 18 November 1998, and the four-part series on France-Rwanda in *Le Figaro*, 12-15 janvier 1998. Other key studies focused on Afghanistan, Mozambique and the Sudan.

fed into, an organized campaign with clearly defined goals and strategies. The only “expert” contribution that comes close to this is the UN group of experts study, which as I noted above, played a key role in crystallizing the terms of the debate on various issues. In other studies and reports, policy suggestions ranged from promoting post-conflict weapons collection and destruction, to tightening supplier states’ export controls, to increasing customs and police controls, to focusing on local violence and criminality. There was no real consensus on which goals were priorities, or even on whether or not the problem could be successfully tackled.<sup>33</sup> Traditional divisions between so-called supply-side (enhancing export controls and imposing more restrictive export policies) and demand-side strategies (post-conflict weapons collection programs and other peace-building efforts) emerged, and the whole played itself out against a backdrop of very little concrete information. In fact, one of the early issues identified as crucial to efforts to constrain small arms and light weapons proliferation was the near-total absence of reliable information on the nature and scope of production, stockpiles and transfers of these arms.<sup>34</sup> What this highlights, to put it simply, is that knowledge precedes advocacy, and expert knowledge precedes state action.

### The Emergence of a Campaign, and the Problem of Issue Framing

Elements of a coherent campaign to address small arms and light weapons did, however, start to emerge in 1997 and crystallized with the launching of the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) in October 1998. In this section I will chart the emergence of IANSA, the key actors in its creation, the breadth of its network, and the nature of its “platform” or action plan (such as it is). Although much of the basic information on which this account relies is publicly available, some judgements have had to be made, especially concerning the central actors and key decisions of the early stages of the campaign.

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33. See, for examples of the pessimistic perspective, David Morrison, “Small Arms, Big Trouble,” *National Journal*, 3:18 (1995), 712; Anthony, “Causes of the Conventional Arms Trade with Reference to the Transfers of Small Arms.”

34. See, for example the discussion in Bronwyn Brady, “Collecting and Organizing Data on the Manufacture of, and Trade in, Light Weapons,” in Jasjit Singh, ed., *Light Weapons and International Security*, 140-151.

Probably the first formal steps towards the launching of an international NGO campaign were taken in December 1997, at a meeting in Washington attended by representatives from 23 different organizations.<sup>35</sup> These organizations represented conflict/disarmament, human rights/humanitarian, gun control and development/refugee NGOs. The central actors (judged at least by their subsequent participation in all NGO activities) covered at least three of the four major “interests” implicated subsequently in the campaign coalition: human rights/humanitarian, and conflict/disarmament groups were the most active, while the development community and faith groups were only weakly represented.<sup>36</sup> A similar meeting was held two months later in London, which brought on board European NGOs, again with the overwhelming representation coming from the conflict/disarmament and human rights communities, with only Oxfam and Pax Christi outside of this orbit.<sup>37</sup> The first major “Southern” meeting on the issue was held in Johannesburg in May 1998, and its representation was very different than at the Northern meetings.<sup>38</sup> To begin, the conflict/disarmament community was outnumbered by people from local “gun control” initiatives, and non-South African representatives were drawn almost exclusively from the development or faith NGO networks, with the caveat that national landmines campaigns were also drawn into this network.

In the follow-up to the Washington meeting Ed Laurence of the Monterey Institute established a website (<http://prepcom.org>) to serve as a clearing house of information on small arms and light weapons

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35. Details of this meeting can be found on the Prepcom website, <http://prepcom.org>. The meeting was piggybacked on a larger meeting to discuss small arms policy options.

36. The major groups were: Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Pax Christi, International Alert, Saferworld, BASIC, World Vision and the Federation of American Scientists (FAS). This was largely a function of costs and timing, although it does indicate something about the interest and ability of different NGOs to assume a major role on the issue. One important question that I cannot answer at this point is the underlying reasons that brought each of these four communities to incorporate the problem of small arms and light weapons into their mandate.

