A child stands against a wall riddled with bullet holes, the legacy of Angola's 26-year civil war. Kuito, Angola, March 2000.
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Violent Exchanges:
THE USE OF SMALL ARMS IN CONFLICT

7

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, people engaged in armed conflict have employed many tools of violence, from rocks and sticks to rifles and guided missiles. These armaments have been used to kill, wound, and destroy physical infrastructure, but not with equal effect.

What factors affect people's choice of weaponry and targets? Many variables have a bearing on how small arms and light weapons are used, both within an armed conflict zone and within ostensibly peaceful societies. The answer to the question, therefore, may be as complex as the causes of violent conflict itself. Past studies have highlighted various dynamics, including: the development of gun cultures (Khakee and Florquin, 2003); the presence or absence of social and legal codes to control the use of weapons (Miller, 2003); 'arms racing' among rival groups (Cook and Ludwig, 2003); and links between violence and masculine identity (Cukier, Kooistra, and Anto, 2002).

This chapter does not look in detail at these elements, but instead analyses the broad *facilitating factors* that may encourage or discourage the use of different types of weapons in contemporary armed conflicts. It offers a framework for answering the following question: what are the primary factors that enable or limit the use of weapons? The aim is to provide policy-makers with a checklist of variables with the potential to contribute to the most destructive or indiscriminate forms of weapons use, as a starting point for thinking about how such use might be restricted.

While many subtle social phenomena interact to determine when, if, and how weapons are employed in a particular context, this chapter examines the main influences on the use of weapons with respect to:

- the types of weapons available to armed groups (state and non-state); and
- the kinds of goals espoused by each group.

The first category considers, for instance, potentially strong *material* controls on where weapons can be used and for what purpose. Essential here are *availability factors,* such as the size, weight, and capacity of the weapons, the climatic, topographical, and infrastructural issues that condition their movement, and procurement costs.

The second category takes account of social constraints or shared understanding of acceptable limits to the scale of armed violence. These are *organizational factors.*

The chapter concludes that, by assessing various combinations of availability and organizational factors, one can acquire a better appreciation of an organized group's capacity to engage in armed violence, and of its potential targets. Improved understanding may reveal a number of avenues for limiting the most destructive consequences of armed conflict.

The chapter finds that there are potentially strong 'choke points' that can be exploited to ameliorate the worst instances of weapons use:

- Target the most destructive weapons first, particularly in disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programmes.
- Control more effectively the production and transfer of cheap light weapons to conflict-prone regions.
- Enhance stockpile controls to prevent rapid access to the most destructive varieties of weapons.
- Increase efforts to reduce general local and regional proliferation, as the weapons most readily available are those that are most likely to be used.
- Analyse group goals, command and control, and access to resources thoroughly before introducing restrictive measures.

Methodological considerations

An evaluation of any conflict essentially requires that one look at a number of sub-conflicts, in which the use of weapons varies daily. This is not a new observation. In the early 19th century, Clausewitz (1997, p. 204) wrote: 'our wars are made up of a number of great and small simultaneous or consecutive combats, and this severance of the activity into so many separate actions is owing to the great multiplicity of the relations out of which war arises with us'.

To understand weapons use, it is preferable, therefore, to distinguish between 'type of war' and 'type of warfare' (Kalyvas, 2003, p. 7). Rather than viewing a particular conflict as a 'resource war', a 'low-intensity conflict', or a 'post-modern' or 'new' war, this chapter thus adopts a narrower focus (Kaldor, 1999; Klare, 2002). It concentrates on the particular 'contexts' in which weapons are employed.

The 'context' is the point at which weapons are used to kill, to threaten, to destroy physical infrastructure, or otherwise to facilitate depredation. It signifies the place of convergence between the aims of armed individuals and their opponents. Furthermore, it is the point in space and time at which the negativities of armed violence are most attributable to weapons use.[1]

To analyse meticulously any one context in which weapons are used, a number of other factors must also be taken into consideration. These include: the profile of the actors and their ideologies; their organizational structure; their social basis, military culture, and leadership strategies; the resources they can draw on and the climatic and geographical conditions that influence their operations; domestic or international circumstances; and the specific internal and technological dynamics of the conflict (Kalyvas, 2003, p. 4). Clearly, only some can be addressed here.

The use of weapons in any armed conflict is constrained by how groups are armed and how they interact with their opponents and the local populace.

The use of weapons in any armed conflict is constrained at any one time by how groups are armed and how they interact with their opponents and the local populace. This is true of clashes between rival gangs in a metropolis such as Los Angeles, or Rio de Janeiro, but it is also true of factional battles in Afghanistan or Sierra Leone, and large-scale military interventions in Chechnya and Iraq.

This study, therefore, views weapons use as the nexus of:

- *availability factors*—the physical and supply-side variables that determine, for instance, the type and destructive qualities of weapons available to combatants; and
- *organizational factors*—the elements that influence if, and how, groups of individuals use these weapons.

The chapter is based on three broad assumptions:

- The type of weapon employed in an armed conflict imposes certain fundamental restrictions on how it is used and to what end.
- The physical environment and the organization of armed actors dictate the ease with which groups can acquire certain kinds of weapons.
- The principal variables that determine how armed groups subsequently utilize these weapons are their organizational structures and their operational objectives.

This chapter concentrates on groups that are organized, armed, and use force to achieve their aims, and 'articulate a political or economic agenda rather than private goals' (Capie, 2004, p. 4). The definition does not discriminate between state and non-state armed groups. As recent events in Chechnya, Iraq, and Nepal have demonstrated, the state–non-state dichotomy is problematic for assessing the use and abuse of small arms and light weapons.[2] Furthermore, it is clear that the most established non-state armed groups are better organized, frequently have access to more sources of funds, and are at least as motivated as the armed forces of some developing countries. As Policzer (2002, pp. 3–4) observes:

> Contrary to the dichotomy it predicts, there is a great deal of *overlap* between states and non-state armed groups. In some cases, non-state armed groups look and behave like would-be states, with administrations that provide services to populations under their de facto control. In other cases, de jure states … [and their armed forces] … are such only in name, having dismantled their bureaucracies (or failed to build them in the first place), and operating as a series of loosely connected networks.

Sketching availability and organizational factors

Table 7.1 presents a selection of broad inputs that may condition the use of weapons in an armed conflict. Subsequent sections examine these factors, outline their implications for understanding weapons use in an armed conflict, and comment on the affect that they have on control measures.

Table 7.1   Small arms use: Availability and organizational factors

Factor	Description	Examples
Availability	Material controls on the destructive potential of armed violence, which regulate the type of weapons available to combatants and their harmful effects	Weapon design and firepower Size and weight Local proliferation Group resources
Organizational	Social controls on the targeting of violence and limits to the employment of violence to achieve goals	Group structure Organizational objectives Acceptable means of fulfilling aims Conformity to organizational goals Monitoring the behaviour of group members Command and control of members

MATERIAL CONTROLS ON THE DESTRUCTIVE POTENTIAL OF ARMED VIOLENCE

Weapon design and firepower

Understanding of use is often based on an appraisal of consequences, such as categories of individuals targeted and the number of people killed or wounded. The type of weapon used has a considerable bearing on both of these outcomes. While some weapons offer a high degree of precision, others are designed to claim life across large areas and thus provide fewer opportunities to discriminate between intended and unintended targets.

Effects range from the impact of a single bullet fired from a rudimentary craft-produced weapon to the explosive blast following the detonation of a mortar or anti-tank projectile, expelling fragments of metal up to a distance of tens of metres. The likelihood of death, injury, and destruction of infrastructure is great. As the World Health Organization (WHO) (2002, p. 222) notes, 'the level of weapons technology does not necessarily affect the risk of a conflict, but it does determine the scale of any conflict and the amount of destruction that will take place'.

Combatants do not always select the most suitable weapon for a particular purpose. Availability usually informs the decision. Well-funded armed bodies, including the security forces of developed states, use an assortment of specialized weapons, such as sniper rifles for targeted killings or precision-guided munitions. Groups with fewer resources use a variety of the most easily available weapons.

