Introduction

The technology of warfare has evolved dramatically over the last century. It has seen the introduction of air warfare, unmanned missiles, and weapons of mass destruction. Certain weapons, however, are exceedingly simple, but just as deadly. Moreover, these weapons injure and kill civilians at an alarming rate, due to their widespread use and longevity. Small arms have flooded both the legal and illegal arms markets, and are widely available to armies, militias, and insurgents due to their inexpensive price tag. Landmines from wars decades old still litter some countries, maiming farmers and children who do not see them or think they are toys. Cluster munitions, while not as widely used due to their technological sophistication, similarly harm innocent civilians when unexploded bomblets are discovered.

Small Arms

Often referred to as the real weapons of mass destruction, the scale and costs of small arms proliferation are staggering. Small arms and light weapons accounted for between 60 and 90 percent of all direct conflict deaths in 2003, or 80,000 to 108,000 deaths. Death from homicide and suicide amount to an additional 200,000 to 300,000 annually. An estimated 7 to 8 million small arms and light weapons (SALW) are produced every year, adding to a global stockpile estimated at 850 million. Some 1,200 companies operating in approximately 90 countries are involved in small arms production. Small arms and light weapons exports in 2003 were an estimated USD 5 billion. The largest small arms exporters are the Brazil, China, the European Union, Russia the United States.

The UN has taken several steps to address small arms proliferation. In 2001 it adopted the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (also known as the Programme of Action, or POA), which sought to increase cooperation and information-sharing on several issues, including stockpile management, surplus disposal, manufacturing, transferring, and post-conflict measures, through annual national reports on the implementation of the POA. At the insistence of the United States, the POA focuses exclusively on illicit and state-owned small arms, never on legal civilian weapons.

National measures of the POA included putting in place laws, regulations, and administrative agencies to control the production, export, import, and stockpiling of small arms and light weapons; establishing agencies that would coordinate to identify and dismantle organizations and groups that illicitly manufactured and traded small arms and light weapons, and prevent them from forming to begin with; and implementing adequate rules and regulations to maintain security of legal arms stockpiles controlled by the government. An important regional measure was to cooperate and coordinate to prevent illegal cross-border arms flows. On the global level, measures included cooperating with the United Nations in the implementation of arms embargoes, and encouraging governments to better cooperate with Interpol to identify and apprehend peoples and organizations that deal in illegal arms. However, the POA is not legally binding, so adherence is far from uniform around the globe. Moreover, many states with huge
surpluses of weapons, which can easily and frequently be diverted onto the black market, lack the money and infrastructure to properly secure their stockpiles. The POA encourages states to destroy surplus military SALW. Poorer countries, however, often prefer to keep their surpluses for re-sale.

A major initiative to strengthen international control of all conventional weapons including SALW transfers is the proposed Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). A British initiative, this has strong support from Europe, which supports efforts to end arms transfers to human rights violators and regions involved in armed conflict, and especially by most of Africa, where it is expected to end transfers to non-state actors (NSAs), especially rebel groups and warlords. It is regarded skeptically by many Arab countries, which fear it will undermine their freedom to support Palestine, and regarded skeptically by America, China and Russia, always jealous of their freedom of action.

Another major UN initiative in the realm of small arms proliferation is Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR). The goal of this programme is to facilitate ending armed conflict and strengthen peace. DDR aids post-conflict countries in establishing lasting peace and security, by reclaiming small arms from rebels and insurgents for government stockpiling and/or destruction, disbanding the warring parties, and bringing ex-combatants into the political, economic, and social systems. DDR typically involves coordinated disarmament of combatants, measures to assure their safety and re-education, and programs to find a place for them in civilian society. Although costly and difficult to implement, dozens of successful DDR programmes have occurred since the early 1990s, including DR Congo, Republic of Congo, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. By cooperating bilaterally with post-conflict countries and bringing in non-governmental organizations as well, the UN maintains DDR operations in over a dozen countries.

