



Forum: Disarmament and International Security

Issue: The social impacts of small arms availability with special regard to the safety of educational institutions

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Introduction

Small arms and light weapons continue to be most commonly used in many of the violent civil and ethnic conflicts. Also all of the major armed conflicts of the post-Cold War era were being fought mainly with light weapons.

Civilians and civilian societies have been the principal victims of these weapons. For example, gun violence in the United States results in tens of thousands of deaths and injuries annually. About 1.4 million people have died from firearms in the U.S. between 1968 and 2011 (BBC News. 5 January 2016).

According to the CNN investigation, from 2009 up to 2018, there were at least 288 school shootings in the United States. However, the problem of school shootings is not specifically American, there were cases of such crimes in Finland, Germany, Russia and other countries.

Definition of the key terms

Small arms – individual-service kinetic projectile firearms. These include: handguns (revolvers, pistols, derringers and machine pistols), muskets/rifled muskets, shotguns, rifles (assault rifles, battle rifles, carbines, designated marksman rifles, sniper rifles, etc.), submachine guns/personal defense weapons, squad automatic weapons and light machine guns.

Light weapons – conventional munitions that can be carried by an individual combatant or by a light vehicle. This includes (small arms), bazookas, rocket propelled grenades, light anti-tank missiles, light mortars, shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles and hand placed landmines. The use of most types of light weapons does not require complex training or operational expertise, making them suitable for insurgents and irregular forces, which lack the formal infrastructure of a professional army.

Social impact – the effect of a social phenomenon on people and different communities.

Safety of an educational institution a condition for preserving the life and health of students, pupils and employees from internal and external threats.

School shooting - an attack on an educational institution, such as a school or University, with a firearm. Incidents that resulted in four or more deaths are classified as mass shootings.

This phenomenon should be distinguished from **terrorist acts** involving various types of weapons (such as the seizure of school in Russian town Beslan (2004)).

Terroristic act - calculated use of violence (or the threat of violence) against civilians in order to attain goals that are political or religious or ideological in nature.

Zero tolerance policy refers to school discipline policies and practices that mandate predetermined consequences, typically severe, punitive and exclusionary (e.g., out of school suspension and expulsion), in response to specific types of student misbehavior – regardless of the context or rationale for the behavior.

Background information

The effects of globalization, technological advances and the end of the Cold War, have all played a role in changing patterns which place more advanced technologies in the hands of a wider variety of users.

Many societies are becoming increasingly militarized. Militarization includes the presence of heavily armed policemen or soldiers patrolling streets, military personnel occupying high government posts, military censorship, armed guards in schools and public buildings.

Salvadorean psychologist Ignacio Martin-Baro suggests that the excessive militarization of a society leads to a “mental militarization”, by which violent responses to social problems become the norm.

Militarization and brutalization destroys levels of tolerance and normative perceptions of human dignity, inviting increasingly widespread acts of rape, torture and other forms of repression. Political tolerance and democratic participation in the political process are circumscribed in areas where violence is the determining factor of societal or national development.

Legal and illegal arms sales to different parts of the world are constantly increasing. For example, the volume of arms sales in 2006 was about three billion dollars, and by the end of 2011 increased tenfold. The UN experts believe that real sales far exceed these figures.

According to the conclusion of the Geneva International Institute, it is the fault of the United States that the global sale of individual weapons is constantly increasing. And, of course, the US remains the largest supplier of pistols, revolvers, hunting rifles and ammunition. About 48% of the weapons market segment is imported from the United States. Russia, Germany, Italy and China are also major global suppliers of small arms and light weapons: their sales amount to \$200 million.

These data confirm the fact that the arms market is constantly growing and it is a profitable and sustainable business.

Countries with the most militarized population

The leader in this case is the USA. About 265 million small arms are stored in the hands of the American citizens ("Guardian", 2016). With a population of about 320 million, this is an impressive number. Almost everywhere, except in the three States, it can be bought and worn freely.

There is a discussion concerning the relationship between the number of weapons owned by citizens and the number of crimes in a society. There is an opinion that legally owned firearms are used for lawful purposes much more often than they are used to commit crimes. At the same time the USA has the highest number of school-related shootings in the world.

School shootings

As of October 2018, the five deadliest school shootings in the United States since the 1999 Columbine High School massacre in Colorado in which 13 were killed were the:

- 2007 Virginia Tech shooting (33 dead)
- 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Newtown, Connecticut (27 dead)
- 2018 Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida (17 dead)
- 2015 Umpqua Community College shooting near Roseburg, Oregon (10 dead)
- 2018 Santa Fe High School shooting in Texas (10 dead)

There also were two mass shootings in German schools (2002 and 2009) in which 25 people were killed by students.

