

bulletin

Small Arms and Human Security

Focus on the Middle East and North Africa

The UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (PoA), negotiated in 2001, recommends a set of measures that should be taken at the national, regional and international levels in order to tackle the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. The International Action Network on Small Arms noted in a 2003 report that, “*there appears to be significant correlation between the existence of substantial regional agreements and programmes and the extent to which participating countries are making progress towards implementing the PoA.*”¹ Yet, while several regional initiatives have been widely acclaimed, two regions – Asia and the Middle East – do not appear to have done enough to implement the PoA.

This article focuses specifically on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, highlighting initiatives taken to date, and identifying political and cultural constraints that might stall action. A focus on the Middle East and North Africa is particularly relevant, as they are one of the largest recipients, by value, of major conventional weapons, as well as important transit points for arms flowing to other parts of the world.²

Cultural and geopolitical factors

As in other regions, traditions in the Middle East associate guns with positive values such as masculinity, pride, honour and manhood.³ Guns are fired at weddings and celebrations as a sign of happiness, which strengthens the positive perception of guns. High rates of civilian possession are a social problem: “*carrying a weapon may give a feeling of superiority to some people of a certain age group. Thus, to these people using a weapon becomes natural and familiar, and even something that is expected of them.*”⁴

In this issue ...

Focus on the Middle East and North Africa

by Mireille Widmer and Atef Odibat *pages 1–3*

Tip of the Hat: National Association to Protect Environment and Children (NAPEC) *page 3*

In Their Own Words: What is Happening in the Middle East on the Small Arms Problem *page 4*

Grappling with Guns: The Lebanese Experience by Gina Rivas Pattugalan and Fadi Abi-Allam *page 5*

Weapons Availability and Misuse in the Second Intifada by Gilad Ben-Nun *page 6*

News in Brief *page 7*

The region, too, has witnessed significant violent conflict in recent years. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the most long-standing and perhaps well-known, the deadly civil wars in Algeria and Yemen, continuing conflict between Kurdish minorities and majority populations in Iran, Iraq and Turkey, armed insurgency in Egypt, and the continuing state of war between Israel and some of its neighbours (Lebanon and Syria) have all led to much bloodshed over the past decades. These years have also been marked by two massive and deadly military campaigns in Iraq.

War and violence continue to prevail in the region. In some cases, perhaps especially in relation to the conflict in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, weapons possession is associated with pride and a symbol of ‘rightful resistance’. Consequently domestic criticism of the widespread availability and misuse of weapons is viewed by some as a challenge to the legitimacy of resistance.

Civil society organisations are slowly emerging to challenge these perceptions. Dr. Atef Odibat of the Regional Human Security Centre in Jordan is adamant that “*The assumption that ‘male + violent = good’ must be challenged; a culture of violence needs to be replaced by a culture of peace and non-violence.*” At this stage there is, unfortunately, little grassroots pressure for change.

At the governmental level, regional instability is also hampering the crystallisation of serious political will to confront the problem. States fearful for their national security are loath to restrict their ability to acquire weapons. At the same time, many governments in the MENA region consider small arms inconsequential and unworthy of attention in light of the greater threat posed by weapons of mass destruction (WMD). While Israel is known to possess nuclear weapons and has consistently refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, all other states in the region have ratified the treaty and possess varying basic levels of WMD capacity. This hierarchy of disarmament issues poses a tremendous challenge for advocates of tougher measures to control small arms. It is a widely held governmental perspective that a focus on guns and grenades would mean that other issues – particularly nuclear disarmament – are left to fester.

A human security issue?

Small arms proliferation and misuse are largely viewed in the MENA region as an arms control issue, not a human

security one. Small arms and light weapons may pose a threat to the stability and security of states, but they pose a more direct and immediate menace to the safety and security of their citizens at times of peace.

It is very difficult to document and quantify the human cost of small arms violence in the region, given the lack of available data on crime, health, economic and psychological impacts of firearm use. Varying notions of crime and punishment further complicate matters: many societies accept private justice or honour killings as legitimate and such incidents are therefore not officially reported. Violence against women is particularly masked, underestimated and treated with indifference.

