

power structures – a recognition that hardly exists today because of the way in which international relations are structured around the state.

The necessity to discuss non-state actors arises from the need to address how and why they are normally excluded from regular discussions on SALW, the impact state-to-state transfers – whether covert or overt – have on them and their role in the “success” of international commitments to certain causes. For example, some states have made it clear they will not sign the Landmines Convention until opposition groups, i.e. non-state actors, in their country and elsewhere agree to give up using anti-personnel landmines.¹ It is hard to deny that these oppositional groups, or non-states actors, play a role in international processes.

1. “The Problem”

- *What is the problem we are trying to address?*
- *Why do we want to restrict SALW access to non-state actors?*
- *What kind of trade and availability of SALW do we consider harmful and to whom?*

Governments of all kinds tend to assume that international agreements have to take place amongst and between states. This is because the state is and remains the fundamental actor in international relations. Beyond this, the level of analysis moves upwards, not down, to international finance and political organisations, such as the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations. In an era of rapid globalisation and change, new levels of analysis are becoming increasingly necessary because the state is becoming either bypassed or irrelevant. The example of SALW is especially intriguing in this respect. Over the past five years the SALW issue has become one of the most important items on the international agenda. Currently, NGOs, governments and independent analysts are grappling with ways to address what is rapidly becoming the most urgent security issue of the post-Cold War era, more global perhaps than even the landmine crisis.

It is now accepted that the majority of deaths and injuries sustained during conflict are the result of SALW. The rampant proliferation of illegal SALW and their use is both a cause and effect of transformed patterns of warfare. It is also the case that the majority of deaths and injuries are increasingly inflicted by individuals and groups that show no allegiance and often fierce opposition to the state in which they happen to reside. Seeking mechanisms to solve and control the SALW problem can only, at present, be agreed by states but any resulting agreements will certainly not be accepted or implemented by groups that exist in opposition to or outside of state structures. This conundrum will, of course, remain as it will also do in the case of landmines. However, it is important for the far-sighted members of the international community to begin a process that addresses these issues, if future progressive in this area is to have any meaning.

¹ This is especially true in South Asia, where several meetings funded by the Governments of Canada and Norway have identified the NSA issue as a major stumbling block to further progress towards the universalisation of the Landmine Convention.