On October 17, 2018, this sad list was extended by the tragedy at the Kerch Polytechnic College (Crimea). Local student Vlad Roslyakov shot 20 students. Judging by Vlad's photo, his image was clearly borrowed from one of the participants in the Columbine school shooting.

According to studies, factors behind school shooting include family dysfunction, lack of family supervision, mental illness among many other psychological issues. Among the topmost motives of attackers were: bullying/persecution/threatened (75%) and revenge (61%), while 54% reported having numerous reasons. The remaining motives included an attempt to solve a problem (34%), suicide or depression (27%), and seeking attention or recognition (24%).

The report of the United States Secret Service (2002) found that security measures in schools are not that important for preventing school shooting as paying more attention to student behavior. Zero-tolerance policies and metal detectors are "unlikely to be useful". Excluding or suspending students for violation of discipline on the contrary can encourage some of them to return to school with guns.

School shootings have sparked a political debate over gun violence, zero tolerance policies, gun rights and gun control.

Relevant treaties and the UN Resolutions

The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)

Part of a larger global effort begun in 1997 by Costa Rican President and 1987 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Óscar Arias. In that year, Arias led a group of Nobel Peace Prize laureates in a meeting in New York to offer the world a code of conduct for the trade in arms. The original idea was to establish ethical standards for the arms trade that would eventually be adopted by the international community.

In 2001, the process continued with the adoption of a non-legally binding program of action at the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms. This program was formally called the "**Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects**" (PoA). Governments agreed to improve national small arms laws, import/export controls, and stockpile management – and to engage in cooperation and assistance.

Later put forward in 2003 by a group of Nobel Peace Laureates, the ATT was first addressed in the UN in December 2006 when the General Assembly adopted resolution 61/89 "Towards an Arms Trade Treaty: establishing common international standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional arms".

The ATT, like the PoA, is predicated upon a hypothesis that the illicit trade in small arms is a large and serious problem requiring global action through the UN.

The ATT is an attempt to regulate the international trade of conventional weapons for the purpose of contributing to international and regional peace; reducing human suffering; and promoting co-operation, transparency, and responsible action by and among states.

The Arms Trade Treaty obligates member states to monitor arms exports and ensure that weapons do not cross existing arms embargoes or end up being used for human-rights abuses, including terrorism. Member States, with the assistance of the U.N., will put into place enforceable, standardized arms import and export regulations (much like those that already exist in the U.S.) and be expected to track the destination of exports to ensure they do not end up in the wrong hands. Ideally, that means limiting the inflow of deadly weapons into places of ongoing conflicts.

On April 26, 2019, President Donald Trump announced his withdrawal from the ATT. Also ATT does not have the tools of real control and especially the mechanism of punishment of violators.

UN resolution 61/89

On 18 December 2006, UK Ambassador for Multilateral Arms Control and Disarmament John Duncan formally introduced resolution 61/89, which requested that the UN Secretary-General seek the views of UN Member States on the feasibility, scope, and draft parameters for a "comprehensive, legally binding instrument establishing common international standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional arms", and submit a report on the subject to the General Assembly. In December 2006, 153 member states voted in favor of the resolution. Twenty-four countries abstained: Bahrain, Belarus, China, Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Kuwait, Laos, Libya, Marshall Islands, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, UAE, Venezuela, Yemen, and Zimbabwe.

It entered into force on 24 December 2014. 105 states have ratified the treaty, and a further 32 states have signed but not ratified it.

Possible solutions

Here are two very clear ways of approaching the question of stemming the proliferation of light weapons and small arms. The first of these involves policy directives, aimed at establishing legislation which would stop or deter the supply of weapons; tackling the means of the weapons circulation problem. The second approach focuses upon the causes of weapons proliferation and consequently the demand side of the light weapons equation.

Increasingly, this has meant developing strategies which will prevent the conflicts in which light weapons proliferation becomes easy, and consequently, eliminate the bad societal

effects which are associated with their use. In these terms the world community must engage to make preventive diplomacy and preventive development agents in an approach to establishing a more stable international environment.

Both approaches demand political will at the national and international levels for there to be any effective change.

Also there is a need of finding tools of real control and especially the mechanism of punishment of violators of the treaties.

It is obvious that it is necessary to restrict access to weapons for minors, improve police tactics for behavior in situations of school shooting, conduct training and strengthen security measures in schools.

There is also a need for serious study and discussion concerning effectiveness of gun policy, zero tolerance policy in schools, the role of the media and computer games in such accidents. At the same time, it is obvious that a person who comes with a weapon to an educational institution is already a consequence. As one of the effective preventive measures it is proposed not to ignore behavioral anomalies of the students and to develop a working system of psychological help to notice such cases promptly and help students.

Useful links

<https://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/att/>

<https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/CN/2014/CN.630.2014-Eng.pdf>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Small_Arms_and_Light_Weapons#UN_SALW_control_efforts

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/School_shooting