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Belarus

Note: This chapter is almost wholly comprised of information supplied by the Belarusian Government.

Introduction

BELARUS DOES NOT PRODUCE SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS (SALW).

While active in other areas of the arms trade, notably the management of Soviet-era military hardware, communication equipment and control devices, it has shown no intention to enter into production of SALW or the manufacture of ammunition. Its standards of conduct in the SALW trade have been responsible. As Bertsc and Grillot, observe, “Belarusian officials...] remain committed[...] to the continued development, implementation and enforcement of non-proliferation export control policies, practices and procedures[...] Belarus has developed from scratch an export control system that is nearly compatible with Western common standards”¹ Certainly its refusal to engage in the potentially highly profitable marketing of its surplus landmines has been exemplary.

Despite this record, since January of 2002 accusations have been made without public evidence about Belarus’ SALW export policies. In response to these interests and pressures, the Belarusian Government has been forthcoming with information but, to a degree, indeterminate in the mode of its presentation or the extent of its disclosure. When approached to supply data for this research study, there was a pronounced willingness, but the shortage of available time for reply made it difficult to offer information on policy in certain areas. These specifically had to do with itemisation of surplus stocks and full delineation of administrative structures. At the same time great willingness has been shown to pursue this path and the Government specifically wished to emphasise that given more time and the opportunity to participate in future surveys more information would be available. Belarus’ participation in the SCAF/ Voluntas Regional Technical Workshops initiative suggests that this nation may be able to play an important part in creating a model of transparency in SALW for the Former Soviet Union.

Stocks and determination of surplus

Government agencies holding SALW

Weapon holding is divided into two categories: military and law enforcement, each falling under the provenance of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the Ministry of the Interior (MoI) respectively. MOI agencies, for example, are the Border Police, the Road Police, State Security Services, Prison Service, Presidential Police and elements

¹ Bertsch, G, Grillot, S (eds), *Arms on the Market: Reducing the Risk of Proliferation in the Former Soviet Union*, (New York, Routledge, 1998).

of the Department of Emergency Services. Each of these agencies has a separate charter, which incorporates the right to possess firearms and use them for designated purposes.

Quantities of SALW and ammunition held by Government agencies

400,000 items of SALW and 48,255 tons of ammunition, including SALW ammunition. When we pressed the MoD for further itemisation we were told that it was not presently available. It is probable that this response rests on a policy decision that has yet to be made. As this is the first time that such information has been requested in this form it is likely that the security implications of itemisation are still being evaluated.

Civilian possession of SALW

Civilians are only allowed to hold hunting rifles and air guns. For a period of four months in 1991, the restriction on civilian gun ownership was lifted. The ban was put back in place in 1992. There have been several amnesties allowing the surrender of illegal firearms dating from both the 1991 period and the Second World War. There appear to be no statistic or estimates of illegal firearm ownership but the number currently in circulation is believed to be small.

Identification and definition of SALW surplus stocks

The body responsible for identifying and determining surplus stocks of SALW is the MoD. Common sense, on the other hand, suggests that other agencies, such as municipal police forces and the Border Police, for example, must also have a hand in calculating and defining their requirements both in terms of attrition of weaponry and the need for new technology. At present we do not have any information on the mechanisms and procedures governing these evaluations.

Calculations of military needs for SALW and ammunition are made by a set ratio of weaponry to military personnel. The National Security Council has promised to make this ratio available shortly. Weaponry which exceeds the calculated need (based on this ratio plus anticipated requirements for replacement) are deemed surplus, as well as weapons which are classified as obsolete.

Quantities of SALW and ammunition categorised as surplus stocks

Information given to us has been in terms of gross weight rather than in itemised quantities. As mentioned above, it is not clear whether this response is a reflection of actual practice or the result of a policy decision based on security or other considerations.

Differentiation between weapons in active service, weapons in reserve, and surplus weapons

There is a distinction made. Active weapons are those held by soldiers on active duty; an enlisted man has a rifle, while an officer has a side arm as well. Reserve weapons are held for replacement of standard issue items which are lost or damaged; arsenals hold specialised weaponry for use in times of emergency and conflict. Surplus weapons are comprised of weapons that are obsolete or in excess of need for both standard issue and reserve.

Reasons for surplus

The Government reply is that surplus stocks of SALW arose due to the military reductions. This, however, must be placed in historical context. With the decline in relations

between the Baltic States and the Soviet Union in the late 1980s it was deemed prudent by Soviet military authorities to draw their arsenals back across the border into the more secure territory of Belarus. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 these stockpiles were essentially abandoned. Thus they should be understood to be a collection of items unrelated in type and quantity to the perceived defence needs of Belarus – essentially an aleatory inheritance. As time has passed, moreover, most ammunition has expired and become unstable. The arms themselves are hardly state of the art and on the basis of technology and market value have become uncompetitive in terms of the international arms trade. As a result, their storage now constitutes a financial drain on the MoD, bringing with it no perceived benefit. On the contrary, these stockpiles are a double liability: poor security makes their contents vulnerable to theft by criminal elements while their mere presence opens the country to unsubstantiated accusations of illicit surplus arms sales.