For both sets of actors, the main consideration is not always to minimize casualties, but rather, to employ force most effectively. Key here is 'the concentration of strength against weakness' (Liddell Hart, 1974, p. 334). Combatants prefer superior and reliable firepower.[3]

Box 7.1   Goals and means: death and destruction in Monrovia, Liberia

In July 2003, the Liberian capital of Monrovia came under indiscriminate mortar fire. While initial reports focused attention on extensive shelling by the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) rebel group, it has since emerged that Liberian government troops were also involved in the bombardment.[4] The case study below concentrates solely on LURD, however, exploring the reasons behind its radical shift in weapons use.

For LURD, a series of assaults in 2003—culminating in the July attack—represented a major escalation in the use of weapons. In the past, small-scale attacks by LURD on government forces had involved small arms and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs). The attack on Monrovia was far larger in terms of scale and level of destruction.

This change is attributable to a concatenation of two sets of factors. First, LURD's goal, to remove President Charles Taylor from power, became more pressing as a ceasefire appeared imminent. Second, it sought, and was able to acquire and employ, more destructive weaponry than it had previously had access to.

In 2003, Brabazon (2003, p. 8) made the following comments about how LURD was organized in 2002:

> While LURD do not bear any comparison with a trained African army, their apparent respect for (and dependency on) the civilian population, combined with a strong *esprit de corps* and a degree of basic military training, certainly elevates them above the level of other regional insurgents, specifically the RUF [Revolutionary United Front].

His observations draw attention to two interrelated variables. First, that LURD was a relatively cohesive fighting unit with established command-and-control structures. It was composed primarily of former United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO) fighters. Around 90 per cent of its command structure was made up of former ULIMO commanders, and at least 60 per cent of its troops had a ULIMO background (Brabazon, 2003, p. 7). These soldiers were united in their opposition to President Taylor.

Second, such an established command structure suggests that the group had the potential to control the actions of its fighters vis-à-vis the civilian population. As Brabazon (2003, p. 7) notes, although LURD did not always respect civilians, it did so when senior commanders were around.

Senior commanders were present, though, in Monrovia. They organized the acquisition of mortars, and sanctioned their use. Such action can hardly be characterized as showing respect for the civilian population.

Box 7.1   Goals and means: death and destruction in Monrovia, Liberia (cont.)

The fighting had severe ramifications for the civilian population. According to Human Rights Watch, people were living in structures covered by plastic sheets, which were completely vulnerable to shrapnel from exploding mortar shells. In a US embassy annex occupied by sheltering civilians, for example, '[o]ver twenty-five people died immediately and more than fifty were wounded … when two mortar rounds fell within the compound' (HRW, 2003, p. 11). The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights put the casualty toll from mortar fire in July at 'several hundreds, possibly thousands' (UN, 2003b, para. 3).

The decline in civilian fortunes in 2003 was not attributable to any change in approach to the control of LURD fighters. Nor was it connected to any radical rethinking of goals. Rather, it was due to a reordering of priorities by the rebel group.

The past experiences of former ULIMO commanders in LURD arguably influenced decision-making. ULIMO had suffered a number of setbacks as a result of the August 1996 ceasefire and the 1997 elections, which consolidated President Taylor's hold on power. In 2003, LURD was on the brink of achieving its principal aim, the removal of President Taylor, but it risked losing all in a ceasefire similar to that of 1996.

LURD's main objective in 2003 thus shifted to preventing President Taylor from either holding elections or gaining any territory in advance of peace talks (ICG, 2003a, p. 6). Hence, the unrestrained assault on Monrovia.

The sudden availability of mortars was arguably no accident. As the International Crisis Group (ICG) notes, the declining health of one of LURD's key backers, President Lansana Conté of Guinea, spurred the group into taking maximum advantage of Guinean military assistance (ICG, 2003a, p. 6) (TRANSFERS).

In short, events dictated that it was vital to procure more firepower. An all-out attack was launched on Monrovia because LURD feared that it might be its last chance to remove President Taylor from office. Consequently, when LURD commenced its bombardment of the capital, the welfare of the civilian population was low on its list of concerns.

The case study shows how certain factors were of particular importance in yielding large-scale loss of life in Monrovia. Chief among them were LURD's ability to acquire and field mortars (an availability factor) and the indiscriminate way that it used them (an organizational factor).

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The aftermath of the bombardment of Monrovia: civilians killed in the annexe of the US embassy in June 2003.

As LURD's assault on Monrovia in July 2003 clearly illustrates, the most serious effects of weapons use stem from the employment of explosive light weapons, such as mortars and RPGs, in areas of high population density. Nonetheless, similar side effects are also observable in situations involving small arms.

Haiti is a case in point. Haitian police officers have been issued with automatic rifles due to the absence of weapons with less firepower. The use of automatic weapons by police is also commonplace in cities such as Bogotá, Colombia, and Rio de Janeiro. In all instances, high-velocity ammunition can penetrate walls, doors, and vehicles, killing or maiming bystanders (AI, 2004; Guyler Delva, 2004; Small Arms Survey, 2004a, pp. 213–43).

Changes in weapons availability affect the trajectory of an armed confrontation. In the Solomon Islands, in early 2000, looting of automatic weapons from police stocks altered the shape of the conflict. Previously, fighting largely involved single-shot weapons that were laborious to reload; subsequently, a single combatant could fire around 30 rounds in a matter of seconds (Small Arms Survey, 2004a, p. 292).

A similar, but more destructive trend was evident in Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) in 1991–93. Initially (1989–91), limited supplies of small arms, such as pistols and assault rifles, restricted the scope of military action and the number of casualties. Once heavy weapons became available, however, following the opening of Russian military depots in 1991, the intensity of the conflict increased dramatically (Box 7.2). Social violence turned into large-scale warfare, marked by loss of life, destruction of infrastructure, and population displacement (Demetriou, 2002, pp. 9–10, 26–28).

Box 7.2	**Weapons availability and effects: Abkhazia and South Ossetia, 1989-93**			
Phase	**Dates**	**Weapons**	**Operations**	**Effects**
1	1989-91	Largely reliant on hunting rifles as well as pistols and rifles stolen from police stations	Small-scale hit-and-run retaliatory operations conducted by small groups of men	Kidnappings, isolated killings, and forced displacement, resulting in some 100-200 deaths. Additional small-scale displacement due to the destruction of a few villages
2	1991-93	Large quantities of small arms and light weapons, including assault rifles, anti-tank weapons, and mortars, plus some heavier weapons	Sieges (of towns) and large-scale military action involving significant numbers of organized and equipped troops. Action aimed at acquiring territory	Massive amount of damage to infrastructure, and the destruction of hundreds of villages and towns. At least 9,000 people killed and more than 300,000 displaced

Source: Demetriou (2002, pp. 25-29)

In the cases outlined above, while combatants were responsible for selecting their targets, the effects of using such weapons were often beyond the control of the user.

The choice of weapon is not *always* constrained, therefore, by consideration of the consequences associated with its use, but it is always constrained by its physical attributes. In all situations, the type of weapon limits how it is employed and the impact that it has on the armed conflict.

Controls on firepower

The ramifications of firepower can be managed by controlling the production of certain weapons and the transfer and stockpiling of these items.

Concerns about general small arms proliferation often overshadow the need to target the most destructive weapons first. Supply-side initiatives should concentrate initially on weapons with the greatest potential to cause massive and rapid loss of life and infrastructural devastation, such as mortars, RPGs, and grenade launchers.

Producers of cheap and highly destructive armaments clearly profit from demand for such weapons in an armed conflict zone. Of note are light weapons such as the RPG-7. Not only is it cheap, manufactured widely, and employed

by numerous state and non-state armed groups, but producers are attempting to increase the appeal of this 'old favourite' by enhancing its destructive capabilities. Less well-funded states appear to be the main targets of this marketing drive, many of which are prone to armed conflict (Small Arms Survey, 2004a, p. 36). As a number of the companies implicated are based in Western Europe or in states that are hoping to join the European Union (EU), policymakers appear to be in a position to prevent such a move (Small Arms Survey, 2004a, pp. 35–36).