37. Details of this meeting, including participants, can be found on the Prepcom website.

38. A meeting was also held in Guatemala City in May 1997, as a follow-on to a conference on post-conflict weapons collection, but it was much smaller, and did not have a broad NGO reach.

activities, both governmental and non-governmental.<sup>39</sup> It organized a “membership” list of interested individuals that can be used to chart the development of the international campaign, as I have done in Table 1 below. Obviously, raw numbers tell one little about the level of activities or importance of various members of the network, nor do they allow one to unravel the power relationships or conflicts that might be implicated in such networks. This would require a detailed set of interviews of key participants, and an exercise of network mapping. I can only approximate this in this paper, based both on documents that emerged from NGO meetings, and familiarity with the issue and players involved. In short, the methodology is loosely “participant” observation.

Table 1  
Membership in the Prepcom Network

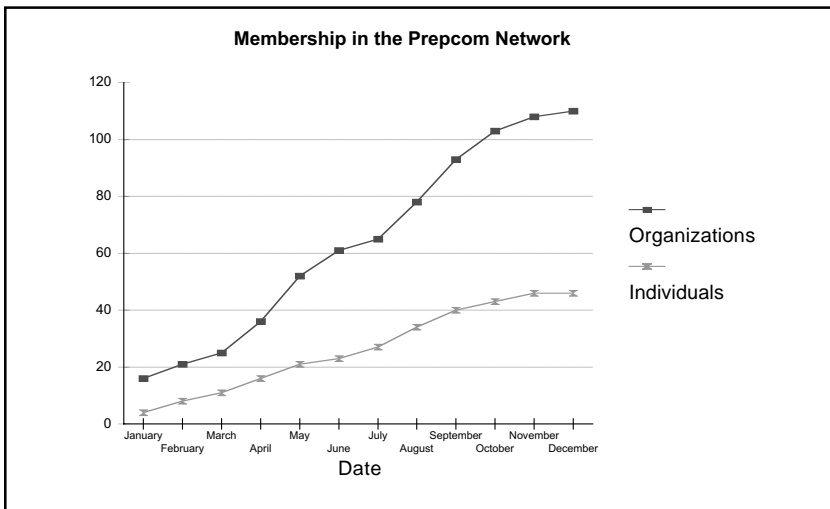


Table 1 does, however, illustrate how rapidly interest in this issue spread among the NGO networks. If one parses the data further, and attempts to sort the different NGOs by their main orientation or activity, the following emerges:

39. Although singling out individuals is invidious, Ed Laurance’s role in advancing this issue, especially as the force behind prepcom.org, should be underlined, especially since he does not represent a major NGO interest, but is an

Table 2

## Distribution of Prepcom Members by Area of Focus

Area of Focus	Number of NGOs
Humanitarianism/Human Rights	38
Public Health and Criminality	20
Economic Development/Governance	65
Communal Conflicts	21
Arms Control/International Security	49
TOTAL	193

Note: 38 NGOs with overlapping or mixed mandates have been double-counted, the total number of NGOs observed is 155.

Likewise, if one attempts to chart the geographic distribution of membership (organizations and individuals), one sees that the network does have “global reach,” albeit with patchy coverage, especially in East and Northeast Asia, the former Soviet Union and the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>40</sup> The fact that the main Southern outreach appears to have developed in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa appears to be the result of two different factors: in the Latin American case, the relative density of civil society networks and associations and an active NGO tradition, and in Sub-Saharan Africa the strong links (which have fostered NGOs) between many of these states and the

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academic at the Monterey Institute. Laurance was present at all three of the meetings noted above (Washington, London, Johannesburg), offered opening “briefings” at two of them, and was the first to promote the idea of an international “Convention on the Prevention of the Indiscriminate and Unlawful Use of Light Weapons.” This idea did not meet universal approval in the NGO world, and was subsequently dropped.