Some analysts conclude that small arms availability does not pose a significant threat to human security in the region, arguing that high rates of civilian possession do not necessarily imply use/misuse of these weapons. One view suggests that weapons possession in the Middle East has a more communicative than practical value, and that those same social norms that fuel the demand for the possession of weapons may also strictly regulate their use.⁵

More research is required to determine the nature and extent of the small arms problem in the MENA region. Yet the proliferation and misuse of small arms should be taken seriously. Small arms violence in the region occurs daily, as tribal or family vendettas, hostage taking (for example in Yemen), honour killings, violence against women, or outright civil war. In Algeria for example, more than 100,000 people have been killed since 1991 and Amnesty International reports that “around 100 people continue to be killed each month by armed groups, the security forces and state-armed militias, with civilians bearing the brunt of the violence.”⁶ The Egyptian temple of Luxor also made headlines in November 1997 when 62 people were gunned down in an attack that lasted nearly 40 minutes. Additionally, many societies in the region are experiencing tensions between modern state and traditional forms of social structure, or between the rule of law and private justice.⁷

Tougher controls on small arms possession, use and transfers appear to be in states’ own national interest: “Looking at the destabilising influence of conflicts across the Arab region and at the emerging presence of organised crime networks, one could easily make the case for stronger regional cooperation [to combat small arms proliferation] – if only to deal with criminality and terrorism.”⁸ Furthermore, fears that the attention devoted to small arms will steal the limelight from nuclear disarmament appear not to be well grounded. On the contrary, an equally-valid view would suggest that regional co-operation around the question of small arms and light weapons could constitute a confidence-building exercise helping to revive other disarmament processes.

Positive developments

Institutional changes taking place at the regional level bode well for more serious responses and activities in the MENA region. In July 2002, the League of Arab States created a Department of Disarmament Affairs. It

is too early to assess the performance of this new Department, but it could potentially constitute a driving force for regional disarmament in the Arab Middle East and North Africa. No forum for the discussion of disarmament issues has existed in the region since the Arms Control and Regional Security working group fell into disuse in 1995.⁹

In collaboration with the UN Department of Disarmament Affairs, the Arab League organised a conference in December 2003 on the implementation of the PoA by Arab States.¹⁰ The meeting was attended by 21 out of 22 member states, as well as other interested governments, UN agencies and representatives from civil society in the MENA. Issues as diverse as national reporting, gender perspectives on disarmament, the role of civil society, the experience of regional organisations from outside the MENA region, donor responsibilities and policy options were discussed with various levels of engagement.

It was clear from this meeting that many states are still not acknowledging threats posed to their citizens by the over-availability and misuse of guns and light weapons and their responsibility to diminish the threat. In addition, several MENA states expressed a deep reluctance to replicate lessons from other regional models. Indigenous initiatives, however, appear to have a fair chance of succeeding. Arab states are starting to acknowledge the problem of small arms as a regional, as much as a global issue, and once they do, these states will also be more likely to take collective action to stem the uncontrolled spread of small arms.

Some states in the region have become strong advocates for a more comprehensive approach to the problem of the illicit trade, by calling *inter alia* for legally-binding instruments on marking and tracing firearms, as well as arms brokering activities, and by supporting discussion of the contentious issue of arms transfers to non-state armed groups. The Algerian government in particular called for the drafting of an Arab Convention on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons, and for the creation of a regional contact point on small arms to exchange information and co-ordinate action between the United Nations and members of the Arab League.

Such calls have yet to translate into action, but they could disprove the perception that the MENA region is not active on the subject.

Civil society

On another front, the possibility of establishing partnerships with civil society to facilitate the implementation of the PoA is being discussed in the region, for example in Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon and Yemen. National commissions are being established in accordance with the provisions of the PoA, providing an opportunity for formal NGO involvement in the implementation of the PoA.

Until recently few NGOs in the region recognised small arms proliferation as a cause for concern *per se*, focusing instead on broader human rights and humanitarian

issues. But this trend is slowly changing as several regional conferences have taken place on this topic. A workshop on the national and regional measures adopted by Arab states in their attempt to conform to the UN PoA was the first regional initiative in this context organised by the Regional Human Security Centre in mid 2001.¹¹ Also, particularly influential in this regard were a regional seminar organised in Amman in July 2002 to discuss the means to curb the demand for small arms, and a follow-up seminar in November 2002 to discuss traditional cultural practices related to small arms.¹² The need to form a MENA network on small arms was acknowledged, and an NGO network was officially founded in November 2002. Although at present it is still a very informal network of civil society organisations, with consistent funding it could provide a driving force for a human security approach to the challenge of arms availability and misuse in the Middle East.