Landmines

Landmines have been used in warfare since the beginning of the 20th century, designed to explode remotely or after being activated by an unwitting soldier, jeep, tank, etc. However, much like small arms, landmines have become a victim of their own success. Relatively cheap and versatile, landmines proliferated in the latter half of the 20th century. They could be used to protect bases from attack, to add an extra line of defense on the frontlines, or to “hold” territory without a large contingent of soldiers, who could then be deployed to other areas of interest. However, removal of landmines when the fighting was over was not a priority in many of the war-torn countries around the world. As a result, civilian casualties due to leftover landmines began to mount at an alarming rate. By the end of the 1990s, experts estimated that between 15,000 and 20,000 new casualties were incurred by abandoned landmines each year. Landmines are strewn across some 75 countries, many of which do not have people and land to spare. As with other weapons, the cost of landmines is actually greater when its victim survives. Medical expenses to repair or replace damaged or amputated limbs; wages that the person loses in the event they cannot be employed due to their injuries; the lost wages of family members who must
tend to victims of landmines rather than work; and the lost production of swaths of land that are infested with abandoned landmines, all take a toll on the struggling nations.

A grassroots movement, made up of citizens, national leaders, and NGOs, gained momentum in the late 1990s in their push for a complete ban on anti-personnel mines, primarily under the umbrella of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL). This push eventually resulted in the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, also known as the Ottawa Treaty or the Mine Ban Treaty. This treaty not only prohibited the production and sale of anti-personnel mines, but also required state parties to destroy their stockpiles of anti-personnel mines within four years of signing, and clear all mined areas within their borders within ten years. State parties may only keep a small number of mines for training purposes (clearing and detecting mines, etc.). However, the Ottawa Treaty only applies to anti-personnel mines (APLs); anti-tank, remote control (claymores), anti-handling mines, among others, have no restrictions.

To date the Ottawa APL treaty 156 state parties. Major powers, including China, Russia and the United States have not signed, although they say they have ended production and exports in compliance with the treaty.

Cluster Munitions

Cluster munitions are weapons that launch a shell, capsule, or missile, that then disperse smaller submunitions, also called bomblets, over the targeted area. Defective, unexploded bomblets, then, can be left over a wide area to be found and tampered with by innocent civilians, much like landmines, causing injury or death. Cluster munitions were first developed during World War II, and have subsequently been significantly improved upon, increasing their lethality by an incredible amount. Cluster munitions today are used by at least 23 countries, and each bomb may contain anywhere from three to thousands of submunitions. Use of cluster munitions is opposed by organizations like the Red Cross and the United Nations because of their wide area of effect (as large as several football fields in some cases), and the large number of unexploded submunitions they leave behind. As an example, UN experts have estimated that as many as one million unexploded submunitions may remain in cluster munitions strike sites in Lebanon, following the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war.

To address the issue, the Convention on Cluster Munitions has been developed in the United Nations, and will be open for signatures in December 2008. The convention prohibits state parties from using, stockpiling, manufacturing, transferring, or developing cluster munitions, nor to assist or encourage any other country to do so. Certain cluster munitions are still allowed, with strict qualifications, such as weight, number of submunitions, and electronic self-destruct and self-deactivation measures. Russia, China, and the United States have refrained from endorsing the Convention on Cluster Munitions, though many U.S. allies have expressed support. As a result, a provision was added that allowed signatory states to cooperate in military exercises and operations with non-signatory states, so as to legitimize military cooperation between those that do and do not use cluster munitions.
Conclusion

Advances in technology have brought great prosperity to many people in the world, but they have also brought great violence. As the weapons of warfare evolve, it is important for the international community to cooperate to ensure that civilians do not continue to die after the cease-fire has been signed. Small arms, landmines, and cluster munitions all contribute to civilian deaths after wars have ended, due to their large numbers, ease of use, and longevity. Working towards limiting their roles during war is an important first step in reducing their roles after war.

But in every case, there is serious tension between governments advocating restrain and control, and others seeking exceptions to permit established use and trade in these weapons.
Recommended Resources

*Reaching Critical Will* is a website devoted to coverage of the UN GA First Committee.


**SALW:**


Interview with Daniël Prins, Head of UNODA Conventional Arms Branch, on small arms diplomacy in the UN, *UN Connections*, no. 87, October 2008. [http://www.wfuna.org/site/c.rvIYlEcN1JwE/b.4567077/](http://www.wfuna.org/site/c.rvIYlEcN1JwE/b.4567077/)


**Arms Trade Treaty**

Landmines:

*Landmines Monitor* is a massive publication covering landmines issues in virtually all countries. [http://www.icbl.org/lm/2007/](http://www.icbl.org/lm/2007/)


Cluster Munitions:

“EU to urge Russia, Georgia to dispose of unexploded cluster bombs”, *Manichi Daily News* (in English), Tokyo, 7 October 2009. [http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20081007p2a00m0na015000c.html](http://mdn.mainichi.jp/mdnnews/news/20081007p2a00m0na015000c.html)

