
Conclusion: Small arms proliferation – an opportunity for progress

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The South Caucasus: ten years on from chaos

THE STUDIES INCLUDED IN THIS REPORT have provided an insight into the effects that small arms and light weapons (SALW) have had on the South Caucasus. The primary conclusion that can be reached from the case studies is that while some progress has been made over the past decade to enhance security in the region and to control SALW proliferation, considerable challenges remain.

At the time of the break-up of the Soviet Union, there were few attempts to tackle SALW proliferation, as it was not seen as a major concern. This problem was exacerbated by the lack of a formal treaty controlling SALW. Whilst the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty has ensured that there is some degree of openness in tracking and monitoring heavy weaponry, this is not so for small weapons. As a result, there is little information about the division and distribution of SALW arsenals, meaning that estimates about the quantity and location of SALW in the region differ enormously and precise figures are unlikely to ever be known.

Between the late 1980s and early 1990s the entire region experienced chaotic political upheavals associated with the break up of the Soviet Union. Given that the countries of the South Caucasus had only enjoyed independence for a brief period from 1918 to 1921, many expressed doubts that the new states that emerged from that upheaval would survive at all.¹

However, in spite of the circumstances surrounding their emergence, the states did survive, and there is now a greater level of regional peace and stability than there was a few years ago. Though there has still not been a political breakthrough, the ceasefires in South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh have largely held. In Abkhazia, there have been

¹ In giving evidence to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee on 25 May 1999, then Foreign Office Minister, Joyce Quinn MP, suggested that at the start of the 1990s the British Government initially had doubts over whether the states of the South Caucasus would survive: 'New countries were coming into being, which perhaps at the time there was some uncertainty as to how durable they [the South Caucasian states] might be and what kind of evolution they were going to take'. See House of Commons website: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/199899/cmselect/cmcaff/349/905251

sporadic outbreaks of fighting, but there has been no return to full-scale hostilities. These scenarios provide some optimism, though the lack of progress in finding a long-term political solution to these conflicts is a worrying and destabilising factor. The ongoing conflict in nearby Chechnya, which continues to lumber on bloodily, also has a destabilising influence on the situation in the South Caucasus.

A political settlement to the conflicts is very important in establishing normality in the region and also in combating SALW proliferation. Yet efforts to control SALW are by no means dependent on political settlements being found, especially in those areas where there is relative stability; in fact, tackling SALW proliferation can have a vital impact in stabilising the situation and making a long-term political settlement more likely. SALW tend to fuel conflicts, and the more their possession and impact can be reduced, the better the chances for conflict prevention. Measures to restrict the availability of SALW in the region can also have a direct impact on the day-to-day lives of those affected by conflict; for example, they can help to build confidence between communities, and can limit the capacity of criminal groups. A good example of the positive effects that measures to reduce SALW proliferation can have is provided by the work of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in the Georgian-South Ossetian zone of conflict, which has already had some success in building confidence between communities and collecting weapons. Nonetheless, there are few such initiatives currently underway in the South Caucasus.

The general improvement in security in the region is reflected by the authors in their case studies: law and order has been firmly re-established in most of the South Caucasus (there are also law-enforcement agencies in areas that are outside the control of the central authorities, such as those in Sukhum(i) and Tskhinval(i)); organised crime is being fought more effectively; SALW do not generally circulate so freely and openly; and states have worked to develop more legitimate security institutions.

However, problems persist, particularly in security 'grey areas' where no side has firm control, and these need to be tackled as a priority. The situation in areas such as the Gal(i) region and the Pankisi Gorge, where local residents are forced to live with the constant threat of crime and violence, is miserable. Furthermore, these 'grey areas' undermine security elsewhere in the region. For example, the repercussions of the uncertain security climate in the Pankisi Gorge are keenly felt in both the Abkhaz and South Ossetian zones of conflict.

The ongoing development of civil society in the region is also to be welcomed. Until the late 1980s, no truly non-governmental organisations (NGOs) existed across the Soviet Union, yet over the past ten years, all sorts of groups and societies have sprung up dealing with a vast range of issues. In the South Caucasus as anywhere else, civil society is crucial for a modern democracy. It provides a forum for positive interaction between the state and those whom it is supposed to serve as well as a vehicle for promoting change.