It should be noted that civil society organisations in Israel are also actively – although incidentally – working against small arms violence. Militarism is of particular concern to those Israelis who think that the state of war the country has known throughout its existence is leaving a dark stain on cultural and political life, and endangering its democratic foundations. Such organisations decry the aura surrounding the Israeli army, the widespread culture of violence in Israel and the broader impacts of militarism, particularly on the status of women.¹³ Others are focusing specifically on the issue of misuse of weapons by police and security forces. They denounce abuses by those government agents and encourage soldiers to refuse conscription for reasons of conscience.¹⁴

At present small arms is probably the lowest priority on the disarmament agenda of the MENA region, where concerns about nuclear weapons take precedence over any other item. In the coming years the Arab League can and should be a facilitator of a proactive approach. Combined with growing civil society engagement, the MENA region has a window of opportunity for collaborative action at the regional and national levels to tackle this demanding and urgent issue.

Written by Mireille Widmer, Project Assistant, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Switzerland, and Dr. Atef Odibat, Director, Regional Human Security Centre, Jordan.

Notes

¹ IANSA. "Implementing the Programme of Action 2003: Action by states and civil society". Produced by International Alert, Saferworld and the Centre for International Co-operation and Security, Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford, 2003, p. 6.

² Regional Human Security Centre, *The UN PoA to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in SALW in All its Aspects in the Arab Region: Successes and Challenges*. Executive summary of the Conference organised on 23–24 June 2003. Additionally, according to the Small Arms Survey 2003, small arms imports to the Middle East were worth 285 million USD in 2000, or 15% of total documented small arms imports. It should be noted however that these figures do not account for illicit transfers. In addition, five Middle Eastern states figure among the 10 developing nations who received the most arms by value in 2002. These are Saudi Arabia (USD 5.2 billion, rank 1), Egypt (USD 2.1 billion, rank 2), Kuwait (USD 1.3 billion, rank 3), UAE (USD 0.9 billion, rank 6) and Israel (USD 0.7 billion, rank 8). Source: IISS, *The Military Balance 2003–04*, Oxford University Press, 2003.

³ See American Friends Service Committee and Regional Human Security Centre, *Traditional Cultural Practices and Small Arms in the Middle East: Problems and Solutions*. Report of a workshop held in Amman from 3–4 November 2002.

⁴ Abu Jaber, H.E. Prof. Kamel, President, Jordan Institute of Diplomacy, in: Oda Tealakh, G., Odibat, A. and Al-Shaer, M. (eds). "Small Arms and Light Weapons



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Tip of the Hat

The Centre would like to extend a "Tip of the Hat" to the National Association to Protect Environment and Children (NAPEC), Iraq. The Tip of the Hat salutes small but significant efforts at all levels to tackle the small arms crisis. On 8 December 2003, following NAPEC's call, children burned toy guns during a demonstration in Baghdad against the importing and manufacturing of child military toys. Thanks NAPEC for starting early to break cycles of gun violence.

in the Arab Region: National and Regional Measures", Regional Human Security Centre, Amman, 2002, p. 12.

⁵ See for example Miller, Derek B. *Demand, Stockpiles, and Social Controls: Small Arms in Yemen*. Small Arms Survey, May 2003 (Occasional Paper No. 9).

⁶ Amnesty International, *Algeria: Steps towards change or empty promises?*, AI Index: MDE 28/005/2003, 16 September 2003.

⁷ McDonald, Dr. Glenn, *Human Security, Small Arms and the Middle East*, Presentation for the Fifth Annual Course on Arms Control and National Security, Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP), 23 February–1 March 2003.

⁸ Peters, Lilian and David Jackman. "First Steps: Exploring small arms issues in the Arab region". Quaker United Nations Office, Briefing Paper No. 2/01, June 2001, available at www.afsc.org/quno/Resources/BP200106.htm.

⁹ The Middle East Peace Process initiated in Madrid in October 1991 led to the creation of five multilateral working groups, including one on "Arms Control and Regional Security" (ACRS). The ACRS included 13 Arab States, Israel, a Palestinian delegation, and some 30 extra-regional entities. Six plenary sessions were held between May 1992 and December 1994. See *Middle East Peace Process Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) Working Group*, Fact Sheet, U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, July 2001, available at www.state.gov/t/pm/rls/fs/2001/4271pf.htm.