40. A second (albeit somewhat overlapping) data set can also be used to chart the network: the participation in a large-scale international conference in Brussels in October 1998, which marked the formal launching of the IANSA network. It “piggybacked” upon the Prepcom network, but also drew in a somewhat larger pool, and had a slightly different geographic focus. More than 200 individuals representing about 60 different organizations took part in the Brussels meeting, and their distribution and orientation will be analysed in subsequent drafts of this paper.

international development community.<sup>41</sup> The membership break down as follows:

Table 3  
Geographic Distribution of Prepcom Members

Geographic Origin	Number of NGOs
North America	41
Central/South America	26
Western Europe	38
East/Central Europe	9
Sub-Saharan Africa	27
Middle East and North Africa	1
South Asia	8
Southeast Asia and the North Pacific	3
Former Soviet Union	4
TOTAL	157

The way in which the IANSA coalition was put together, and its core membership is also captured only imperfectly by these facts and figures. While a detailed “process-tracing” remains to be done, two crucial turning points in the construction of an international campaign took place over the summer and fall of 1998, with key meetings being held in Canada and Brussels. The first meeting, held in July 1998, was expressly designed to hammer out a consensus draft of a campaign document that could “develop ideas for complementary, cooperative and coordinated international action to respond more effectively to the political, social and humanitarian catastrophes wrought by the unrestrained diffusion of small arms around the globe.”<sup>42</sup> The meeting was sponsored by the Canadian government and the Ford

41. I have not yet compared geographic distribution to area of focus to see if this assertion is borne out, but my sense is that most of the sub-Saharan NGOs come out of the development network.

42. From invitation letter. For details of the planning, see meeting notes from the US small arms working group of 27 March and 1 May, where the initiative to hold a summer meeting was discussed and approved. Interestingly, the four-person steering committee for this meeting included two (Northern) academics, one researcher (Southern), and only one “activist” NGO – Canadian-based Project Ploughshares.

Foundation, emerged from the work of the US small arms working group, and included 38 NGO participants, more or less equally divided between North and South. It represented the move from “discussions” to “organizing”—as one participant put it, we were told to lock ourselves in a room for a few days and come out with a campaign document.<sup>43</sup> Some details of the document that emerged are offered below. The next stage of the creation of the coalition was the Brussels meeting of October 1998, at which the IANSA was launched, based on the campaign document hammered out at the Canadian meeting. The joint government/NGO conference included several hundred participants, and was followed by a one-day NGO meeting that involved more than 200 individuals from 60 different organizations, which discussed in working groups the draft document, and made suggestions for amendments or improvements.<sup>44</sup>

Beyond this simple “map” and story of the emergence of an international coalition, there are at least four things that should be noted. First, lest one get the impression of an ever-growing NGO consensus that drives the process forward, it is important to note that one of the key impulses that pushed activists to arrange a meeting in the summer of 1998, and to hammer out a campaign document, was the fact that the Belgian government had *previously* announced its sponsorship of a major international government/NGO conference for October. As it became clear a) that this would be a large, and potentially significant, event and b) that the size of the meeting would not “permit the kind of focused work that needs to happen on conceptualizing a campaign,” NGOs moved their agenda forward in order to lay the groundwork for the Brussels meeting.<sup>45</sup> Key or core NGO actors seized the initiative, debated among themselves how best to proceed, and established a “policy framework.” The core NGO players were Saferworld, BASIC, International Alert, Federation of American Scientists, Amnesty

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43. This message was delivered by one sponsor – the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, although I am still seeking clarification on the various forces behind this workshop.

44. A final draft of the IANSA document is to be circulated in mid-February.

45. From notes of the 1 May US small arms working group meeting. There was also some concern that the divisions within the Belgian government (and perhaps NGOs) over the nature and scope of the October meeting might create some problems.