Proliferation worries, however, should not mask the fact that many states employ weapons for domestic security purposes, and will continue to do so. Put simply, if armed entities, such as police and paramilitary forces, do not have access to weapons that are suitable for the task at hand, they are likely to use military armaments that place the local populace at greater risk (AI, 2004, p. 28). Moreover, policing by soldiers (the cheap option) in states such as Afghanistan allows financial savings to be made at the expense of an increased threat to lives.

Hence, responsible measures to combat the effects of small arms and light weapons must be based on a nuanced appraisal of the types of weapons that need to be controlled most urgently and their effects.

Supply-side initiatives should concentrate on weapons with the greatest potential to cause massive and rapid loss of life and infrastructural devastation.

Size and weight of small arms

Small arms and light weapons come in all shapes and sizes, from pistols that are small and light enough to be carried in a pocket to heavy machine guns and grenade launchers that can weigh 100 kilograms or more. These factors, in conjunction with climate and terrain, condition the availability of weapons for any particular user.

Size and weight place constraints on the movement of weapons, which can only be overcome through expenditure on transportation. All groups are affected, but those that suffer most are usually small, resource-poor entities. In contrast, logistical capacity facilitates an increase in the size of weapons used by a group, as well as a change in type and capability. For instance, state armed forces and non-state groups such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have the logistical capacity to move and employ heavy weapons, including large artillery pieces. Resource-poor groups are often restricted to using only small arms.[5]

Effective use often depends on the ability to transfer war materials across all kinds of terrain (Muggah and Bevan, 2004; Yousaf and Adkin, 2001). This is evidenced by arms supplied to mujahideen fighters via mountain passes (from Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province) during the Afghan–Russian conflict of the 1980s. It is also clear in the trade in weapons between Bougainville and the Solomon Islands in the late 1990s and after the turn of the millennium. When natural features make it easy to move weapons, groups need to invest fewer resources to obtain the items they desire.

The portability of weapons has considerable implications for research and policy-making. At the very least, it provides a rough guide to the type of weaponry that combatants are likely to look to acquire in a given context. This is important information for those trying to discern the types of weapons being transferred to a conflict zone and their potential effects.

Local proliferation

If groups are not in possession of weapons 'suitable' for a task, they have two options: to desist from certain types of violent activity; or to procure those armaments that are most easily available. Local weapons are the easiest to acquire.

Sourcing weapons locally does not mean that groups are able to obtain the most appropriate hardware. Thus, as a medieval serf might have brought a pitchfork into battle, so hunters, for instance, may enter a war with (frequently antiquated) hunting rifles. Locally stockpiled small arms and light weapons will play, therefore, a crucial role in determining the form of an armed conflict.

Masked combatants of the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR) carry an assortment of the most easily available weapons, including a stick, in Mexico, September 1996.

In the Solomon Islands, the use of home-made guns severely restricted the number of sustained armed exchanges. It was only after military weapons were seized from state armouries that weapons use escalated in terms of scale and impact (Capie, 2003; Small Arms Survey, 2004a). Similarly, rebels in northern Mali were at first ill equipped to engage in protracted hostilities. Violence escalated following the capture of large quantities of military weapons from government forces (Lecocq, 2002, p. 231).

Locally stockpiled small arms and light weapons play a crucial role in determining the form of an armed conflict.

The repercussions for stockpile security are clear. The types of weapons held in a particular geographical area, whether in the hands of the local populace, or in the arsenals of state security forces, are liable to affect the shape of a conflict considerably should one break out.

The continuation of efforts to secure stockpiles in regions of the world where social tensions make armed conflict more likely is essential to condition the use of violence should conflict erupt. This focus, however, needs to be qualitative as well as quantitative. The kinds of weapons stockpiled are at least as important as numbers.

Group resources and the acquisition spiral

Organizational capacity largely determines a group's ability to acquire, move, and use certain types of weaponry. There is a strong link between the resources available to a group and the potential impact that it can have on an opponent and the local populace. Knowing what resources armed actors have available to them is fundamental to understanding how to control the use of weapons.

In a study of 74 post-cold war insurgencies, one publication found evidence to suggest that state support played a major part in the perpetuation of 44 of them. It also intimated, however, that diaspora assistance may be becoming

more of a factor in armed conflict (Byman et. al., 2001, p. xv).[6] The second Tamasheq rebellion in northern Mali (1990–96), for instance, witnessed intermittent and minor external support. The small arms and light weapons purchased were bought with funds from 'les grandes partenaires', expatriates with capital and sympathetic to the group's objectives. The phenomenon is perhaps best illustrated by larger groups, though, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, the LTTE in Sri Lanka, and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC). These organizations have used extensive networks to procure advanced weaponry, including man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS), from suppliers situated far from the immediate locality (Small Arms Survey, 2004a, pp. 88–89).

In extreme cases, where foreign backing is absent and natural resources are scarce, human capital may be mobilized as a resource in its own right. For example, the National Resistance Army (NRA) in Uganda appealed to ethnic, religious, or spiritual sentiment, in the early 1980s, in order to attract relatively large numbers of recruits. Subsequently, these combatants were tasked with capturing arms from opponents (Weinstein, 2004, pp. 3–4).

Weapons alter the resource–acquisition equation significantly, by enabling groups to seize more and better armaments. In areas where there is a poorly defended opposition, groups are able to strengthen their arsenals considerably. The Malian Mouvement Populaire de Libération de l'Azawad serves as a good example of this acquisition spiral. It apparently began its campaign with a single Kalashnikov rifle. In a succession of attacks, it was able to seize close to 500 weapons. In each case, the quantity captured was greater than before, as the increased stocks allowed more effective assaults to be launched (Humphreys and ag Mohamed, 2003, p. 3).

In simple terms, this means that a group's military effectiveness is enhanced. As some analysts have noted, though, the success of combatants may also lead to a cumulative rise in the level of external support. That is, military gains result in greater interest in the cause, additional finance, and more and better weapons—the acquisition spiral—further strengthening a group's capacity to engage in violence (Byman et. al., 2001, p. 55; Yousaf and Adkin, 2001).

Group resources have considerable implications for steps taken to ameliorate armed conflict. Factors such as an embargo on a state (UN and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)) or the labelling of a group as a terrorist organization (United States and Hezbollah) may impede access by belligerents to small arms and light weapons. These factors are countered, however, by other variables, including support from a neighbouring government (Rwanda and the DRC), state support for a group (Syria and Hezbollah), or the backing of a diaspora (LTTE). Far more research needs to be conducted on the linkages between state and non-state armed entities if an accurate picture is to be painted of the inputs that influence weapons use.

Resource flows, whether of a commercial nature, or connected to the political ambitions of a state or a diaspora, also have the capacity to change qualitatively the degree of violence in an armed conflict by affecting the types of weapons available to disputants. This observation has consequences for analyses carried out before, during, and after a conflict.

In the first instance, the prevalence of small arms and light weapons in a particular region must be viewed as potentially facilitating the acquisition of such armaments in *all* regions. Availability of resources simply enhances the ability of potential combatants to procure small arms and light weapons.

In the second instance, the continued flow of resources to groups has severe ramifications for DDR and peace-building programmes. In Afghanistan, for example, there are clear, if indirect, connections between control over the sale of opium and the capacity of warlords to resupply themselves with the types and quantities of weapons that they require (COFR, 2003).

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SOCIAL CONTROLS AND THE TARGETING OF ARMED VIOLENCE

So far this chapter has concerned itself primarily with physical factors related to the types of weapons that an armed group can field and their effects. These variables, though, yield little insight into how the use of small arms and light weapons is targeted. This requires an understanding of social controls on weapons use (Table 7.1).

The following sections present a broad overview of how individuals break into armed factions, which have extremely different goals and hence use small arms and light weapons in very different ways. The focus is then narrowed so that an explanation can be offered on how the social composition of these groups facilitates or hinders the development of oversight mechanisms that can control the use of weapons.