¹⁰ See <http://disarmament2.un.org/rdb/Meetings,%20Conf20and%20Events/salw-LASconf.html>.

¹¹ See www.id.gov.jo/human/index.html for more information on RHSC and its activities related to SALW.

¹² For more information see Regional Human Security Centre, www.id.gov.jo/human/index.html.

¹³ See for example, New Profile, www.newprofile.org/default.asp?language=en.

¹⁴ See for example, Yesh Gvul ("There is a limit"), www.yesh-gvul.org/english, or Courage to Refuse, www.couragetorefuse.org/english/.

■ In Their Own Words

What is Happening in the Middle East on the Small Arms Problem

Mr. Izzedin al-Asbahi

Director, Human Rights Information and Training Centre, Yemen

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the Middle East – particularly in my country – is rooted in strong traditions and cultural factors. Yet this should not become an excuse to avoid the issue of arms availability and misuse in the Arab World. Attitudes and cultural factors that associate weapons with pride and manhood must be changed, and civil society can play a crucial role in raising public awareness of the negative impacts of arms proliferation, suggesting practical alternatives to the possession and use of weapons, and emphasising the link between arms availability and development. I applaud the emergence of an Arab NGO network on small arms, and I hope that the international community will lend us support in this endeavour.

H.E. Mr. Ramez Goussous

Deputy Permanent Representative of Jordan to the United Nations

The human cost of small arms and light weapons is felt in the Middle East as elsewhere in the world. Nearly 60% of small arms worldwide are in civilian hands – an issue that was regretfully left out of the UN Programme of Action – with demand fuelled by a variety of factors such as poverty, lack of public security, and cultural practices including the celebratory use of weapons or the value of guns as a symbol of manhood. The availability of weapons is further increased by the existence of well-established networks of arms smugglers, and poor border controls. Jordan is calling for legally-binding instruments on marking and tracing and on brokering, recognising that illicit weapons often find their origin in the legal trade. Jordan is encouraging discussion of the issue of arms transfers to non-state armed groups, another area that was left out of the Programme of Action. All these issues must be addressed with urgency: too many people are killed, injured or traumatised every day by small arms to postpone action any longer.

Mr. Mohammed Belaoura

Deputy Director for Disarmament and International Security, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Algeria

Algeria is committed to progress in the regional implementation of the UN Programme of Action. The establishment a year ago of a Department for Disarmament within the League of Arab States is undoubtedly a very positive step and offers a real opportunity in this regard. In addition, Algeria is putting forward to the Arab League four concrete proposals to take action on the scourge of small arms illicit trade: the adoption of a legally-binding Arab convention on the illicit trade of small arms and light

weapons; the establishment of a regional point of contact to facilitate coordination between national points of contact in the region and with the UN system; the establishment of an information network on national legislations and procedures to enhance cooperation and coordination among Arab states; and the establishment within the Arab League of a Working group to harmonise classification of small arms and light weapons, and standardise Arabic vocabulary and definitions applied to small arms and light weapons.

Mr. Wa'el Al-Assad

Director, Department of Disarmament Affairs, League of Arab States

In spite of the fact that the Middle East faces a myriad of challenges, which define the region's security priorities, there has been a growing awareness of the dangers posed by the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, and its political, social and economic ramifications. The League of Arab States has exerted a variety of efforts to combat this illicit trade, and has taken some important measure to strengthen cooperation at the regional level, particularly within areas of border control and management. Yet this progress is – up until now – limited and was only achieved in relevance to other problems such as combating terrorism and organised crime. During 2003, the Arab League realised that extensive efforts and new approaches are required in order to address the small arms problem as a human security issue. The price that civilians, particularly women and children, pay in conflict areas in the Middle East is horrific and immediate action is required. The Arab League is developing programmes to tackle the issue. We are drawing upon the conclusions reached at the first Intergovernmental Regional Conference on the issue held in Cairo last December in collaboration between the Arab League and the UN.

Mr. Bassem Eid

Director, Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group, East Jerusalem

Palestinians know very well about the human cost of small arms and light weapons. Indeed, in this Intifada alone, 2,577 Palestinians have been killed by the end of 2003, the majority of whom by small arms. What cannot be expressed in statistics is the trauma of people living in fear, the disruption of the most basic daily tasks, and the difficulty to simply survive. As a human rights activist, I argue that the targeting of civilians can never be legitimate, and that states producing weapons should think twice before exporting weapons to a country that blatantly violates international human rights and humanitarian law. Additionally, Palestinian armed groups should think carefully about the long-term effects of the use of firearms on their own population. Palestinian children are growing up in an environment where guns are celebrated as a symbol of resistance. These guns are then often turned against other Palestinians, to settle family feuds or chase alleged collaborators. The illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories by Israel must not be an excuse to avoid this discussion.