Policies

Export control regime

Under Belarusian law the following legislative acts regulate the export of conventional armaments and related technologies:

- The law of Republic of Belarus Regarding export control (*Об экспортном контроле*) of 6 January 1998.
- Presidential Decree of the Republic of Belarus, of 11 May 1999, no 265: Provisions on granting legal entities of the Republic of Belarus the right to engage in foreign trade in specific goods (work, services). (*Положение о порядке предоставления юридическим лицам Республики Беларусь права на осуществление внешнеэкономической деятельности в отношении специфических товаров [работ, услуг]*).
- The law of the Republic of Belarus Regarding arms (*Об оружии*) of 13 November 2001.
- Laws of the Republic of Belarus on Arms nos 61–3 (effective 13 December 2001). These laws impose strict regulations on circulation production, purchasing, use, stockpiling, transfer, export, import) of small arms in Belarus.²
- Decision of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus, of 24 April 2002, no 522: Provisions for the trans-shipment of military goods through the territory of the Republic of Belarus (*Об утверждении положения о транзите товаров военного назначения через территорию Республики Беларусь*).
- Provisions of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus of 4 February 2003, no 133: Measures regarding the implementation of the state control of the import (export) of specific goods (work, services) (*Об осуществлении мер государственного регулирования ввоза [вывоза] специфических товаров [работ, услуг]*). The Republic of Belarus also approved legislative acts regulating the mode of transfer of arms within the Republic with a view to increasing the effectiveness of control of trans-shipment of military goods through its territory.
- Presidential Decree of the Republic of Belarus, 11 March 2003, no 94: Measures regarding the state regulation of military & technical co-operation and export control (*О некоторых мерах по регулированию военно-технического сотрудничества и экспортного контроля*).

² For the text of this law (and most of the other laws and decrees cited) in Russian see: <<http://www.ncpi.gov.be>>

Rules and laws applicable to the destruction of SALW and ammunition

The procedure for SALW destruction in the Republic of Belarus consists of disassembling the weapons, crushing their separate units and parts, and then melting them.

A special procedure has been developed for decommissioning and destroying each type of arms. They are disassembled in special state enterprises. Fifth Category SALW are disassembled in central military bases and arsenals with facilities for the destruction of these weapons. The disassembled muzzles and receivers from these weapons are melted in blast furnaces at the facilities of the Ministry of Industry of the Republic of Belarus, under the control of special commissions and with the participation of the representatives of military agencies. It is not specified which agencies these are. Transfer of SALW designated for destruction is strictly documented. The information required in these records includes factory serial numbers and year of issue of models. All units and details are included in the destruction report, which is signed and certified by the appropriate officials. Additionally, representatives of higher authorities verify the destruction of all parts of the weapons and the accuracy of the accounts. We do not have the positions or agency affiliations of these officials. The procedure for destruction of both surplus SALW and weapons confiscated from the public is the same.

Storage of SALW and ammunition

There is a strict system in the Republic of Belarus for the management of SALW stockpiles, ensuring adequate and reliable monitoring of their existence and safe storage when they are being transported or otherwise processed.

SALW are stored in installations and buildings protected by a double barbed wire fence. The system for protecting SALW stockpiles provides for the use of technical devices and an armed sub-unit for the physical protection of the territory, borders and depots and for the assignment of separate armed posts in places where SALW are stored with troops.

Documentary accounting for SALW is organised in managerial bodies and on site. The timing of checks on account keeping and SALW inventory is determined by the officials' work schedule, specified in orders given to military units. Account keeping and checking of accounting data on SALW by military units and managerial bodies are prescribed in routine report schedules.

The Presidential Decree of the Republic of Belarus Regarding arms (*Закон об оружии*), 13 November 2001, regulates modes of transfer of arms in the Republic of Belarus and is aimed at strengthening international co-operation in the control of crime and illicit spread and circulation of small arms. The rules of safe storage of SALW stockpiles are determined by manuals of management and established under the orders of the Defence Minister of the Republic of Belarus.

Questions of the centralisation of the places of storage are evaluated and determined on the basis of the priorities and interests of national security.

The system controlling SALW security is overseen by officials of a different level. It includes checking: the keys to the doors of the warehouse; the functioning of the alarm, which blocks doors, gates and ventilation hatchways; the functioning of communication systems; the maintenance of the metallic lattices protecting window apertures and ventilation hatchways; the functioning of perimeter and indoor lighting; the teams of sentry dogs; the condition of perimeter enclosures; and the equipment of doors with reliable bolts.

SALW are stored separately from ammunition. Weapons stored are not disassembled, working parts are not stored separately.

In each case of theft or loss the commander is obliged to report to his superior officer and control agencies, and to conduct a search for stolen or lost SALW. Each incident of theft or loss of SALW is examined by the officer in charge. A criminal investigation is

conducted which can result in prosecution. In 2001 there were no incidents of theft or loss of SALW.