Group structure and weapons use

What differentiates the use of small arms and light weapons by groups from individual acts of sporadic violence is that clear patterns can be identified in how the former utilize weapons. Individuals in groups ensure that their behaviour stays within certain parameters and is acceptable to other group members. By doing so, they are relieved of constantly having to evaluate potential courses of action to the extreme. Rather, they follow a rough blueprint (or set of standard operating procedures), which defines acceptable and unacceptable forms of behaviour (Allison, 1971; Steinbruner, 1974). Group behaviour remains relatively stable over time.

Armed individuals share commonalities not shared with unarmed individuals. As one former combatant in Mali pointed out, 'with a weapon, one is automatically isolated from the world'.[7] He admitted that this is because of not only mistrust on the part of the unarmed populace, but also because of the armed combatant's fear that his or her weapon could be stolen and the situation reversed. Weapons redefine perceptions of 'self' and the 'other'. A core motivation of group members is, therefore, to stay 'in the club'.

To remain members, individuals relinquish some independent interests (Simon, 1997). In the case of armed groups, an individual may be required to follow codified rules or, in extreme situations, may have to observe a tacit agreement not to steal from or kill other group members for personal gain.[8] These regulations are in place to ensure that a group functions smoothly and that its goals are fulfilled. They can extend from the most fundamental conventions aimed at guaranteeing continued group cohesion, such as those mentioned above, to rules that have a bearing on the efficiency with which a group conducts a campaign of armed violence. The latter may include prohibitions on shooting or stealing from members of friendly civilian populations or principles designed to conserve ammunition supplies. The threat of sanction, ranging from removing individuals from operational duties, to humiliation or ostracism, to death (in the extreme), reinforces such regulations.[9]

To acquire a deep understanding of how weapons are used, one must appreciate the underlying social circumstances of prospective group members and why they are attracted to a particular entity, how their aims shape its broad objectives, and how violence is used to achieve the latter. To comprehend in simple terms how a group is likely to behave, one need only assess, however, its core goals.

The following section addresses initially the impact of recruitment on the formulation of group objectives and subsequent targeting of small arms and light weapons use. Next, it analyses how the social composition of groups affects the development of command-and-control structures and how these mechanisms condition the use of small arms and light weapons, in accordance with the aims of the organization.

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Formulation of group goals, command and control, and the use of small arms and light weapons

While war may mask a vast assortment of odious activities, from theft and rape to the taking of personal revenge in the heat of battle, the actions of armed groups are clearly purposive. One can even go as far, therefore, as to characterize conflicts according to the behaviour of the belligerents. For example, one might perceive the conflict in Liberia as one primarily fought for reasons of predation and resource extraction rather than the satisfaction of political aims. Similarly, with regard to Palestinian armed groups, although smuggling and profiteering are undoubtedly among the activities conducted by some entities, the main goal is to establish an independent state. In both instances, the cause or objective defines how armed violence is targeted. A Liberian group may target a village; a Palestinian group may target Israeli police or military units or civilians. In either case, violence so directed may contravene international norms, and some may consider it excessive and indiscriminate. For the groups involved, however, it is normal, legitimate, and/or necessary.

Why are small arms and light weapons employed in such different ways? Why, in some situations, is armed violence targeted expressly at civilian populations, and, in others, at armed forces, institutions, and supporters of a political order? One reason is that the motivations of individuals differ in their immediacy, which is reflected in the composition of groups. The gains from membership of an armed group may be instant, such as a sense of solidarity with other armed individuals, and the ability to plunder more effectively, or they may be more long term in nature. The latter may include better political representation for a particular group of people, repellence of invaders, or secession from a state.

At the outset of an armed conflict, as Kalyvas argues, the use of small arms, and indeed all forms of violence, is often multi-directional and not focused on achieving a particular long-term objective. Myriad acts of violence are often perpetrated against neighbours, as sides have yet to become polarized to the extent that parties to a conflict are clearly identifiable; individuals violently abuse suspected enemies (Kalyvas, 2003, pp. 12–13). It is not necessarily that traditional grievances resurface and crystallize into a campaign of armed violence, but more that, using high levels of instability and hostility as cover, individuals often employ weapons to settle old scores or to satisfy greed-based desires.

In an environment marked by high instability, the ability of individuals to unite in groups has an obvious bearing on the identification of subsequent targets of armed violence. Where leadership and individual will are present, and the possibilities for a forward-looking project are clear, it is likely that cohesive groups will emerge and direct the use of weapons towards, among other things, engaging state security forces (or, conversely, protecting a nation). This is not to say that massacres and atrocities perpetrated against civilians necessarily subside—in fact, there is every chance that they will increase—but rather that combatants adhere to groups espousing lucid aims and often receive training in the use of weapons. Hence, small arms are, for the most part, used tactically and violence is usually highly directed. Where prevailing social conditions do not facilitate such developments, there is a strong incentive for groups to form solely with the intention of gaining from the status quo. These groups employ small arms predominantly to extract resources and to plunder, or indeed to secure any other kind of immediate social or spiritual benefit.

The text above provides some idea of the broad goals that groups espouse. But how do these groups differ in terms of their command-and-control structures, and what are the implications for the daily use of weapons? How can objectives serve as a broad metric for gauging the likely targets of armed hostility?

The structure of armed groups is diverse, ranging from the long-established, highly organized hierarchies common to traditional armies, to entities in which it is hard to discern any kind of system of organization whatsoever. Yet,

At the onset of armed conflict, using high levels of instability and hostility as cover, weapons are used to settle old scores or to satisfy greed-based desires.

as Bowyer Bell (1998, p. 103) stresses, all armed groups in practice must have some type of formal configuration to control to some extent the operational direction of their activities.

Debatably, two key factors determine why group structures differ. First is the ability of commanders to exert influence over armed individuals (and, on the contrary, the willingness of these individuals to relinquish some personal freedoms and to accept the authority of commanders). Second is the capacity of commanders to oversee how group members use their weapons.

Young LTTE recruits listen to lectures at a jungle training camp in the Sri Lankan village Vakarai in August 1996.

While the leaders of a group largely determine the degree of control exercised over members, command and control relies greatly on the willingness of recruits to respect leadership.[10] Arguably, command and control is as much about charisma, of which all leaders have at least a trace, and the level of consensus leading to consent, as it is about feeling compelled due to the threat of punishment (Bowyer Bell, 1998, p. 103). Organizational goals must comprise credible promises to deliver benefits to group members (Cyert and March, 1963; March and Simon, 1958; Simon, 1997). Only groups able to make credible promises to deliver future benefits, rather than immediate gains, can attract highly committed individuals (Weinstein, 2004, p. 15). Such individuals are more likely to use weapons to satisfy the aims of a progressive project than to employ them for personal gain.[11] As Weinstein notes, in contrast to short-term, gain-seeking groups, it is often far easier for commanders of groups comprising long-term, gain-seeking individuals to exercise control because the latter are less likely to put personal benefit before the satisfaction of group objectives (Weinstein, 2004, p. 32).[12]

A second (closely linked) command-and-control issue is the level of oversight that commanders are willing and able to exercise over group members. Policzer (2002, pp. 8–15) has constructed a comprehensive framework for analysing the structure of a group, based on the quality and quantity of information that leaders acquire about the activities of recruits. His approach focuses on the ability of leaders to receive information and to monitor whether the performance of subordinates is consistent with the goals of the group (Table 7.2). The central hypothesis is that 'organizations that are good information processors are likely to exercise coercion radically different from those that are not' (Policzer, 2002, p. 8). Leaders either monitor the actions of subordinates directly, or through an intermediary within the group, and/or they rely on external sources of information on the activities of group members.

In the latter case, leaders must consider a variety of channels, such as human rights groups and the regional and international media. The relative attention that the leadership devotes to each of these channels alters its ability to monitor the activities of subordinates.