The past decade has also seen the integration of the states of the South Caucasus into the international community. Each state is a member of the United Nations (UN), the OSCE, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme, and the Council of Europe, as well as a number of other international bodies. Furthermore, the three states of the South Caucasus have established bilateral relations with a variety of countries across the world, though relations between states in the region itself are often tense. The international community is in turn actively engaged in the South Caucasus, and is involved in activities and programmes in a variety of fields from democracy-building to economic development.

However the post-Soviet transition has been fraught with difficulties. Building a new order out of the vast, centrally controlled Soviet state caused problems across the board, and nowhere was this truer than in the military sphere. A superpower, with the armed forces and armaments to match that status, had gone into meltdown.

Simultaneously there was a collapse in the previously unchallenged control of the central authorities, and anarchy ensued. The enormity of this event cannot be overstated, and the number of arms released into society and out of the control of the authorities, as shown by our case studies, will never be known for certain. The widespread availability of arms will continue to have implications for the region for many years. The most common small arm in the region, the Kalashnikov, can have a life span of seventy years or more, and weapons that first saw service in World War II continue to be used in the region's conflicts. The task of tackling SALW proliferation in the Caucasus is huge. However the cost of not taking on the problems that still plague the region could be even greater.

Domestic challenges

The case studies highlight a number of pressing issues that need to be tackled by national actors, especially at a governmental level. In the first place it is obvious that the chaos which plagued the South Caucasus in the early 1990s has cast a long shadow. Yet in spite of the ongoing difficulties caused by SALW diffusion, authorities in the region tend to shy away from fully tackling the issue. There is often a tendency among officials and other decision makers to regard SALW proliferation and its effects as somebody else's problem.

As a first step, those in power must face up to the problem in all its complexity, and commit to tackling it as a priority. Until this occurs, little progress can be made. Although the authorities across the South Caucasus have enjoyed successes in curbing the proliferation of SALW over the past few years, the methods used, and results, have varied widely. The key to further progress lies in recognising that SALW proliferation is both a cause and effect of insecurity, and in striving to develop a comprehensive range of measures to tackle the roots of the problem.

That said, a number of other obstacles stand in the way of further success in tackling SALW proliferation, many of which are related to security perceptions amongst the population of the region. In certain areas of the Caucasus there is a belief that SALW possession can actually increase community security through deterring potential aggression by one's neighbours. For example, Alan Parastaev made the point that the South Ossetians forced the peace by making sure they were as well armed as their opponents. Similarly, in Dagestan, the presence of large amounts of SALW is claimed to have acted as a restraining factor and has contributed to the relative stability in the republic since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In such circumstances, measures to control SALW must be carried out as part of wider efforts to create a safe and secure environment, including security sector reform, conflict resolution, and economic and social development. Only in this way can an environment be created where the possession of SALW is considered unnecessary.

SALW are also seen as being an important means of defence at a personal level – as the case studies demonstrate, people in some areas of the Caucasus still do not have a sense of individual security. Their concerns exist for a number of reasons, including:

- General lack of law and order – although the situation has improved, crime is still a big problem across the region.
- Fear of fresh outbreaks of hostilities – particularly in frozen conflict zones such as South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Nagorno Karabakh and in security 'grey areas'. There is also a fear of informal armed groups in these areas, for example the White Legion and the Forest Brothers, especially where there is a lack of more formal security structures.
- Lack of trust in the law-enforcement structures – many people feel (with some justification) that the law and order institutions are only there to protect their own interests and the interests of those in power, rather than to protect the population at large.

Thus one of the most pressing problems is that of security sector reform.² Problems persist in every part of the region. The security sector is under-funded and under-developed. Security institutions are, as a consequence, dependent upon additional sources of income to keep staff members in work, and without this they would simply cease to operate. Police officers on meagre state salaries are often unable to provide for their families, and often resort to corrupt practices as a means of supplementing their income. As David Darchiashvili noted, corruption is an integral part of the security structures in Georgia. Without adequate provisioning and funding of the sector, corrupt practices will continue to form a vital cog in the workings of security institutions.

