

Semi-automatic

IDENTIFYING AND DESTROYING MILITARY SURPLUS

The world is witnessing the largest systematic destruction of military small arms and light weapons since the end of World War Two. Dozens of internationally sponsored destruction or security enhancement projects are currently under way. They vary from the destruction of dozens to more than a million small arms, from building better fences to destroying hundreds of thousands of tons of ammunition. They may destroy rifles from World War One or advanced anti-aircraft missiles.

Although surplus destruction is established in the international security-building repertoire, it remains experimental in many respects. When are small arms and ammunition destruction projects most likely to succeed? What barriers must be overcome? Among major findings:

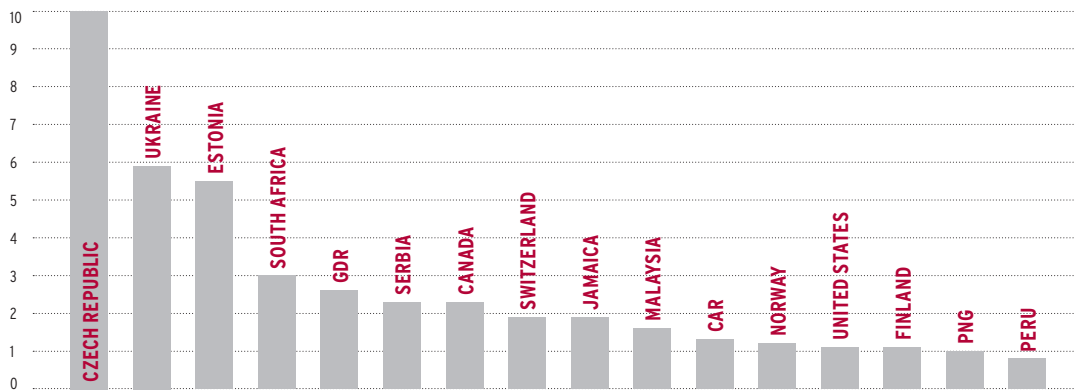
- Definitional issues are the sine qua non of surplus military small arms and ammunition destruction. Before surplus weapons can be destroyed, they must be defined as surplus.
- About 430,000 military small arms are destroyed annually, probably fewer than are newly produced.
- Out of some 200 million military firearms worldwide, at least 76 million are surplus.
- The world harbours 100–140 million tons of military ammunition, of which some 20–30 million tons are for military small arms. Of the latter, at least two-thirds is surplus.
- Although the *UN Programme of Action* and other international instruments create a predisposition to eliminate surpluses through destruction, exports often are preferred in practice.
- The most systematic progress in surplus destruction involves MANPADS, where the United States has secured extensive cooperation.
- Two mechanisms that greatly increase willingness to destroy surpluses are membership in regional organizations and security sector reform.
- Donors can facilitate surplus destruction, beyond providing financial and technical help, by taking steps to enhance international legitimacy for action.

Table 3.8 (excerpt) Selected military surplus small arms destruction programmes, 1991–2007

Country	Quantity destroyed	Programme sponsorship	Years
Germany	2,076,442	Domestic	1990–2006
Russian Federation	1,110,000	Domestic	1994–2002
United States	830,000	Domestic	1993–96
Ukraine	700,000	Domestic	1990s
United Kingdom	543,000	Domestic	1992–95
South Africa	262,667	Domestic	1998–2001
Bosnia and Herz.	250,000	International	2002–07
Albania	222,918	International	1997–2005
Cambodia	198,148	International	1999–2006
Romania	195,510	International	2002–03
Netherlands	143,632	Domestic	1994–96

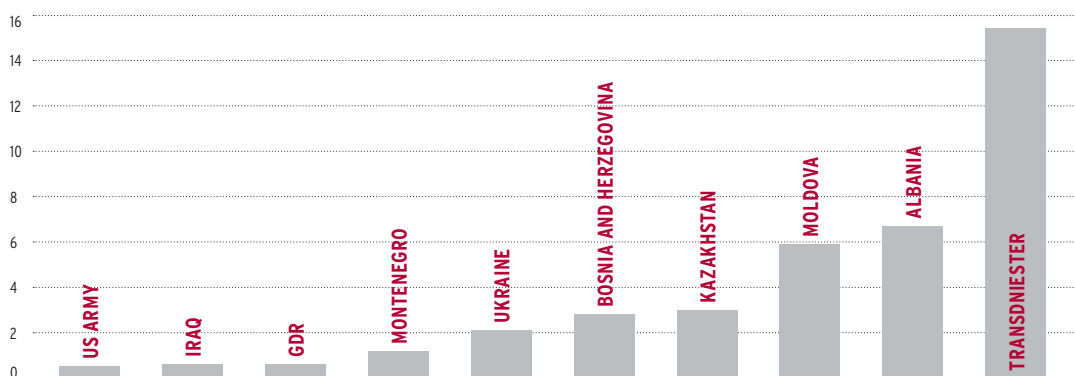
Notes: Bosnian weapons designated for surplus destruction may be among those subsequently transferred to Iraq. Albanian and Cambodian totals include an unknown proportion of civilian firearms. The possibility of civilian guns in the Belarusian, Cambodian, and Ugandan totals cannot be excluded. The UK figure is based on predictions.

Figure 3.1 Small arms per person, selected armed forces



Source: Table 3.3

Figure 3.2 Ammunition tons per person, selected armed forces



Source: Table 3.6

The process of surplus military small arms and light weapons and ammunition destruction has acquired an independent momentum, but the force behind it is not very strong. There are at least 76 million surplus firearms in the world's military arsenals, maybe considerably more, but even after years of effort, destruction programmes are not affecting more than a small proportion. Surplus destruction is fully established on the international agenda, but it is far from automatic or comprehensive. Destruction is organized but not systematic. It is enduring, but it is not growing. It is highly legitimate, but not authoritative.

Unlike other disarmament processes, the destruction of surplus small arms, light weapons, and ammunition is not guided by binding treaty obligations. It builds on principles codified in several international agreements but relies on unilateral decisions by governments or their armed services. They often are encouraged and supported by donor countries, usually working with multi-lateral organizations. Four major groups have dedicated offices to facilitate small arms and ammunition destruction: the European Union, NATO, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and the United Nations Development Programme.

Although exact numbers are difficult to pin down, it appears that the destruction of small arms is offset by new military production. As a result, surplus stockpiles probably are not shrinking and may even be growing. Nor are surpluses always being stewarded carefully; it appears that many countries with surpluses are as likely to export their unwanted equipment as to destroy it. This is partially due to the ambivalence of outside actors, most prominently the United States, who simultaneously encourage cooperative host governments to destroy and export their surpluses.

Lack of financing for destruction is a major problem. Compared to other areas of international disarmament, spending on small arms and ammunition destruction is limited. Vague definitions and weak standards are serious problems as well. Countries have radically different standards for how much small arms and ammunition they need (see Table 3.8 and Figures 3.1 and 3.2).

Surplus identification and destruction are heavily influenced by the broader international and domestic political contexts. Military reform can be instrumental. Even ostensibly unrelated processes like EU and NATO expansion affect surplus destruction fundamentally. International cooperation is an invaluable catalyst for surplus destruction, allowing donors to work more efficiently, enhancing legitimacy, and insulating projects from political criticism. ■