Table 7.2   Types of monitoring within armed groups

Type of monitoring	Source of information	Examples
Internal monitoring	Information generated within the group	Direct monitoring by a leader Monitoring through an intermediary Combination of the two
External monitoring	Information from external sources	Monitoring the immediate populace Monitoring the regional and international media Combination of the two

Note: Table based on ideas proposed by Policzer (2002).

For the study of armed groups, the approach is of great value. While the leadership may often make the decision whether or not to use weapons, different organizational structures control its ability to articulate objectives, be they of an aggressive or benevolent nature.

Table 7.3   Strong and weak monitoring

	High internal monitoring	Low internal monitoring
High external monitoring	Highly organized armed groups frequently with strong international connections, such as the British Armed Forces, Hezbollah, or the LTTE	Organized armed groups within which oversight is intentionally opaque, such as right-wing militias in Colombia and perhaps some private security outfits in Afghanistan
Low external monitoring	Organized armed groups with few linkages to the external environment, such as rebel entities in northern Mali or drug factions in Rio de Janeiro	Armed groups with little in the way of a formal system of organization and few external connections, such as armed elements in Sierra Leone or the Solomon Islands

Note: Table derived from the work of Policzer (2002).

The following sections present two forms of organization—short- and long-term gain-seeking groups—and illustrate how various combinations of membership and leadership strategies affect weapons use. They concentrate on variables that influence the kind of person recruited, his or her objectives, and the degree of accord between the objectives of groups and those of their members.

Box 7.3   From long-term to short-term goals: UNITA's slide from mass mobilization to resource extraction

Since its emergence almost 40 years ago, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola, UNITA) has transformed from a group employing violence for ideological purposes to one using it to further material gains. Although these two concepts are hard to disentangle, a distinct change is nonetheless observable in the goals of UNITA and in the way in which it engages in armed violence.

Jonas Savimbi formed UNITA in 1966 during the struggle against colonial Portugal. It drew support largely from the Ovimbundu people, comprising nearly 40 per cent of the Angolan population. The Ovimbundu enjoyed little political representation within the larger Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola, MPLA).

Seeking national liberation, UNITA could be seen initially as a group promoting long-term goals on behalf of a large section of Angolan society. Describing Savimbi during the early years, Burke (1984, p. 17) notes:

He long concentrated on raising the political consciousness of the peasantry, an important lesson learned from Mao. He established food cooperatives and developed village self-defense units. He also established an elaborate governmental framework in which regional elected councils made their views known through a political commissar to the 35 member central committee whose members were to be chosen every four years at a congress.

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Box 7.3 **From long-term to short-term goals: UNITA's slide from mass mobilization to resource extraction (cont.)**

Of the three main non-state armed groups involved in the colonial era struggle (1966–74), UNITA relied least on external support, depending primarily on political rather than military means to extend its control (Burke, 1984, p. 17). UNITA could not for long describe itself, however, as a movement characterized by widespread ethnic or ideological mobilization.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, UNITA received military aid and backing from the apartheid Government of South Africa, from the United States, and indirectly from North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) countries in Western Europe (Johnson and Martin, 1988, pp. 102–106). Military aid continued to flow after the departure of the Portuguese (1975), as the conflict between UNITA and the communist-leaning MPLA deepened. By the late 1970s, and throughout the 1980s, UNITA essentially derived revenues from participating in one of Africa's most protracted proxy conflicts.

As UNITA sought to demonstrate to the outside world its strength vis-à-vis the MPLA government, acts of terrorism came to form a core component of its armed strategy, including kidnapping and hijacking (Burke, 1984, p. 53).

In May 1991, Portugal, the Soviet Union, and the United States brokered the Bicesse Peace Accord, and a ceasefire was implemented to halt the 16-year conflict (ICG, 2003b, p. 2). The agreement signified a turning point with regard to UNITA's goals. From the early 1980s, Savimbi had indicated a willingness to share power with the MPLA if Cuban and Soviet forces left the country (Burke, 1984, p. 56). The peace deal arguably robbed UNITA of a significant portion of its *raison d'être*.

UNITA rejected the results of the September 1992 elections, which the UN deemed free and fair, and resumed fighting in October 1992. The UN Security Council imposed sanctions in 1993. Resolution 864 forbade the sale and supply of weapons and petroleum or petroleum products to UNITA (Fowler and Angell, 2001, pp. 191–92).

In response, UNITA stepped up its transfers of diamonds and other resources for weapons. It offered Congo-Brazzaville and Zaire (now the Republic of Congo and the DRC) natural resources, including diamonds, in return for military and political support (Prendergast, 1999, p. 3). The conflict escalated dramatically; violence was perpetrated primarily to acquire natural resources. As Cleary (1999, p. 146) points out, 'more Angolans died as a result of war in the two years between 1992 and November 1994 than in the sixteen years of conflict before 1991'.

Fighting subsided somewhat in the years immediately following the signing of the 1994 Lusaka Protocol. By 1997, though, the accord had broken down completely.

When the government of Zairian President Mobutu Sese Seko collapsed in April 1997, UNITA lost its most important backer.

The UN imposed further sanctions later in 1997 (Resolution 1127), and in 1998 (Resolution 1173), which included prohibitions on representation abroad and travel and on the sale or export of diamonds by UNITA. Nevertheless, as one ICG report states, 'by mid-1998, freshly rearmed and demanding significant amendments to the Protocol, [UNITA] resumed a low-intensity war' (ICG, 2003b, p. 3).

Given President Mobutu's demise, how was UNITA able to rearm? Prendergast asserts that the organization sought and found assistance and shelter in Burkina Faso and Togo, largely in return for access to natural resources. He notes: 'the fuel for UNITA's resupply efforts during this decade has been diamonds, replacing the aid UNITA received from the United States and apartheid South Africa during the Cold War' (Prendergast, 1999, p. 3). The group took advantage of an extensive network of regional brokers in order to exchange natural resources for arms.

Following Savimbi's death in February 2002, the conflict came to a formal end on 4 April 2002, with the signing of the Luena Accords.

In 2003, the ICG reported that many UNITA units had taken to banditry and organized criminal action due to the collapse of the command structure in the year prior to Savimbi's death (ICG, 2003b, p. 6). The fact that many top UNITA commanders have been offered political positions in the capital, Luanda, and have been supplied with welfare has further encouraged disloyalty among rank-and-file recruits who have been left with nothing. In sum, the long-term goal-seeking group of the 1960s has turned into a short-term goal-seeking group made up of those UNITA members with just a rifle to their name.

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Groups may seek pillage or the control of resources, or the social and economic benefits of war may simply outweigh those of peace.

Short-term gain-seeking groups

Groups looking to make short-term gains may include those whose objectives are to pillage or to gain control of resources, such as diamond mines and forests. Alternatively, they may be engaged in an armed conflict simply because the social and economic benefits of war outweigh those of peace. The use of small arms and light weapons varies depending on the particular short-term aim. These groups attract recruits who often care little about the ramifications of violence for the proximate populace. Hence, at first glance, small arms and light weapons use may appear random.

In relation to a number of groups, such as those in Liberia, torture, theft, rape, and mass killing by armed combatants cannot be viewed as part of a systematic political project, or as the result of agreement on goals among a large number of people (Ellis, 1999). In such cases, the use of small arms and light weapons is largely ad hoc, military-style coordination is notably absent, and violence is multi-directional. Fighters with President Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) lived hand-to-mouth and relied on killing, pillaging, or rape to satisfy immediate desires. Weapons were used more to facilitate looting, rape, and other forms of predation, therefore, than to achieve military objectives.

The same is true of conflicts in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone. Weapons have been used, for example, to threaten local people and to extort and kill at will for various reasons. Only infrequently, are fighters persuaded or coerced into launching large-scale assaults on government troops to procure or defend territory.

Once installed in a region, fighters endowed with small arms and light weapons can plunder and kill without having to engage in combat as an element of a long-term political project (Clapham, 1998).

Box 7.4   Group objectives and cycles of armed violence

Violence begets violence. While the presence of armed individuals has the potential to raise insecurity in a region, autocatalytic cycles of armed violence seem to be triggered by how groups appear to act with respect to the people around them.