Calculations of reserves, use and expense of SALW and ammunition are conducted under strict accounting procedures.

Stocktaking records are checked by inspection commissions on troop bases not less than once a year, and three to five times a year in major storage centres. Checking explosive and fire safety of SALW and ammunition is conducted annually by commissions of the MoD.

Structures and practices

The MoD is in charge of the disposal of surplus weapons held by various Government agencies as well as the disposal of collected and confiscated SALW and ammunition. The destruction of surplus is executed by state-owned agencies.

How many SALW and how many rounds of ammunition from surplus stocks have been stored?

All of the surplus items listed above are presently in storage.

How many SALW and how many rounds of ammunition from surplus stocks have been destroyed?

The table below was supplied to us through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and is based on figures from the MoD. Conspicuous by its absence is a figure for ammunition destroyed. We are, however, aware anecdotally of an intermittent programme to destroy expired stocks of ammunition.

Table 1: SALW Destroyed in 2001

Category and/or model	Decommissioned Arms (Units)
Small arms	
1. revolvers and semiautomatic pistols	453
2. rifles and carbines	232
3. automatic pistols	1131
4. automatic rifles	—
5. light machine-guns	71
Light weapons	
1. heavy machine-guns	—
2. light undermuzzle and heavy grenade launchers	—
3. portable anti-aircraft machine-guns	5
4. anti-tank rifles	—
5. recoilless guns	—
6. portable anti-tank missile systems	—
7. portable anti-aircraft missile systems	—
8. mortars under 100 mm calibre	—

How many SALW and how many rounds of ammunition from surplus stocks have been transferred (exported or sold to commercial dealers within the country)?

According to the most recent report to the OSCE there have been no exports of SALW or ammunition being transferred during 2001. There is no reason to believe that the situation has subsequently altered. There are no commercial SALW dealers in Belarus.

How are revenues from such sales distributed?

Since there are no sales there is no income. It is worth noting, however, that the use of revenue from other types of arms sales has been a politically contentious issue, often utilised by opposition political configurations who have made undocumented allegations of speculation. Given the current political culture in the country it is unlikely that these allegations will provoke and increase transparency, regarding the distribution of revenues. The Government's official position is that such funds are used for social programmes and capital renovations for social institutions such as hospitals and sports facilities.

How many SALW and rounds of ammunition have been retrieved from the civilian population?

This information, for unspecified reasons, was not made available to us. The figure, though, is likely to be small. Belarus does not have a gun-culture and most SALW in private hands were confiscated by the mid-1990s. In the Republic of Belarus, weapons are collected on a regular basis from the civilian population and are subsequently destroyed.

How many of these have been stored, destroyed and transferred?

We have been told informally that it is Government policy to destroy all weapons and ammunition confiscated from civilians.

Does the Government regularly review the surplus holdings?

Surplus holdings are reviewed annually under the auspices of the MoD and the National Security Council in compliance with, and exceeding the requirements of, OSCE reporting procedures.

International assistance

Unfortunately no assistance has been provided Belarus for the decommissioning of surplus weapons or the securing of stockpiles. However, both the MoD and the MFA welcome and seek such co-operation. This was explicitly stated at the November 2002 Technical Workshop in Minsk.

The Belarusian Government is eager to participate in any international initiative promoting transparency in SALW transfers and decommissioning. It is an active participant in the SCAF/Voluntas initiative of regional technical workshops on these issues. It is felt that this is a strong issue for Belarus and one that will help to promote its leadership in a wider Europe, while integrating it into the ongoing discourse already established in the West.

Reforms to implement the OSCE Document on SALW

On 15 July 2002, Presidential Decree of the Republic of Belarus no 383 was signed. The Decree concerns the Republic of Belarus' fulfilment of its international obligations under the OSCE Document on SALW. In accordance with what is laid out in the decree, the MFA, the MoD, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry for Emergency Situations, the State Committee of Border Forces and State Customs Committee are determined as the agencies responsible for guaranteeing the fulfilment of the OSCE Document on SALW. The decree also regulates the obligation to prepare information on SALW questions to participating OSCE States, and the form this information should take. The adoption of the edict will make it possible for the Republic of Belarus fully to accomplish its obligations under the OSCE Document.

Remarks

The information provided by the Belarusian Government contains some internal contradictions. On the one hand, the Government claims that no export production takes place and no stockpiled weapons are sold. On the other hand, it states that any revenues from such sales are used to construct hospitals and sports facilities. It also states that alarms, multiple locks, inventories, perimeter lights, walls, guard dogs, back up generators and other measures are used to secure storage facilities, and that there are no incidents of theft or loss from these facilities. It seems odd to make the claim that an existent, sophisticated system functions well whilst also signalling an urgent need for international help to manage stockpile security. Poor security is not directly detailed in the report, but only suggested by the stated wish of the Government to receive international support for stockpile management. Assistance programmes could be better advocated by an increase in transparency about the difficulties with stockpile management hitherto elided by the Government.