Another problem is that these institutions also remain relatively politicised – a legacy of the struggles surrounding independence. Although this is less true now than it was during the early years of independence, many law-enforcement personnel consider their first loyalty as being to certain parts of the political elite rather than to the people as a whole. Though this is slowly changing, more effort should be made to ensure that there is no danger of the security sector once again becoming a wholly political tool.

Reform of the security sector is of crucial importance to the ongoing development of Caucasian governmental institutions and their relationships with the outside world. The countries of the South Caucasus all seek, to some extent, greater co-operation with NATO and the European Union (EU), yet without reform this will be impossible. In NATO states, the concept of democratic civilian control over the security structures is a central pillar of state order. Yet in the South Caucasus democratic civilian control is at best limited.

There also needs to be greater co-operation between internal state security actors. The countries of the South Caucasus have precious few resources as it is without having competing agencies. Security sector institutions must be given clearer remits, tasks and more effective working guidelines. States must also do all they can to discourage the existence of informal armed groups and encourage the formalisation and accountability of security structures as far as possible.

As well as internal inter-agency improvements in co-operation, the authorities will also need to work together more effectively at an international level. States need to open up dialogue on issues of mutual concern. The OSCE initiative bringing together security actors from across the Georgian South-Ossetian zone of conflict is a welcome start.³ However, there is still a distinct lack of co-operation between security organs at every level across the region. Whereas criminals operate on a cross-border basis and thrive under frozen conflict conditions, democratic law-enforcement institutions do not. Criminals have so far had an unfair advantage over the state institutions that are trying to curb their activities. Dialogue must be undertaken to redress the balance. For instance, there is scope for greater co-operation between Georgia and Armenia, and Georgia and Azerbaijan respectively over the management of their mutual borders. Further co-operation across the region including both Armenia and Azerbaijan is of course desirable, but unlikely in the current political climate.

As part of this development process, governments should recognise the valuable role that civil society can play. As well as providing a means of maintaining checks and balances over the security sector institutions, civil society could provide input into governmental policy. Operating independently of government institutions, civil society attracts experts and interested parties on a wide range of issues, providing an independent and at times refreshing viewpoint, and playing an important role in building trust and co-operation. This is particularly true at a regional level, where civil society can do much to promote and facilitate regional dialogue and openness. However, to be effective civil society organisations must be able to speak out without fear of intimidation or retribution. Incidents such as the July 2002 attacks on

² Koyama S, *Security Sector Reform in Georgia*, (Saferworld, 2002).

³ www.osce.org/georgia

employees of the 'Liberty Institute' (an NGO campaigning for greater press freedom in Georgia), allegedly for political purposes, cannot be tolerated.⁴ Events such as these have done little to change an atmosphere where civil society and government officials still remain too isolated from and suspicious of each other. Building trust between them will be an essential part of any increased dialogue.

Yet there are responsibilities on both sides. There is a distinct need for certain individuals and organisations to take a more positive approach to their work with other organisations and officials. Currently, Caucasian civil society too often represents narrow political and personal interests rather than that of the public at large. Furthermore, with a few notable exceptions civil society organisations in the region remain disappointingly underdeveloped. The international community needs to demonstrate its commitment to the long-term development of civil society so that it can operate independently. In particular, civil society and their donors must be pro-active in the long-term development of civil society in the provinces. Far too many NGOs exhibit a metropolitan bias, ignoring areas that are crucial to the region's long-term stability.

Finally the lack of sustained economic development also inhibits measures to tackle SALW proliferation. In an environment where much of the population continues to live in abject poverty, and any economic growth that does take place tends to benefit only a minority of the population, SALW become an instrument of power. This pattern is particularly visible in areas such as the Gal(i) region, where those who are armed are able to exploit the unarmed for economic gain, impeding any economic normalisation. In these circumstances, owning a gun is seen as the best way to get on in life and provide for one's family.