International, Human Rights Watch, World Council of Churches, and Oxfam.<sup>46</sup>

Second, what this tells us about the growth of the network and the nature of the coalition is that its strength emerges from its mobilization of some large NGOs that have not hitherto (at least until the landmines campaign) devoted a great deal of attention to “security” issues. The case of human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International has been noted above, but one should also note the active participation (as evidenced by the presence at the Canadian meeting) of development or faith groups such as Oxfam, CARE, the World Council of Churches, Pax Christi and the Quakers. In each of these cases, an explicit link had to be made between light weapons and conflict, and the core mandate of these of groups. Hence, the World Council of Churches sponsored work under a “Programme to Overcome Violence,” while Oxfam, for example, undertook (among other things) a major study on UK export controls and exports of small arms to zones of conflict. The rationale for this classically “arms control” formulation was that:

Oxfam has worked with the victims of conflict on projects of relief and rehabilitation for most of its institutional life. In some countries Oxfam has also been invited to participate in initiatives to promote peace and reconciliation at both local and national level. One theme running throughout all of this work, whether in Asia, Africa or Latin America (and latterly in Eastern Europe), is that the ease of access to weapons, and in particular small arms, has helped to spark conflicts, prolong conflict, destabilise relief programmes, and undermine peace initiatives.<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, for a group such as Amnesty International, the core idea of “indiscriminate and unlawful use,” which is primarily a legal concept, was essential to its engagement.<sup>48</sup>

Third, each of these groups framed the issue of small arms and light weapons in a slightly different way. A quick summary of their

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46. This list is based on two criteria: consistent and regular appearance at all relevant NGO meetings; membership on “core groups” (eg: planning committees, steering committees, and the like), and my first-hand knowledge. A more robust methodology would a) trace their input more directly and b) interview NGO participants to have them “map” the network.

47. *Small Arms, Wrong Hands: A Case for Government Control of the Small Arms Trade* (Oxford: Oxfam, April 1998), foreword.

48. Brian Wood, Amnesty International, made this point in both the Washington and London NGO meetings cited below, and it appears to have won broad acceptance.



positions can be found in Table 4 below, which offers representative (not exhaustive) examples of how different NGOs lined up on the problem of small arms and light weapons. What is important to note is that these different ways of framing the problem can generate very different prescriptions for international action. For example, a focus on criminality and “local” violence leads naturally to a strong emphasis on national gun control legislation, and somewhat less concern with initiatives such as enhancing cross-border customs controls or tightening national export legislation.. Likewise, a focus on potential human rights violations (by states as well as non-state actors) leads one to reject a narrowing of focus to the problem of *illicit* weapons transfers, since legal transfers to states can still be (and often are) the source of massive violations of human rights and humanitarian law.

Finally, whether or not this differential framing of the issue has consequences for the ability of an international campaign is impossible to determine at this stage. It is clear, however, that the relatively broad and open-ended nature of the IANSA network is a direct result of the different interests and orientations of the various stakeholders. The “agenda” gives equal weight to policies “which address controlling or limiting the trade in and diffusion of small arms, and those which are directed towards reducing the demand for them.” The overall framework could be called one of “human security”—ie: “designed to enhance sustainable development and to promote the development of cultures of peace.”<sup>49</sup> Both of these pillars include a large number of possible policy initiatives. On the “supply” side, these include measures such as: promoting inter-state agreements to prevent illicit trafficking, strengthening police and customs cooperation, collecting and destroying surplus weapons, restricting the export of surplus weapons, enhancing domestic firearms control and regulation, and increasing international information exchanges and transparency. On the “demand” side these include promoting peaceful conflict resolution, reforming security institutions, or undermine cultures of violence.

