

would however be difficult for SALW sales to pass the test of “unlikely to be used against the civilian population” in an environment characterized by serious human rights violations.⁴⁰

Domestic Firearms Regulations

Until the 20th century the regulation of firearms from a criminal and particularly a public health perspective was not a significant issue.⁴¹ There were a variety of reasons for this. In the domestic context military small arms differed very little, if at all, from their civilian counterparts. In fact, civilian firearms were frequently better than their military equivalents. There was also no perceived requirement for such controls as governments of the day were less regulatory- and interventionist-minded. Furthermore, in some states, particularly those states settled by Europeans, firearms were owned by much of the population for sustenance and protection.

Within the North American and European context domestic firearms regulations evolved over a number of years, primarily in reaction to the real and potential criminal use of firearms as reflected in the political climate of the time. It is not the intention of this short overview to track the historical evolution of firearms regulation in various countries and jurisdictions, together with the controversy such regulations have at times generated. There are many sources which examine this subject.⁴² It is sufficient to observe that domestic firearms regulations in most countries have generally become more restrictive with the passage of time. The last decade has witnessed perhaps the most significant increases in levels of regulation. In Australia, Canada and the UK, citizens have been outraged by a number of multiple murders carried out by one or more individuals, acts made possible in part by access to modern firearms. Politicians have reacted swiftly to those events by imposing new and ever-more-stringent firearms regulations. New developments in firearms and the perception that this has led to, or might lead to, more lethal criminal activity has also been a factor in the growth of firearms regulations over the years. Examples of such development are advances in machine guns (in all of their manifestations) as well as the development of more easily concealed firearms and an increased magazine capacity for many SALW. Other reasons for increased firearm regulation relate to a demographic swing in many developed countries from a rural agrarian/hunter society to an urban industrial/service sector-oriented one: in this new socio-economic environment, guns are often no longer seen to possess a legitimate utilitarian value and are instead primarily associated with criminal activity

⁴⁰ Export permits are often perused by a number of government departments before approval is given for export: these many include Industry Canada, the Department of National Defence, the RCMP, the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service, the Communications Security Establishment, Customs and Excise and various Divisions within DFAIT.

⁴¹ This is not to suggest that domestic restrictions did not exist. But where they did, it was generally applied to discouraging uprisings and/or to maintaining the position of the authorities of the day. It was never a public health issue.

⁴² Anyone interested in this subject need only go to the Internet and type in “Gun Control” on any search engine.