

# The Count Continues:

## STOCKPILES



The climax of a fantasia charge: mokahala in the air. Meknes, Morocco.

Small arms proliferation continued to affect countries worldwide in 2004. For the United States and its allies in Afghanistan and Iraq, easy access to firearms, rockets, and explosives among civilians and insurgents continues to present a tremendous obstacle to human safety and political stability. Other large countries as diverse as Australia, Brazil, Canada, and China continued processes of domestic reform aimed at reducing gun violence. Elsewhere, with less public attention, governments and civil society pushed forward a similar agenda.

This chapter focuses on the role of small arms disarmament in the management of global weapons inventories. It also examines the scale of military, police, and civilian inventories in two regions just beginning to deal with these issues, north-east Asia and the Middle East.

Internationally sponsored disarmament was the most prominent aspect of small arms inventory management in 2004, with high-profile initiatives taking place in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Liberia. The challenges to disarmament in Iraq reveal numerous problems coalition authorities gradually learned which approaches worked best and the limits of what can be achieved. Politically sensitive efforts were started in Colombia, Haiti, Ivory Coast, and Nigeria, and disarmament proposals played major roles in efforts to resolve conflicts in India, Lebanon, Palestine, Spain, Sudan, and elsewhere. Less prominent—but potentially just as consequential in the long run—were domestic initiatives emphasizing gun violence reduction. The growing importance of these initiatives testifies to the visibility of the issue and to the determination of a growing community to advance the small arms management agenda.

Domestic disarmament was led by Brazil, which eliminated more than 300,000 firearms voluntarily surrendered by private owners by March 2005.

Among the greatest successes for military stockpile management were projects sponsored by NATO members to eliminate surplus small arms. Unilateral weapons destruction continues apace in Western Europe and in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, where assistance by NATO countries has facilitated the destruction of hundreds of thousands of unwanted weapons, ensuring that they will neither be exported to regions of instability or seep into illegal markets. The destruction of 1.5 million surplus small arms planned for Ukraine is the most ambitious undertaking of this kind so far.



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An Iraqi National Guardsman drives a truck loaded with weapons collected in Sadr City, Baghdad, in October 2004.

Domestic disarmament was led by Brazil, which eliminated more than 300,000 firearms voluntarily surrendered by private owners by March 2005. Smaller domestic programmes were undertaken in Australia, South Africa, and several other countries. The most important exception to this apparent trend was the United States, where state and federal laws governing private ownership were relaxed, most visibly through the lapsing of a ten-year-old law restricting sales of 'assault weapons'.

Progress on small arms stockpile management requires an ever-improving sense of where the weapons are, who has them, and which pose the greatest dangers. Since the rise of diplomacy on the issue in the 1990s, a few regions have remained aloof from efforts to understand local small arms problems. This chapter pays special attention to the two largest of those regions, north-east Asia and the Middle East.



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Police display guns seized from illegal traders in Chengdu, China, January 2005.

Except for Japan, the only country in north-east Asia to make data available on its civilian and police firearm inventories, little is known about the scale of small arms ownership in the region. Ownership patterns must be inferred and estimated. Conservative assumptions lead to the conclusion that north-east Asia is home to combined military and police arsenals of at least 22 to 42 million firearms. The scale of private ownership in much of the region remains obscure. According to Chinese officials, more than 4 million illegal firearms have been seized there since 1996, suggesting that the total figures could be higher than often assumed.

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The Middle East region is extremely diverse, with countries where gun ownership is rather unusual, such as Morocco—examined here in detail—and others where ownership seems to be among the highest in the world. The people of the Middle East appear to own a total of between 45 million and 90 million firearms. Representatives of several governments have expressed concern that gun violence is becoming a major threat to public safety and a source of regional instability. Fuelled by demographic and economic forces, firearm ownership in the Middle East seems likely to grow.