The practical and analytical problem with such a broad action plan is that it is difficult to trace how the concrete measures that may emerge have been influenced by the efforts of the IANSA coalition, unless it becomes more clearly focused on particular initiatives. The simple assertion that a wide range of NGOs think there is a problem

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49. IANSA draft of founding document, Policy Framework.

does not necessarily mean action to address it can be traced to this assertion. Likewise, an open-ended agenda means that it is difficult to see how, in a specific context, NGO efforts to influence state policies and negotiations have any impact. For example, in the case of the campaign to ban landmines, the clarity of the NGO goal (a total ban) provided a measure against which the evolution of state policies could easily be judged. No such measure yet exists in the small arms and light weapons context. This problem leads me directly to my final concern: the state-NGO nexus.

Table 4

Different Ways of Framing the Small Arms and Light Weapons Problem

Statement of Problem	Description of Problem	NGO Groups Implicated (representative listing only, not comprehensive) <sup>50</sup>
Humanitarianism and Human Rights	culture of violence; child soldiers; personal insecurity; vulnerable groups (women, visible minorities, ethnies); excessively injurious weapons	Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, ICRC
Public Health and Criminality	drugs/terror/arms nexus; increase in petty criminality or "disorganized" crime; "contagion effect"	Gun Control Network UK, HELP, Viva Rio, Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, WCC, Gun Free South Africa
Economic Development and Good Governance	"gun as livelihood" problem; extortion; "mafias;" corruption; weak climate for investment	Oxfam, Pax Christi, World Vision, World Council of Churches, CARE
Communal Conflicts Extra-Regional	flow of light weapons increases level of violence and intractability of communal wars	Project Ploughshares, International Alert, Centre for Conflict Resolution (South Africa)
Conflict Intervention and Regional Destabilization	grey market transactions (govt. to govt. or insurgent) designed to affect course of a conflict, conflict spillover, recycling of surplus weapons	BICC; Monterey Institute, CISD, GRIP, NISAT, FAS, Saferworld, BASIC, UNIDIR

50. Several NGOs are also implicated in more than one of these framings; the grouping is to illustrate principle concerns only.

## State and IGO Leadership and the State-NGO Nexus

None of this activity in the NGO world is of any interest unless it ultimately has some impact on how states (or other actors in the international system) define or pursue their interests. Yet the question of the influence exerted by NGOs is a tricky one, for several reasons. To begin, it is not clear what *kind* of changes one wants to look for: changes in state practices, or changes in the behaviour of any actors in the international system. Evidence for the former tends to focus on the production of new international institutions such as formal treaties or agreements, and to concentrate on states as the central regulators of global political life.<sup>51</sup> But the influence of NGOs on state policies and practices is often difficult, if not impossible, to show, for two reasons. First, the generation of new international institutions does not necessarily mean that the “problem” the NGO coalition emerged to combat has actually been “solved.” The relationship of the Ottawa Treaty to the actual elimination of the scourge of anti-personnel landmines is a good example. One could argue that many state policies are designed simply to give the appearance of having dealt with the problem, without taking further concrete steps. Second, the relationship between states and NGOs is a complex one, and increased NGO activity can be as much a result of changed state policies than a cause of it. Evidence for the latter (ie: changes of behaviour by any actors) tends to start with the simple existence of new NGO coalitions where none were before present, and with the emergence of high-profile references to, in this case, the problem of small arms and light weapons. But the mere emergence of a new coalition, or success at a campaign to publicize an issue, does not by itself mean that new actors have been “empowered” in different ways, or that the way in which a problem has been framed has fundamentally changed.

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51. Hence the relatively great attention paid to such things as the Montreal Protocol on combatting ozone depletion, the Chemical Weapons Convention, or implementation of international human rights instruments. See Litfin, *Ozone Discourses*; Richard Price, *The Chemical Weapons Taboo* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Kathryn Sikkink, “Human Rights, Principled Issue Networks and Sovereignty in Latin America”; Kathryn Sikkink, “The Power of Principled Ideas: Human Rights Policies in the United States and Western Europe,” in Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane, eds., *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions and Political Change* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 139-170.