Grappling with Guns: The Lebanese Experience

Lebanon suffered a devastating 15-year civil war, which erupted on 13 April 1975. This violent conflict was rooted in social and economic disparities between the dominant Christians (mostly Maronites), Palestinian refugees (mostly Sunni Muslims) and other minority groups (mostly Shi'a Muslims).¹ Additionally, various regional actors – particularly Syria, Israel and Iran – exploited the conflict for their own interests. By the end of the war, Lebanon was shattered, with more than 150,000 deaths (about five percent of the population); over 300,000 people were injured and a quarter of the population was displaced.²

The Ta'if Agreement of 1989, facilitated by the League of Arab States and negotiated by Lebanese parliamentarians, officially concluded the violence. The accord addressed power sharing between the major religious groups and the nature of Lebanese-Syrian relations. It also aimed to extend the state's authority over the entirety of Lebanon and, with the assistance of Syria, to disband and disarm all armed factions within six months of implementation.³ Most armed groups and militias welcomed the peace agreement, with the notable exception of General Michel 'Awn, the incumbent Maronite president. Eventually Syria forcibly removed 'Awn from Lebanon, an act which effectively empowered Syria as the key external implementer of the accord.

Disarmament activities began in December 1990, soon after the first government was sworn in. The process consisted of two phases: the "Greater Beirut" security plan, detailing the evacuation of all militia groups from the city, and restoring government control of the ports. Secondly, the dissolution of all armed groups and militia forces, including the confiscation of weapons and reintegration of a substantial number of militiamen into the Lebanese Army and the Internal Security Forces.⁴ In May 1991, the Lebanese Defence Minister announced that 80 per cent of weapons had been handed over.⁵ However, an unknown quantity of these weapons were sold to actors outside of the country or simply given to Syrian controlled forces.⁶ Moreover, the disarmament focused mainly on large weaponry, and caches of assault rifles, pistols and other light weapons used in the internal fighting remain to this day.

Many issues remain unresolved: deep animosity between religious groups; widespread proliferation of small arms and light weapons; insecurity in and around Palestinian refugee camps; ongoing activities of armed groups in southern Lebanon (most notably Hezbollah); and persistent border problems with Israel. The presence of 16,000-strong Syrian troops continues to loom over Lebanese affairs.⁷ As with many other nations emerging from years of violent conflict, there has been a noticeable

rise in the "use and abuse of the armed forces and the judiciary to quell dissent, and the prioritisation of order and security over justice and reconciliation".⁸ Public demonstrations have been banned in Lebanon since 1994. Likewise, many individuals connected to the opposition groups or human rights activism have been arrested. The judiciary's independence and impartiality have also been questioned, as many cases brought before the institution are tried in military courts.⁹

The civil war has had a profound impact on attitudes towards weapons in Lebanon. The overarching emphasis of the state on national security in a volatile regional environment continues to influence civilians to obtain or retain a weapon. Additionally, cultural factors associating the possession of arms with pride, manhood and resistance combine to compound the 'demand' for small arms. Lebanese gun laws date back to 1959 and licences are issued with relative ease. It is estimated that some 500,000 small arms and light weapons are in the hands of civilians; potentially every household possesses at least one weapon.¹⁰ Moreover, weapons flow freely within Palestinian refugee camps and across porous borders, with well-established networks of illicit traffickers plying their trade.¹¹ This issue is clearly an area for governmental leadership and action in the coming years, particularly in the lead up to the 2006 Review Conference to assess implementation of the UN Programme of Action on small arms.

Dramatic change relating to attitudes about weapons possession – including the view that resistance against occupation is legitimate – is not likely; however, incremental change is possible. Awareness is also growing amongst the population that genuine peace requires comprehensive disarmament, as a culture of non-violence is finding voice in Lebanon. The emergence of NGOs, such as Permanent Peace Movement, are testament to this growing presence. Notably, civil society is beginning to identify that disarmament can and should include innovative strategies to encourage behaviour indicative of a state at peace, where recourse to power of the gun is no longer second nature.