Former combatants in Mali reported that, while there was always mistrust of armed individuals, if the families and communities of group members accorded the group's objective legitimacy, there was a degree of consensus that it was necessary for members to be armed. If, however, the group was seen to be engaging in action contrary to the aims of local communities, such as banditry, the reverse was true. In North Kivu, DRC, fieldwork conducted between 2002 and 2004 revealed that Mayi-Mayi groups, once perceived as 'brave and fearless fighters' (qualities often attributed to supernatural powers) in the struggle against President Mobutu's regime, held diminished status. The research noted a deep change in local perceptions. People now recognize that the fighters are not invincible and attribute their loss of status to their thieving, banditry, and abuse of the local populace. The outcome is a situation in which local condemnation aggravates the anti-social behaviour of combatants. In turn, this leads to the perpetration of increased acts of violence by the populace against them, resulting in pervasive armed violence in society (Jourdan, 2004, pp. 157-76).

Short-term gains also manifest themselves in ways less related to economic benefit. In some regions, such as North Kivu, DRC, membership of an armed group offers an opportunity for immediate social mobility, representing 'an attempt to accede to material, and above all, symbolic aspects of modernity' (Jourdan, 2004, p. 157). In such instances, not only do combatants use small arms and light weapons to steal for a living, but also they often utilize them in an attempt to invert the social order to their own perceived advantage (Jourdan, 2004, pp. 162–63). Examining the Somali National Movement (SNM), Compagnon (1998, p. 80) remarks:

> The original well-trained militias had been decimated in the heavy fighting … and were replaced by contingents drawn from all [clan] lineage segments. Many of these new combatants came from ravaged towns, and had lost their closest relatives in the war. Most of them had no formal education, because the school system had been disrupted since as early as 1984, and the majority had been unemployed before they became guerrillas. Warfare became a way of life, and the automatic rifle a means of a living.

In such cases, acts of armed violence are often directed at members of older generations, particularly elderly persons who represent the traditional hierarchy. Alternatively, they focus on the procurement of items that symbolize modernity, such as sunglasses, designer clothes, and radios (Ellis, 1999).
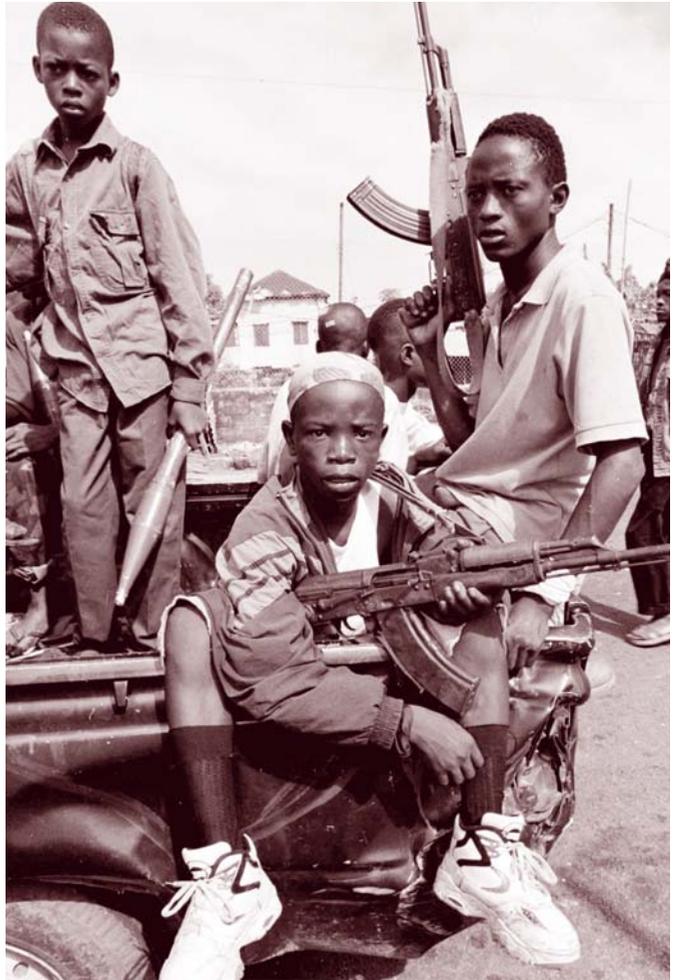
Similar patterns are observable vis-à-vis violence committed by state-sponsored armed groups. Members of government-armed militias and paramilitaries, frequently from poor backgrounds and lacking any long-term commitment to a cause, have used weapons to facilitate the predation of the general populace. Mostly, these groups consist of short-term gain-seeking individuals. As Dasgupta (2003, pp. 9–11) argues, the fact that paramilitary units, such as the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, AUC), are often a transitory feature of a state's security apparatus means that group members will regularly attempt to gain access to resources other than those provided by the state.

The high prevalence of short-term gain-seeking individuals has notable implications for the type of command and control instituted within a group. Groups that attract such individuals, for example, the NPFL, are often hard to control and commanders have little incentive or ability to introduce a solid organizational structure. Minimal internal and external

Child combatants hold their weapons on the streets of Monrovia in April 1996.

© Reuters

monitoring produces a situation in which the leader is unlikely to have any real knowledge about the activities of subordinates, or to exercise any degree of control over their actions. There are few restrictions on weapons and most individuals are armed and able to use them with impunity against persons outside of the group.[13]

In contrast to longer-term goal-seeking groups, the command-and-control structures of lesser-organized entities are often more opaque and spheres of authority regularly overlap. Consequently, should a commander wish to control the use of weapons, authority is so fragmented as to render it difficult. A case in point is the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone. Despite attempts by senior officials to unite the group, the RUF remained essentially a 'bandit organization solely driven by the survivalist needs of its predominantly uneducated and alienated battle front and battle group commanders' (Abdullah and Muana, 1998, pp. 191–92).

Even in groups in which commanders exercise considerable oversight, and command and control are robust, these processes do not necessarily extend to all combatants. For the purpose of military expediency, commanders often employ small groups of combatants that are peripheral to the group proper. The reasons for this are that they

enhance the size of the overall force that a group can field, or they know the area of operations well. Routinely, these combatants are no more than freebooters and show little allegiance to a particular cause. Some commanders admit to having little control over how they use their weapons.[14]

This is a not simply a feature of small, non-state armed groups. Events in Afghanistan demonstrate that armed actors often attach themselves to larger groups for a number of reasons. The armed vigilantism of Jonathan Keith Idema in Kabul is illustrative (Burnett, 2004; *Washington Post,* 2004). Peripheral groups of individuals may be tolerated, because they are useful, or they may be encouraged to participate, so that denials of actions are afforded more credibility. Yet, in both instances, control over how weapons are used is necessarily weaker than with armed groups proper. In extreme situations, such as that of the DRC, quantities of weapons were distributed among militias, without mechanisms in place to record the identity of the recipients (Capie, 2004, p. 9).

Similar situations are apparent when command and control is deliberately vague to ensure deniability for supreme leaders. Often this is the case within the ranks of paramilitaries, constabulary forces, and militia groups that are 'extensions of the centralized authority of national militaries', such as the (Hutu) Interahamwe in Rwanda (Dasgupta, 2004, p. 1). Members of these groups receive a degree of direction on targeting a particular enemy, yet their consequent actions are not coordinated and the leadership usually denies them.

Box 7.5   Structures of control: the drug trade in Rio de Janeiro

Armed violence associated with the drug trade in Rio de Janeiro has received worldwide media attention. Four factions currently dominate Brazil's drug market.[15] While they display little in the way of a formal structure, seemingly 'independent' actors—*donos do tráfico*—and their subordinates act within a framework of loose beneficial alliances. The structure is organized around mutual support—common goals, which encompass mutually desirable objectives for profitable gain and territorial advancement (Dowdney, 2003, p. 43). It is also regulated, however, by extreme violence. In this system, armed violence is far from random; it is tightly controlled.