This last point hints at a deeper problem that is certainly not confined to the small arms and light weapons problematic: if the changes that one looks for have to be directly connected to specific goals of NGOs or the international coalition (a functional or bargaining notion of power), there is little room for examining the broader “structural power” of NGO action, which would be directed at affecting the international security agenda, or at altering the range of options considered available to various actors.<sup>52</sup> If, for example, one goal of the IANSA campaign is a global reduction in gun violence (which is the focus of some actors), then the pathways to such a goal are complex and may only indirectly implicate states, and even more indirectly their international behaviour. But NGOs might still have a tremendous impact on this. Similarly, if the goal is simply to keep the issue of small arms and light weapons high on the international security agenda in order that greater resources be devoted to a wide range of initiatives to address the problem (ie: development assistance, grassroots work, aid conditionality, demand-side measures), then the success or failure of these efforts will not be well-captured by looking for the creation of new inter-state institutions or formal practices. As Paul Wapner puts it:

the conception and meaning of NGOs in world affairs...will remain problematic as long as scholars remain focused on the relations between NGOs and the state, and ignore the civic dimension of NGO efforts. NGO activities within and across societies are a proper object of study and only by including them can one render an accurate understanding of NGOs, and by extension, world politics.<sup>53</sup>

In short, how one thinks about *politics* determines how one regards the activities and influence of NGOs. In this respect, a rationalist, instrumental, conception is completely inadequate, for it can only with great difficulty incorporate this “structural” or contextual dimension of power, and it is guaranteed to push analysis of the role of non-state actors to the margins.

All of these difficulties appear in the small arms and light weapons issue area, and in this section I only want to focus on the way in

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52. On the distinction between bargaining and structural power, see, *inter alia*, Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London: Macmillan, 1974); Keith Krause, “Military Statecraft: Power and Influence in Soviet and American Arms Transfer Relationships,” *International Studies Quarterly*, 35:3 (September 1991), 313-336; Stefano Guzzini, “Structural Power: The Limits of Neorealist Analysis,” *International Organization*, 47:3 (Summer 1993), 443.

53. Wapner, *Environmental Activism and World Civic Politics*, 10.

which NGO activities *followed* rather than preceded state or inter-governmental efforts and the way in which state sponsorship has been critical to the “success” of current NGO initiatives. It is not my claim that therefore the IANSA campaign is purely a consequence of state efforts, but I do want to highlight that the contribution of NGOs to international efforts needs to be thought through more carefully. In particular (and as noted above), a change in the *normative horizon* against which both state and non-state actors frame their interests and hence actions appears to have been a crucial “explanatory” factor in the emergence of the small arms and light weapons issue, over and above the activities of any particular set of actors.

There are several examples of concrete initiatives into which NGO input appears to have been low or non-existent. First, the emergence of the issue on the agenda of the United Nations, reflected in the Advisory mission to Mali (and its follow-up in the West Africa moratorium), the first UN experts’ group study, and repeated references to the issue by the Secretary-General, does not appear connected with the activities of any of the NGOs involved in promoting the issue.<sup>54</sup> If anything, these activities may have played a key role in bestowing the mantle of “expert” on certain communities and NGOs, thus legitimizing their subsequent role in policy development. Second, the Norwegian Initiative on Small Arms Transfers (NISAT), which was borne out of Norway’s involvement with the Mali disarmament and demobilization project also did not emerge as an NGO response to a problem; rather, it was developed in conjunction with the efforts of the Norwegian foreign ministry to coordinating policy-relevant research in this area and to assume a leading role in the emerging coalition of like-minded states acting on this issue (other players include Canada, Belgium, Switzerland, Japan, South Africa and the Netherlands).<sup>55</sup>

A third state-sponsored initiative that has also received a great deal of attention has been the Organization of American States’

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54. The original Malian request for UN help occurred in 1993, and the first mission included two ex-military people as advisors. For details see Robin-Edward Poulton and Ibrahim ag Yousouf, *A Peace of Timbuktu: Democratic Governance, Development, and African Peacemaking* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 1998), 151-155.