Though changing the current situation is not going to be easy, it is possible: public awareness and information campaigns can help to demonstrate the dangers and malign social effects of SALW proliferation; security sector institutions can develop their capacity to deal with SALW issues, and can improve relations with the local population through community policing and confidence building measures; and cross-border co-operation between law-enforcement agencies can cut crime and increase stability. All these measures would make gun ownership less desirable.

The role of the Russian Federation

There is no doubt that the Russian Federation is still the most important external player in the South Caucasus. This is so not just in terms of geography but also because of Russia's extensive interests south of its border. It is for this reason that Saferworld expressly included a case study written from a Moscow perspective.⁵

Relations between the Russian Federation and its southern neighbours have fluctuated over the years, especially at the start of the 1990s. The breakdown in relations between Russia and the states of the South Caucasus, especially Georgia and Azerbaijan, can, in part, be attributed to the proliferation of SALW in the region.

The governments of the South Caucasus, and the international community in general, need to be more aware of the importance of Russia in the region and understand that it has legitimate strategic and other national interests there. Furthermore, given the increased political stability in the South Caucasus, there is now an opportunity for greater co-operation between the states of the region and Russia.

Greater co-operation would be beneficial in a number of spheres. One step would be to have a better exchange of information and more transparency on the amount and types of SALW possessed by states, as well as those lost over the past decade. Similarly,

⁴ 'Liberty Institute Violently Attacked', 10 July 2002, www.civil.ge

⁵ See also *National and international norms, principles and measures for controlling small arms proliferation: the view from Russia*, report of a Seminar hosted by Saferworld and the PIR Centre, Moscow, December 2001.

there should be closer links between security agencies trying to tackle issues of mutual concern, such as arms trafficking and other forms of crime. This could involve intelligence sharing on SALW proliferation, such as information concerning the routes used for illegal trafficking and the names of individuals who are known to be involved in this trade. At a time when any number of militant and criminal groups seek to acquire illicit weapons, it would also give the world at large better knowledge of the SALW that were available to such organisations and the ways in which these weapons were procured.⁶ These events display the need to share information. SALW are not merely a South Caucasian problem, and the easy access that many appear to have to arms demonstrates that Russia has a keen interest in working with others to tackle this issue.

The role of the international community

The international community is reasonably active in the South Caucasus and can have a positive influence through its resources and activities. Experience gained elsewhere in its work on SALW issues could be further utilised in the region. However, SALW problem is a sensitive one, and should be tackled in a transparent and unambiguous way.

As Cold War practices so clearly demonstrated, aid can be used as a political tool to promote the donor's strategic objectives. Today the South Caucasus is regarded as a crucially important region strategically and politically, and Russia, the USA, Turkey and the EU, amongst others, all have significant interests in the area. Whilst it would be unfair to attribute donor aid to purely political motives, it should be kept in mind that these interests still have a role to play in the management of aid. For instance, the USA's 'Train and Equip' programme in Georgia appears to be driven primarily by the USA's political and security concerns. It is being undertaken largely in response to the terrorist attacks on the USA in September 2001 as part of the 'War Against Terrorism'. Although the programme has the potential to bring long-term benefits through security sector reform, it is already causing further tension between Georgia and Tskhinval(i) and Sukhum(i), and there is a danger that it could become a source of destabilisation in the region.

One of the means by which international organisations have already had a positive influence is by encouraging the development of internationally recognised agreements that provide frameworks for tackling SALW proliferation. The *OSCE Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons*⁷ of November 2000 commits OSCE member states to co-operate on SALW issues in a comprehensive manner. It calls on states to develop a number of measures, including:

- Combating illicit trafficking in SALW.
- Reducing the uncontrolled spread of SALW.
- Ensuring that arms produced are for legitimate security and defence needs and that appropriate export control mechanisms are in place.
- Building confidence, security and transparency regarding SALW issues.
- Dealing with SALW as an integral part of practical measures to improve the security situation in signatory states.
- Ensuring the collection, safe storage and destruction of arms that are surplus to legitimate security requirements.

The OSCE Document also acknowledges that any action to tackle SALW proliferation should be an integral part of the organisation's wider efforts in conflict prevention,

⁶ For instance missiles used in the attempts to shoot down a passenger airline in Kenya in 2002 and military helicopters in Chechnya were of Russian origin.