The Ta'if Agreement of 1989 was instrumental in disarming the majority of militias, but Lebanon remains inundated with weapons. Lebanon's persistent insecurity is closely linked to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the entrenched animosity of differing cultural and belief systems. Yet the national government and civil society have much to contribute in promoting a secure environment for the Lebanese people. Effective control of transfers, possession and use of small arms and light weapons by the state and civilians alike would be a critical step forward. In addition, civil society is well-placed to undertake awareness-raising and peace education on the issue, with committed support from the government.

For footnotes see p. 7.

This article was co-written by Gina Rivas Pattugalan, HDC 2003 Southeast Asia Fellow and Fadi Abi-Allam, Co-ordinator of Permanent Peace Movement in Lebanon.

Weapons Availability and Misuse in the Second Intifada

Small arms and light weapons have been critical 'tools' in the recent cycle of Palestinian-Israeli violence. Since September 2000, over 85 per cent of the 2,648 Palestinian casualties and around 40 per cent of the 850 Israeli deaths were caused by small arms – primarily high velocity assault rifles, handguns and sniper weapons.¹

In Israel, there are approximately 363,000 small arms in civilian hands – about six weapons per 100 people.² Though this figure is surprisingly low, it does not account for additional military automatic weapons issued by the Israeli army to Jewish settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The army has issued some 10,000 automatic military rifles and submachine guns to Jewish settlers with a dramatic increase since the beginning of the second Intifada.³ In calculating weapons in the hands of settlers, current estimates stand at around 41,000 guns ranging from fully automatic high velocity assault rifles to hand guns. Alarming, even when armed by the Israeli military, settlers are not subject to the Israeli army's rules of engagement, and they lack accountability for actions taken with the weapons. In addition, some 49,000 soldiers were serving in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as of January 2003 – often going on leave with their weapons, contributing to the normalisation of weapons in Israel.⁴ Vast quantities of illegal firearms, estimated at between 50,000 to 100,000 weapons, further add to this.⁵

Estimates of the total quantity of guns in Palestinian hands vary between 35,000 and 50,000, held by Palestinian Authority security forces and multiple armed groups and paramilitary units. Weapons come from a variety of sources. 44,000 were issued to the Palestinian Authority following its establishment in 1994,⁶ but the army claims that it has taken back 5,000 of those weapons since the beginning of the Intifada.⁷ Additional guns have been diverted from Israeli arsenals and/or smuggled from neighbouring countries. The number of firearms in Palestinian areas appears to have decreased since the end of 2001, due on the one hand to a shift in strategy from sniper attacks to suicide bombings, and on the other hand to a shortage in supply, as aggressive Israeli military operations in the Occupied Territories have made smuggling increasingly difficult.

The consequences of small arms availability, use and misuse for both societies are dire and range beyond the direct impacts of death and injury. Fear, intimidation and an escalating culture of violence can be witnessed daily. In addition, the proliferation of small arms is becoming a noticeable factor in the disintegration of communities. Since 1995, 151 Palestinians have been killed by Palestinian weapons misuse within the Occupied Territories, and 79 vigilante killings of alleged collaborators have taken place in the last three years alone.⁸

In Israel, homicide rates related to small arms have soared in the last three years, averaging approximately 110 casualties annually during the years of the second Intifada, in comparison to approximately 60 cases a year during the second half of the 1990s.⁹ Particularly revealing is the growing use of small arms in cases of femicide – the killing of women by their intimate male partner or other close relative. Gun ownership in Israel is primarily a male phenomenon, with over 97 per cent of registered firearms held by men. Since the early 1990s, an average of 17 women has been killed annually by men known to them. Until the beginning of the second Intifada, a consistent ratio of 1 to 4 of those murders was committed by small arms. Since 2000, this has risen to one in every two cases. As of 2003, approximately two-thirds of all femicide cases were perpetrated by small arms.¹⁰

These figures illustrate the militarisation of Israeli society. Sociological research is beginning to demonstrate the cascading effect on violence against women, including more often than not the psychological terror that children are subjected to daily by the mere presence of a weapon in the house, and the tacit and overt threat of its use by fathers, husbands and other relatives. In 2003 alone, some 40,000 women were treated at Israel's emergency wards as a result of violence at home, out of which 15,000 women were hospitalised (it is unclear to what extent these cases are related to weapons misuse).¹¹