55. The four NGOs were the Norwegian Red Cross, Norwegian Church Aid, the International Peace Research Institute (Oslo), and the Norwegian Institute for International Affairs. The exact nature of the government-NGO links in this case remain to be clarified. NISAT was launched in December 1997.

“Inter-American Convention Against the Illicit Manufacture of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials.” This 1997 treaty focuses on the long-standing concern of many Latin American states with the *illicit* trafficking in arms, and the links between drug cartels and other criminal activities. It has been widely cited as a regional “model” to follow, but its sources are not NGO concern, but rather state concerns over “internal” or “regime” security.<sup>56</sup> Finally, the activities of the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, which include the preparatory work for negotiations on a “Firearms Protocol” (negotiations began in early 1999) has been somewhat linked to the activities and interests of criminal justice and firearms control NGOs, but again appears not to be fuelled by this in a significant way.

State sponsorship has also been essential to the development of NGO activities, and, as hinted above, one could easily argue that the path of “influence” between states and NGOs has been reversed: that in many cases NGO activism, and potentially the entire emergence of the IANSA network, can be attributed to the heightened interest of particular states in pursuing international initiatives in this area. Prominent examples of this would include: Canadian sponsorship of the August 1998 NGO consultation, Norwegian sponsorship of the NISAT project, Belgian sponsorship of the October 1998 Brussels meeting, Swiss sponsorship of NGO seminars and workshops in Geneva, and a variety of other activities to which other states have contributed in one way or another. In all of these cases, sponsorship means funding—and it would be interesting to see to what degree work in this area is free from state sponsorship.<sup>57</sup>

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56. Latin American concern over illicit trafficking goes back to the late 1980s, and was first expressed in a resolution on illicit arms transfers of 1988. See UN General Assembly resolution 43/75I (1988). Also see, *inter alia*, “Measures to Curb the Illicit Transfer and Use of Conventional Arms,” UN General Assembly resolution 49/75M, 15 December 1994. I would argue, however, that state interest in this issue does reflect a broader concern with “human” or “societal” security, in particular via the emphasis on the negative impact of arms transfers on social and economic development, and that this is part of the normative shift against which the emergence of the small arms and light weapons issue must be understood.

57. The work of Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, and probably of some of the development organizations, has been free of state sponsorship. It is worth noting that some foundations, notably the Ford Foundation, have also sponsored important work in this area.

But while this implies that the activities of NGOs is not free of state “direction” or priority setting, situating this in the broader context of “global civil society” merely highlights the complex nexus of state-civil society interactions. The relative autonomy of civil society is and always has been contestable, and there is no reason to think that the same would not hold true at the global level.<sup>58</sup> What is important to untangle are two things: a) the way in which states may attempt to steer the activities of NGOs in this area, either through cooptation or selectivity and b) the broader “normative” backdrop against which all this plays out.

With respect to the first issue states have attempted to steer the debate in at least four ways: by concentrating their activities against the *illicit* trade in weapons; by focusing on strategies for *reduction* of weapons in circulation in zones of conflict, rather than on supply-side restrictions (eg: on arms exports); by advocating increased exchanges of information between states, without necessarily increasing international transparency; and by attempting to prohibit small arms transfers to non-state actors. In each of these cases (with the partial exception of the last one), the goal has been to protect states’ prerogatives to acquire or to export weapons to each other, according to sovereign judgements of their “legitimate security needs.”<sup>59</sup> Of course, matters are not so simple: for example, almost all *illicit* weapons begin their journey as legal transfers, and subsequently leak out of the state monopoly over instruments of violence. Likewise, strategies for reducing weapons that do not also address questions of weapons production and supply could prove to be hopeless, if the number of weapons injected into the system continues to exceed the number taken out of circulation.<sup>60</sup> Finally, increased confidential information exchanges between states (in, for example, the Wassenaar Arrangement or Interpol) do not provide a measure of oversight or accountability to NGOs or

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58. See, for general overviews, John Keane, ed., *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives* (London: Verso, 1988); Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992)

59. One example of this is the preambular language to UN Security Council resolution 1209, 19 November 1998, which reads: “Reaffirming the right of African States to procure or produce necessary weapons to meet their legitimate national security and public order needs in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and other rules and principles of international law.”