Each *dono* controls one or several *favelas* and organizes the trade in cocaine and marijuana in these communities, distributes weapons to employees, and maintains diplomatic relations with other *donos* from the same faction (Dowdney, 2003, p. 47).

No *dono* faction has a leader per se, but certain individuals amass power and respect through their leadership skills. Many of these powerful *donos* are in prison, yet they are able to monitor activities in their territories using cellular phones or nominated *donos* on the outside.

Donos have created 'a control system based on violence or the threat of violence whereby traffickers receive community protection in exchange for offering what the state has traditionally failed to provide: the maintenance of social order, support, economic stimulation and provision of leisure activities' (Dowdney, 2003, pp. 53–54).

Recruitment into this system benefits considerably from a distinct lack of options. It is voluntary, simply because entering the drug trade is often 'the best alternative' (Dowdney, 2003, p. 130). This is the case particularly for children and adolescents.

Members may begin their career as *olheiros* or lookouts, progress to become drug sellers, and possibly end up overseeing other members. They may also become *soldados*: permanently armed members of the faction responsible for maintaining order and defence.

Throughout their career, group members and local residents are subject to a system of oversight, orders, rules, and sanctions. Importantly, attaining and preserving group objectives are at the heart of the system. Drugs must be paid for, no one can speak to the police, and territory has to be defended. Petty crimes that, for example, might endanger this system of control or exacerbate tensions with rival factions are punished (Dowdney, 2003, pp. 139–47). Punishment depends on the crime and ranges from expulsion to beatings, and even execution. A serious offence is judged not on social mores, but on its implications for the continued functioning of the system of control—a crime is something that jeopardizes the system. As one 17-year-old replied in response to a question about what would happen if he did not follow the orders of his boss: '[d]epends what he asks ... If it's to kill someone, I have to do it. If I don't kill then it's my life at risk' (Dowdney, 2003, p. 149).

Understanding how faction members use weapons requires that one appreciate the principal goals of the system and the acceptable and unacceptable activities that take place within it.

Note: Box based on research presented in Dowdney (2003). Children of the Drug Trade provides a comprehensive analysis of organized armed violence in Rio de Janeiro. Thanks to the author for his valuable input.
Source: Demetriou (2002, pp. 25–29)

Long-term gain-seeking groups

In contrast, groups that attract recruits looking to secure long-term benefits differ considerably from those composed largely of short-term gain-seeking individuals. Such groups hope to acquire a place in the political system, or employ violence to achieve goals intended to be collectively progressive. The use of weapons differs greatly as a consequence. First, group members are likely to refrain from engaging in violence that might jeopardize these aims. Second, because of collectively progressive goals, commanders are often in a better social position to sanction members who deviate from them. While this is obviously not true at all times, a number of cases are illustrative.

Groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and the LTTE comprise members that, for the most part, are committed to a long-term political project. Violence is, therefore, more targeted than with short-term gain-seeking groups such as the NPFL. Hamas, for instance, regularly uses weapons against Israeli troops and citizens. Combatants, though, either refrain from targeting large numbers of popular supporters of Hamas, or are sanctioned if they do. The use of weapons for predation, as in Liberia or Sierra Leone, is clearly not an issue here.

Groups such as the NRA in Uganda displayed similar tendencies before coming to power. Members and leaders shared common principles and objectives when in opposition to the government of President Milton Obote, which were easily reinforced by formalized training in the aims and ideology of the movement. As Clapham (1998, p. 10) argues, the NRA was thus far more effective militarily than groups such as the NPFL, because its troops were less inclined to engage in banditry and other acts of depredation. Furthermore, such activities did not reduce the willingness of members to confront government forces.
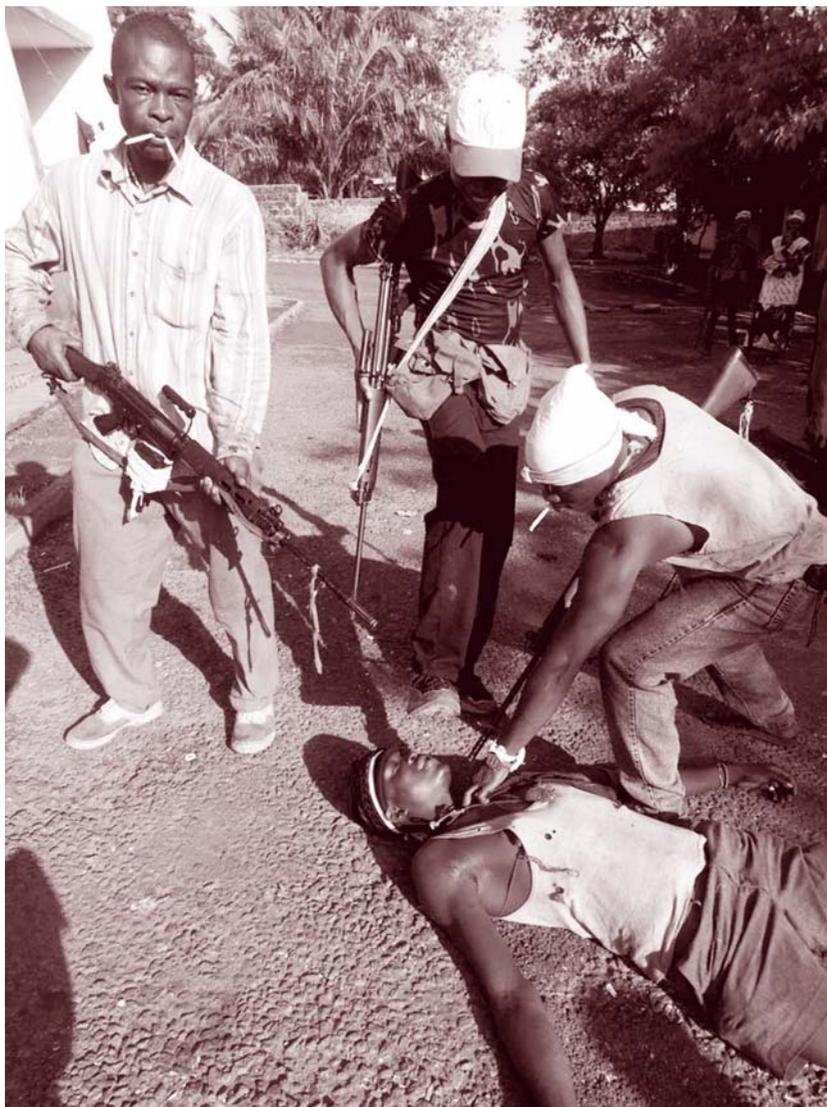
Often these groups are highly structured, with distinct hierarchies and clear command-and-control channels. Consequently, leaders are often able to monitor closely the actions of their members. With respect to the Tamasheq rebellion in northern Mali, for example, former Malian Army commanders modelled a number of armed groups along military lines. These groups appeared highly coordinated and leaders were not only knowledgeable about the actions of members on the ground, but also were able to direct them. As a result, such armed groups usually carry out highly targeted killings, and use violence to fulfil outwardly progressive objectives. These aims take precedence over the longing for personal revenge, and the momentary wish to pillage or take advantage of a woman's body.

The extent to which these groups are structured is best illustrated by controls over the distribution of weapons. In Mali, there was a prevailing view that, while combatants controlled their weapons (most had one for personal defence), armament in general was the concern of the commander. In some cases, on joining the group, an individual's weapon became group property. As for arms procured by the group, or captured from the enemy, there was no doubt that these were group property. Subsequent distribution was determined by the type of mission that the user was about to undertake. The serial number and the user's name were noted, and weapons not in employment remained under the supervision of the c*hargé des armes*. Once issued, strict controls came into effect concerning the utilization of ammunition.[16]

Within long-term goal-seeking groups, the prospect of controlling the use of weapons against civilian populations is better than in short-term, gain-seeking groups. Key factors in this regard are the frequent need to obtain political support from local populations and effective command-and-control structures. As Clapham notes of the NRA (in Uganda) and the closely related Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), overall training and discipline levels, while improving the fighting performance of a unit, were accompanied by an ability to enforce stringent levels of discipline. '[I]ndividuals responsible for rape or murder of civilians were publicly executed' (Clapham, 1998, p. 10).