⁷ As adopted on 24 November 2000 at the 308th plenary meeting of the OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC.JOUR/314).

crisis management and post conflict rehabilitation.⁸ This is very much in line with the findings of the authors of this Monograph's case studies, and the discussions that took place at Saferworld's Yerevan seminar in November 2002.⁹

To some extent, the measures contained in the OSCE Document are reinforced by the UN Programme of Action agreed to in July 2001,¹⁰ which though less detailed, provides an important set of international norms to contribute to tackling SALW issues.¹¹

The European Union Code of Conduct on Arms Exports¹² is another potentially valuable tool in developing controls to tackle the flow of SALW and in enhancing regional security. Since all of the states in the South Caucasus have expressed a desire for closer co-operation and integration with the EU, the Code is a useful working document for states that aspire to the development of EU norms in arms export controls.

There are also a number of opportunities for the international community to have an impact on an inter-governmental basis. For example Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan are members of NATO's PfP and recently participated in PfP exercises in Georgia. Although the exercises involved the participation of a large number of countries, the fact that both Armenia and Azerbaijan took part at the same time is significant. In a similar way, NATO could use its influence, expertise and resources to encourage security sector reform in the South Caucasus through the PfP Trust Fund.

The Council of Europe may also be able to provide a positive framework for progress. As members of the Council, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan have certain obligations. Although the Council of Europe does not have the same powers or authority as institutions such as the EU or the UN, it does have a role to play in encouraging dialogue on the implementation of certain norms contained in Council of Europe documents. For example, the European Convention of Human Rights could be used as a model to develop more transparent and accountable power structures with its provisions for the right to a fair trial, right to privacy and the right to life amongst others.¹³ Indeed, there is extensive European Court of Human Rights jurisprudence on the role of the state, including that relating to the security sector.¹⁴ Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan are clearly falling well short of their obligations in this regard. The Council could also promote greater interaction between states by *inter alia*, encouraging greater dialogue between parliamentarians in the region on issues relating to accountability, security sector reform, countering cross-border crime and tackling SALW proliferation.

The international community is well placed to assist the South Caucasian states in meeting their obligations as set out in the documents and agreements mentioned above. Practical support in the form of training for customs officers on tackling arms trafficking, donating specialist equipment for border monitoring and facilitating cross-border projects to improve co-operation between state officials could be highly desirable. There is certainly scope for donors to be more assertive on the SALW issue, and they should ensure that measures to combat SALW proliferation are sustainable over the long term. This means integrating these initiatives into wider efforts at conflict resolution, peace-building and development.

Given that it potentially has a great deal of influence in the region, the entire international community should consider its overall long-term objectives carefully.

⁸ Section I, OSCE Document on SALW.

⁹ The seminar 'Tackling the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Caucasus: International Norms and Caucasian Realities', was organised by Saferworld and Co-operation and Democracy, 4-5 November 2002, Yerevan. A report of the seminar is available from Saferworld.

¹⁰ The Conference took place between 9 and 20 July 2001 and was entitled 'The Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects'. It involved representatives from most countries. Saferworld facilitated the attendance of representatives from the governments of Georgia and Azerbaijan.

¹¹ For further information see *Biting the Bullet – Advancing the Agenda for the UN 2001 Conference on the illicit Trade in SALW in All its Aspects* (Basic, International Alert and Saferworld, 2001).

¹² *European Code of Conduct on Arms Exports*, The Council of the European Union, 5 June 1998.

¹³ See for instance Articles 2, 3, 5, 6 and 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights.

¹⁴ See for instance *Brannigan & McBride v the UK*, European Court of Human Rights, 1993; *Gulec v Turkey*, European Court of Human Rights, 1997; *Ireland v UK*, European Court of Human Rights, 1973.

Organisations such as NATO, the OSCE and the EU, have a particularly important role to play in the region's development. The international community should also recognise that it has a stake in tackling the proliferation of SALW in the Caucasus. The attacks on a passenger aeroplane in Kenya in December 2002 and reports in February 2003 that shoulder launched surface-to-air missiles could be used to attack aircraft at Heathrow airport in London show that a failure to tackle this issue effectively could have repercussions that go way beyond the confines of the region itself.

