

There is no doubt that any proposed light weapons register will run into difficult and possibly protracted diplomatic negotiation as proprietary interests come into focus and their influences are played out via international posturing. Indeed, some very legitimate cultural and domestic opposition may make a light weapons register a difficult goal to achieve in some areas of the globe.

At the very least, governments and international organizations which wish to institute such a register must be clear in their aim and take account of opposition, some of which will be difficult to ignore. Drawing upon experience with existing information exchanges in the arms control field will be helpful. It may be that only a portion of the ideal small arms and light weapons register may be attainable. This is, of course, a matter for politicians to decide and diplomats to negotiate.

No light arms register will provide a complete picture of manufacture, trade and traffick in these weapons. The extent of the black and grey arms markets will not be covered. Criminal activity will not be included and covert and quasi-official arms transfers will be ignored except in very limited ways. However, by bringing some attention to these activities controls may be encouraged where few or none exist at present. This pre-supposes, of course, that there is political will and general acceptance of such controls and that the national criminal and security forces can act to enforce the law. In many countries, this may be problematic.

There are also indications that a light weapons register is not high on the agenda of some nations and international organizations. A recent press report noted the reluctance of some NATO countries to deal with the issue during that organization's operations in the former Yugoslavia.⁴⁸ This might be typical of the ambivalence which may have to be overcome if a light weapons arms register is to succeed.

Making provision for the inclusion of partial data, and the opportunity to explain omissions, may encourage some weak or reticent governments to participate. Other participants and researchers using the data base of information will quickly assess for themselves whether any particular nation is whole-heartedly supporting the light weapons register.

The success of a light weapons register will be directly dependent upon what it is meant to do. Like the United Nations Register on Conventional Arms, any register will likely start off tentatively and grow only when nurtured by national action and international agreement to take concrete action to curb the arms flows to the area of interest. Initial hopes should probably be kept conservative to avoid disappointment