Glimmers of hope stem both from public opinion and past government practice. During the buildup towards the Camp David summit in early 2000, a poll by the University of Tel Aviv demonstrated that a significant majority of Israelis (53 per cent versus 38 per cent) were supportive of major restrictions on gun ownership. This was primarily due to the public fear of internal social violence coupled with the belief that portions of the settler population would misuse weapons in the instance of settlement dismantlement in the Occupied Territories.¹²

Secondly, between 1996 and 2000, the Israeli government, bowing to demands from civil society groups, curbed the possession of small arms by nearly 25 per cent dropping from almost 300,000 to approximately 220,000 during a four-year period.¹³ Undertaken by the Ministry of the Interior together with the police, and followed through by both right and left-wing governments, this effort proved strikingly successful. Direct causal connections to the general drop in femicide are hard to draw; yet an overall reduction in violence did indeed take place in Israel as a whole. Given the tight grip Israeli security services have over the amount of weapons both within Israel and Palestine, coupled with the overwhelming support of public opinion for small arms disarmament the success of the late 1990s can be repeated, provided the government chooses to do so.

For footnotes see p. 7.

This article was contributed by Gilad Ben-Nun, who works for the Geneva-based War Torn Societies Project following a research fellowship in UNIDIR. Previously he was the director of research for Peace Now in Israel after serving for 10 years in the Israeli security establishment.

Notes for Lebanon article

¹ See Zahar, Marie-Joelle, "Peace by Unconventional Means: Lebanon's Ta'if Agreement", in *Ending Civil Wars: The Implementation of Peace Agreements*, edited by Stephen Stedman, Donald Rothchild and Elizabeth Cousens (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 2002), pp. 567–568.

² Zahar, op. cit., pp. 572–573.

³ Full text of the agreement is available at www.lebanese-forces.org/lebanon/agreements/taef.htm.

⁴ Zahar, op. cit., pp. 577–579.

⁵ Maginnis, Kent, *Pathways to Peace*, 1999, www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/disarmament.htm.

⁶ For example, the Lebanese Forces sold weapons, including helicopters gunships, patrol boats, various types of artillery, rocket launchers and ammunition worth USD 330 million to Bosnian Serbs. See Ibid and Zahar, op. cit. pp. 578–579. See also Human Rights Watch, "Israel Withdrawal from South Lebanon: The Human Rights Dimensions", May 2000, available at: www.hrw.org/campaigns/lebanon/israel1051000.htm.

⁷ US State Department, *Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, Background Note: Lebanon*, November 2003, www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn.

⁸ Zahar, op. cit., p. 589.

⁹ See for instance Human Rights Watch, "Lebanon: End Harassment of Rights Activists", "September 2003", available at www.hrw.org/press/2003/09/lebanon091203.htm/5419.htm.

¹⁰ Summary of proceedings of the conference on "Traditional Cultural Practices and Small Arms in the Middle East: Problems and Solutions" at the Jordan Institute of Diplomacy, Amman, Jordan, 3–4 November 2002, available at www.iansa.org/regions/nafrica/cultural_practices.doc.

¹¹ See IANSA, "Implementing the Programme of Action 2003: Action by states and civil society". Produced by International Alert, Saferworld and the Centre for International Co-operation and Security, Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford, 2003, p. 111/112, www.iansa.org/documents/report/colour/progress3.pdf.

Notes for Israel-Palestine article

¹ Palestine Red Crescent Society, www.palestinercs.org/intifadasummary.htm, Btselem – The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied, www.btselem.org/Territories.

² *Small Arms Survey 2003*, p. 77.

³ *Small Arms Survey 2003*, p. 77.

⁴ Author's estimates are based on interviews with Israeli army officials, cross referenced with: Cordesman A.H. (2002), *The Arab Israeli Conventional Military Balance 2000*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, www.csis.org.

⁵ Golan A., "A Gun Upon Demand", *Haaretz*, 30 October 1996; Landau S.F. (2003), "Violence in Israeli Society: Its Relation to Social Stress" in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry XVIII: Jews and Violence*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 139–140.

⁶ Weapons were handed over by the Israeli army in order to implement the Declaration of Principles, also known as the Oslo Agreement, which provided for the establishment by the Palestinian Authority of a "strong police force" (art. VIII).

⁷ *Small Arms Survey 2003*, p. 78.

⁸ Bassem Eid, "The Reign of the Thugs", *Haaretz*, 28 January 2004 and "Letters to the Editor", 24 July 2003.

