

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Among the suggestions of the 1997 Report of the United Nations Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms with regards to preventing excessive and destabilizing accumulations and transfers of small arms was the initiation of "... a study on the problem of ammunition...". This report is intended as a preliminary step to addressing that aspect of the UN Report. It is, for the most part, a layman's technical analysis regarding the considerations and issues surrounding enhanced controls on ammunition. It attempts to address some of the hypotheses and speculation put forth in earlier writings on the subject.

This preliminary study suggests that, for the purpose of preventing excessive and destabilizing accumulations and transfers of small arms, ammunition is not the "choke point" that some might believe. There is a wide diffusion of ammunition production worldwide that involves at least 71 states and possibly as many as 100. As well, within states there tends to be further diffusion of ammunition production. Ammunition does not have a short shelf life, if stored with a modicum of care. It can be manufactured as a cottage industry, recognizing that there would be limitations in quality and quantity for such production. There are some possibilities for enhanced tracking through taggants and cartridge markings, but these may have limited value. As well, there is potential for enhanced export controls through instruments such as the Organization of American States' Convention of Illicit Firearms Trafficking as well as Codes of Conduct. Supply-side controls, however, should take into consideration the possibility that such efforts could contribute to a greater diffusion of production capacity. Any attempts at greater control will have to be backed up with augmented resources devoted to enforcement in both the supplying and receiving states. Ammunition, like the weapon itself, is just one component of the multi-faceted issue of small arms -- a holistic approach to solutions involving multiple complementary tracks is the most appropriate strategy to follow.

Much more study on ammunition controls is required. Definitive studies must include government and commercial organizations involved in regulating, producing, distributing and using ammunition. Studies are required to ascertain the unique characteristics of various regions with respect to the viability of controls. More technical studies are required on the utility of marking cartridges for tracing and detection. A survey by the UN is required to ascertain which states manufacture small arms, ammunition and ammunition components.

It is important to note that domestic firearms and ammunition regulation for the purpose of domestic public health and safety, particularly within the context of advanced states such as Canada, is not a focus of this study. The problems upon which this study concentrates relate to conflict and post-conflict situations which are, for the most part, in developing countries.