60. There is no data on this, but good reason to believe that stocks are constantly increasing.

civil society, and are inconsistent with a broader commitment to the openness or transparency that some states have tried to promote.

Not surprisingly, NGOs have made all of these arguments in opposition to some state proposals. The best one can claim to date is that attempts by states to regulate the global flow of light weapons have increased dramatically, and that this might, in the long run, lead to greater restrictions on the legal production and transfer of arms, and to greater public transparency. But for the moment, the structural power (getting and keeping the issue on the agenda) of the international campaign appears to be greater than its bargaining power (achieving specific outcomes).

### Conclusions

At this stage in the process, at least five preliminary conclusions can be drawn:

- The relatively rapid rise in the issue of small arms and light weapons on the international agenda—and the “normative change” that accompanies this—is the result of a complex constellation of factors, of which direct NGO pressure is only one element.
- Deeper “norms” or ideas about what constitutes “security,” and what is an appropriate subject for international oversight, transparency and accountability have had to shift in order for this issue to rise on the international agenda.<sup>61</sup>
- Although several NGOs (especially in the arms control/international security community) have been “entrepreneurial”

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61. One example of this change is reflected by the UN Security Council Resolution 1209 of 19 November 1998, the first operative paragraph of which reads: Expresses its grave concern at the destabilizing effect of illicit arms flows, in particular of small arms, to and in Africa and at their excessive accumulation and circulation, which threaten national, regional and international security and have serious consequences for development and for the humanitarian situation in the continent;

The language is that of classic “international security” issues, yet the context (and the rest of the resolution) depart significantly from this logic. The second example is the final communiqué of the NATO Ministerial meeting (8 December 1998), which in noting the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council action agenda for the next year, referred positively to the inclusion of “arms trafficking, control of small arms transfers and means of encouraging de-mining,” as issues under the arms control and non-proliferation agenda.



in the sense that they have shifted their activities to taken advantage of perceived openings in the international agenda to pursue this issue, the taking up of this issue by many others (in particular in the development and human rights communities) reflects a growing realization that the unchecked proliferation of small arms and light weapons has jeopardized the achievement of their core mandate in the field.

- The momentum that the issue currently has is at least equally, if not more, the result of the actions of a small core of like-minded states than it is of NGO action.<sup>62</sup> Most of these states have also grasped that working with a broad NGO coalition also *increases* their international profile and leverage on this issue.
- The links between NGOs, states and intergovernmental organizations, and the pathways of influence among them, are far more complex than any simple model of international relations can capture.

The upshot of all this is that traditional tools of International Relations, rooted in analogies with micro-economic exchange and bargaining theories, are wholly inadequate to analyse the sociological dimension of international life. Similarly, “international society” approaches that take as their central unit of analysis the development of shared norms and ideas among *states* are equally unable to grasp the complex and genuinely *social* nature of the transnational associational life that manifests itself at all levels of civil society—from the most local and grassroots to the most global and “international.” Developing and refining appropriate tools and methods with which to study these important phenomena ought to be a priority for International Relations scholarship.

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62. This raises the issue of why these states have identified themselves as “like-minded” and in particular the domestic influence on their identity construction, but this goes beyond the scope of this paper.

## Content

Introduction	5
Small Arms and Light Weapons and Human Security	8
The Changed International Context	8
Light Weapons and Human Security	12
The Creation of “Expert” Knowledge	14
The Emergence of a Campaign, and the Problem of Issue Framing	18
State and IGO Leadership and the State-NGO Nexus	27
Conclusions	32