Recommendations

Widespread reform is needed across the South Caucasus if the problem of SALW is to be tackled. That reform must have depth and sustainability, and must build an environment where the possession of SALW becomes undesirable. Civil society, the international community and governments all have a part to play in that process.

It is Saferworld's contention that the best way to formulate a long-term, sustainable response to the issues raised in this report is for all actors in the Caucasus to be more open to dialogue and debate, and where appropriate, further co-operation and constructive criticism. This document does not contain all the answers to the problems posed by SALW; however it is hoped that the debate stimulated by the paper will help to develop some responses to the problems facing the region.

Different actors have different roles to play. In this regard a list of recommendations has been compiled that could be used as a basis for taking this process forward.

Governments in the South Caucasus

- **Recognise the close relationship between SALW proliferation and development** – High levels of uncontrolled SALW proliferation seriously impede economic and social development, and thus governments must make SALW issues a priority. SALW proliferation can hinder development whereas tangible economic improvements could reduce the perceived need to possess SALW. This is especially important in the regions where there are often high levels of poverty. Weapons for development schemes should be considered as a method of tying economic improvements to reductions in SALW possession.
- **Formulate a National Action Plan** – Governments can best combat SALW proliferation if they have a clear and co-ordinated policy on small arms, and this is what a National Action Plan on SALW sets out. However, comprehensive information must first be collected in a number of fields in order to decide what action would be most effective. The next three recommendations would help to provide this information.
- **Carry out a review of legislation relating to SALW** – Reviewing legislation relating to SALW will provide valuable information about the strengths and weaknesses of the existing laws. National laws should be measured against international standards, particularly those contained in the OSCE Document on SALW, which all states in the region have signed.
- **Ensure transparency on SALW issues** – Governments should make data on SALW issues more widely available, as far as this is compatible with the state's legitimate security interests. Parliaments should also have greater rights of scrutiny over actions related to SALW initiatives.
- **Establish firearms registers and carry out an audit of SALW in government and public possession** – States need to have a better idea of the numbers and types of SALW in the country. This would be regularly updated, and would provide the authorities with information for combating crime, tracking arms movements etc.

- **Increased security of SALW stockpiles and destruction of surpluses** – Storage sites in the Caucasus are often overloaded, and their security facilities do not always correspond to international standards. There needs to be an assessment of what amount of weapons are needed to provide adequate national security, and of how they can be safely stored. This will allow surpluses to be identified and where appropriate destroyed in a controlled environment.
 - **Establish greater control over SALW manufacturing, trading and international brokering** – Although at present very few arms are being manufactured in the states of the South Caucasus, mechanisms are still needed to ensure that any such arms trading is legitimate and does not undermine national or international security. In particular, there is a danger that international arms brokers could take advantage of loopholes in laws on brokering, particularly if these laws are poorly enforced.
 - **Increase public confidence in the security sector** – The public must be able to feel confident that the authorities can provide for their security and that they do not need to possess weapons themselves. Security institutions must build better relationships with the general public and with different communities in their states. Community-based policing and ‘safer community’ initiatives, which have proved very successful in other parts of the world, could help to bridge this lack of trust.
 - **Clarify the roles and remits of the constituent parts of the security sector** – The current ambiguity in the roles that different agencies have to play undermines the effectiveness of the security sector and leads to a waste of precious resources. Clearly defining the functions of each agency would enable them to target resources more efficiently.
 - **Greater interaction and co-operation with civil society** – There needs to be more recognition of the positive role that civil society can play in tackling SALW issues. Regular consultation should be held with civil society as part of a process to develop a national strategy to deal with the SALW problem. Members of civil society should also be able to express their views freely, without fear of retribution.
 - **Initiate public awareness campaigns on the dangers of SALW proliferation** – There is a need for greater education on the dangers of SALW proliferation, and this can be done in co-operation with civil society. In areas where there is reasonable security, public awareness campaigns can be used to prepare the ground for voluntary weapons collection programmes.
 - **Improve cross-border co-operation on tackling SALW issues** – Crime and trafficking benefit from the current situation, where interaction between neighbouring states on SALW issues is low. Cross-border co-operation is needed between the relevant law-enforcement personnel, first by identifying specific contact points, and then by deeper institutional interaction. This could involve, for instance, joint border monitoring, anti-trafficking initiatives and a regional inter-agency databank on SALW that encourages greater transparency and dissemination of information.
- International community**
- **Undertake practical initiatives that link tackling SALW issues with development** – Like local governments, the international community must also be aware of the close links between SALW proliferation and development, and take this into consideration when allocating donor resources. Technical and financial support should be provided to the states of the South Caucasus to implement the measures that are suggested above.
 - **Prioritise conflict prevention work in areas where tensions exist but violent conflict has not broken out** – Rather than reacting to conflicts that have already occurred and remain frozen, work may be better focussed where there is a ‘peace to keep’. This is particularly relevant to border zones, such as Georgia’s borders with