⁹ Author's estimates based upon Israeli homicide registrations, compared with indicative police precincts information from Tel-Aviv (Yarkon and Ayalon & precincts), cross referenced with femicide data: www.no2violence.co.il.

¹⁰ See www.no2violence.co.il.

¹¹ *Haaretz*, "40,000 battered women hospitalized in 2003", 26 November 2003.

¹² The Tami Steinmetz Centre for Peace Research, University of Tel Aviv, Peace Index, April 2000, <http://spirit.tau.ac.il/socant/peace/peaceindex/2000/files/apr2000e.doc>.

¹³ Israeli Ministry of Interior, special communiqué, 23 October 2002.

News in Brief

Brazil Congress approves tough gun controls

On 9 December 2003, after a six year wrangle, Brazil's Senate passed a bill which enacts some of the strictest gun laws in Latin America. The law aims to control the flow of legal arms into the swollen black market, thought to contain up to 20 million handguns. It also calls for a national referendum in October 2005 which will ask: "Should the sale of arms and munitions be prohibited in Brazil?" It took waves of slaughter between Rio de Janeiro drug gangs, thousands of police killings of civilians and the annual deaths of over a hundred police officers in Sao Paulo to push legislators into action.

Source: Reuters, 10 December 2003. For more information visit www.vivario.org

UK flouting its own arms export guidelines

'The Guardian' newspaper revealed in December 2003 that the UK government was allowing the selling of arms and security equipment to countries whose human rights record it had strongly criticised. The statement was based on lists of weapons cleared for export and included Indonesia, where the Foreign Office has reported allegations of extrajudicial killings; Nepal, where it has reported summary executions; and Saudi Arabia, where torture is just one abuse of basic human rights attacked by the Foreign Office. UK arms export guidelines state that licences will be refused if there is a "clear risk [they] might be used for internal repressions".

Source: The Guardian, 6 December 2003

Aid worker shot to death in Afghanistan

A French United Nations worker, Bettina Goislard, 29, was shot dead on 16 November 2003 by a man who opened fire on her vehicle in what an official said was the first UN staff member slain in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban regime. The driver of her car, an Afghan

national, was shot in the arm. UNHCR was "shocked and devastated" by the death of Goislard, who was "killed in cold blood" while travelling in a marked UN car.

Source: Associated Press, 16 November 2003

Ethiopia: Peace leading to proliferation?

Ethnically diverse, with a porous border with neighbouring war-torn Sudan and a local population competing for land, western Ethiopia has long witnessed violent clashes. A spate of killings in the Gambella area in December 2003 has prompted demands for an independent inquiry. Observers hope that the peace process in Sudan between the government and the main rebel group Sudan People's Liberation Army will radiate into the Horn – quelling border violence, encouraging peace talks in Somalia, and warming Ethio-Eritrean relations. But it could also mean that the ample supply of weapons used during the 20-year civil war in Sudan could flood across a largely porous border to rebel groups. Analysts say an explosion of small arms has already fuelled the fighting in Gambella.

Source: IRIN Analysis, 8 January 2004

Liberia: UN rethinks disarmament programme

The United Nations is reassessing the way it conducts its disarmament programme in Liberia, following a false start in December 2003. The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) started to disarm fighters loyal to former president Charles Taylor at barracks near Monrovia, but was forced to abandon the exercise 10 days later after former combatants rioted in the city to demand cash for handing in their guns. UNMIL subsequently agreed to pay former fighters a \$75 advance on their \$300 rehabilitation allowance as they surrendered their weapons, but the demobilisation camp was overwhelmed by people rushing to hand in guns and claim the cash.

Source: IRIN News, 7 January 2004

The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue is an independent and impartial organisation, based in Geneva, Switzerland, dedicated to dialogue on humanitarian issues, the resolution of violent conflict and the alleviation of its impacts on people. The Centre facilitates high-level, low-key dialogue amongst principal actors to armed conflict as well as other stakeholders such as NGOs and UN agencies.

This work is complemented by research and policy efforts to advance action on contemporary humanitarian challenges such as the nature of non-state armed groups, mediation techniques, war economies, the rule of law and arms availability. In 2001 the Centre established the Human Security and Small Arms Programme which undertakes a variety of projects aimed at furthering understanding about the human cost of weapons availability and misuse, as well as advocating options for action.

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