Azerbaijan (Kvemo-Kartli) and Armenia (Javakheti), where work to foster better relations and understanding between the authorities and local communities would help to lower tensions.

- **The international community must be mindful of the possible impact of its actions on the region** – The work of the international community can have repercussions beyond its immediate goals (as the tensions caused by the ‘Train and Equip’ programme have underlined). International actors must be fully aware of the impact of their actions in the region given the complicated underlying issues that exist there.
- **Encourage the development of civil society as a long-term strategy** – Civil society is often overly dependent on short-term donor grants. More should be done to improve the capacity of civil society organisations to function independently over the long-term. International actors should work with local partners as much as possible, and strengthen their ability to address SALW issues by providing training, financial help and other forms of assistance. It is also important to support civil society across the region, and not merely in major towns. Initiatives to tackle SALW proliferation at a grass-roots level in outlying areas, where the problem is often at its worst, may be more effective than externally imposed measures.

Civil society

- **Work in co-operation and partnership with the government and other members of the community** – Civil society, government officials and the international community can all complement one another in their efforts to tackle SALW proliferation. Civil society should welcome this and act as a facilitator for a more joined-up approach.
- **Carry out an audit of government legislation on SALW issues** – Civil society could carry out an audit of legislation concerning SALW, including laws relating to the possession, manufacturing, export and brokering of weapons.
- **Raise awareness of SALW issues among the general public** – Raising public awareness of SALW issues can have two beneficial effects. Firstly, it can encourage the public to become more involved in anti-proliferation measures and push for change themselves. Secondly, it can help to change attitudes to SALW possession over the long-term, making SALW measures more sustainable. Civil society can play a key role in this awareness raising, both through the media and through community-level initiatives. International NGOs have experience of raising awareness to SALW issues elsewhere in the world, such as in the Balkans, and can help to develop best practices.
- **Conduct research to establish the extent and impact of SALW proliferation** – More research is needed to develop a better understanding of the SALW problem. It can also be used as a means of developing dialogues with governments. International NGOs should actively co-operate with local civil society actors in the region in helping to undertake this research.
- **Facilitate debate and dialogue on SALW issue among key actors** – Civil society can host meetings and hold seminars in order to facilitate dialogue with officials and NGOs from across the region. This should build upon research and other activities that have been carried out.
- **Assist in building trust between communities affected by SALW proliferation** – Where possible, civil society should work with the authorities, for instance encouraging community involvement in law and order initiatives.

About the author

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Saferworld's research project on arms and security in the Caucasus

This chapter is part of a wider Saferworld report, entitled *The Caucasus: Armed and Divided – Small arms and light weapons proliferation and humanitarian consequences in the Caucasus*, which collects together case studies from local experts on the situation in their particular geographical region. The report focuses on the conflicts in the region, the relationship between conflict and levels of arms possession, and the effects of small arms proliferation since the break-up of the Soviet Union. It also includes a chapter on Russia's policy towards the small arms issues in the Caucasus.

To obtain a copy of the complete report, please contact Saferworld at: general@saferworld.org.uk or visit www.saferworld.org.uk