There is a further element to consider in assessing the command-and-control structures of long-term goal-seeking groups. Very often these groups not only depend on outside support from states and diasporas, but they are frequently highly aware that their supporters, or potential supporters, will monitor their use of weapons. Where there is strong internal and external monitoring, the constraints on the actions of leaders are much greater (Policzer, 2002, pp. 9–10). This does not mean that such groups are necessarily mindful of, or even knowledgeable about, international norms on conduct in armed conflict. Moderation in the use of arms is, however, certainly more of a preoccupation of long-term goal-seeking groups than of those with short-term and often criminal orientations and few international social linkages.

In the Tamasheq rebellion in Mali, knowledge of international norms among former commanders was fragmentary. Leaders reported that they were aware that it was illegal to shoot at parachutists in the air.[17] Most stressed, though, that killings of civilians were punished because groups required popular support. It is this phenomenon of 'self-policing' that most distinguishes long- from short-term, gain-seeking groups.

In these cases, however, attempts to minimize or sanction the misuse of weapons are frequently hindered by the fact that groups lack the necessary structural capacity (Capie, 2004). In other instances, as with modern militaries, combat objectives take precedence over the effects of using small arms and light weapons against non-combatants.

Sierra Leonean 'Kamajor' civil defence militia fighters train in capturing RUF rebels in east Freetown, May 2000.

© Yannis Behrakis/Reuters

Box 7.6   Command and control in the Uganda National Rescue Front: an example of tactical considerations outweighing human rights concerns

In 2004, the Center for Conflict Resolution (CECORE) and the Small Arms Survey held interviews with, and carried out a brief survey of, 20 former members of the Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF). All ranks were represented, from private to major-general. Among the key findings was that controls over weapons were designed not to prevent abuse of non-combatants, but, instead, to maintain the group's fighting potential.

There was complete agreement that all weapons were the property of the group, rather than of the individual. Importantly, as with groups interviewed in Bamako, Mali, in September 2004, not all individuals were armed. In fact, the UNRF, like its Malian counterparts, was structured along military lines. All combatants reported that there were clear lines of command. With slight variations, furthermore, all were able to describe how the group was split into six or seven hierarchical divisions—from platoon to division. Combatants stated that tactical need dictated how the system functioned. Hence, the task at hand determined how the group's limited stock of weapons (there were always fewer armaments than group members) was distributed. Some combatants said that this worked much like a shift system: those given a particular assignment were issued with weapons that previously had been in the hands of colleagues. Only a private described how weapons were kept in storage and had to be signed for and distributed by the 'technician'. Apparently, members were not allowed to take weapons home.

According to former UNRF combatants, outside support was lacking and thus the group had to capture all of the weapons that it needed from government forces. The type of mission influenced its selection. As with groups in Mali, the UNRF employed as much heavy firepower as possible.

The system, while seemingly rudimentary, suggests considerable command and control. It is important to stress, nonetheless, that command and control over the use of weapons may curtail certain actions, but have no bearing on others. When asked whether it was prohibited to use weapons in particular situations, the vast majority of respondents said yes, but not for reasons connected to human rights considerations. Largely, the reasons were tactical, such as not making enemies aware of the presence of the group by shooting. Only four interviewees mentioned the presence of civilians as a factor in a decision not to use weapons. Worryingly, members of the highest ranks were not among them. Of the four, only one recalled specific instances in which weapons use was absolutely forbidden, including in health centres and the market place.

The harshest punishments for contravening orders appear to have been imposed for any form of behaviour that had the potential to diminish the group's ability to fight. Penalties such as digging latrines were handed out for general disobedience, while penalties such as disarmament and solitary confinement were imposed for using group-owned weapons and ammunition to shoot animals. The most severe punishment, death, was reserved for defilement or theft of a weapon belonging to the group. No reports exist of penalties being imposed by commanders for breaches of international norms on conduct in armed conflict.

Policy implications of a focus on group goals and the use of weapons

The rules and expectations that allow a group to organize and function include a stable set of commonly agreed group objectives. These objectives indicate the type of behaviour that a group is likely to encourage, tolerate, or discourage, including weapons use. An analysis of broad group goals thus provides a reliable means of predicting likely targets and the extent of a campaign of armed violence. It also highlights areas where measures designed to address the negative ramifications of armed violence may or may not be successful.

In order to create incentives for fighters to relinquish small arms and light weapons, for instance, it is essential to understand the rewards for peace in the context of the rewards for war. For groups comprising long-term gain-seeking individuals, there is arguably more chance that combatants will avoid small arms and light weapons use that could alienate the local populace, and that they will be willing to relinquish arms to secure the benefits of peace. In contrast, groups made up of primarily short-term gain-seeking individuals are usually focused on taking advantage of immediate benefits offered by a conflict. The way those combatants use weapons will often antagonize large sections of the local population, further distance combatants from the rest of society, and may ensure that the rewards of peace do not outweigh those of war. The likelihood of disarmament is lessened, as reintegration offers little in the way of social or material gain.

Often groups with weak or fragmented command-and-control structures are unable to commit to agreements and pledge with any surety that their members will adhere to their provisions. In relation to the Movement of Democratic Forces in the Casamance (Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de Casamance, MFDC) in Senegal, economically, the Sadio faction appears to benefit more from conflict than does the rest of the group. As a result, the group's political wing makes commitments on behalf of the military branch and always without a mechanism to ensure compliance (Humphreys and ag Mohamed, 2003, pp. 16–17). In contrast, with respect to a number of groups engaged in the Tamasheq rebellion in northern Mali, former commanders claimed that they surrendered all of the weapons in their possession. None of the weapons held by individuals and groups outside of their control, however, were returned.[18] In arms reduction programmes, therefore, it is essential to target groups with minimal structures or those that are most likely to split into small, armed clusters of plunder-seeking individuals. The reason is that these groups, lacking clear command-and-control structures, are frequently the most uncontrollable in a post-conflict environment and present the greatest threats to local livelihoods. Moreover, these groups, such as the Cobra militia in the Republic of Congo, often retain far more weapons than other groups. Often this is due to extreme lack of organizational coherence and highly individualistic approaches to weapons ownership (Demetriou, Muggah, and Biddle, 2002, p. 18).

It is not just non-state armed groups, though, that demonstrate how weak or fragmented command and control can impact negatively on the use of weapons. Recent events in Afghanistan and Iraq clearly testify to the fact that, when state armed forces and police are overstretched, private armed security groups, paramilitaries, and poorly trained recruits are regularly utilized with little oversight. In Iraq, lack of monitoring was a key variable in the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal.

An understanding of organizational factors and the use of weapons thus has relevance for all instances in which armed entities (state and non-state) use violence to achieve particular objectives. To date, little attention has been devoted to organizational factors in specific reference to small arms and light weapons. The basic workings of authority differ little among groups, regardless of their structure. Hence, much can be learned from analyses of command-and-control structures in the groups that researchers have access to, such as Western militaries, and the findings can be applied to all types of armed group.

Violence is never random, but purposive.

CONCLUSION

While the above approach omits many important and nuanced factors that result in weapons use differing from one context to another, it does so with a clear purpose in mind.

It is easy to believe that the use of small arms and light weapons involves an unfathomable mass of issues. Such a view may prevent certain fundamental variables from being appreciated and basic controls from being implemented that can rapidly alleviate the negative consequences of small arms and light weapons use. This study has attempted, therefore, to present some primary constraints on small arms and light weapons use in armed conflict.

Before investigating more complex phenomena, one needs to ask some simple questions about an armed conflict. For example: will reducing proliferation in the immediate vicinity curb the use of weapons by a group or will it be able to acquire them from elsewhere? Would the supply of some types of weapons alter the conflict dramatically, and, if so, who might provide them? Will a short-term gain-seeking group respond positively to a DDR programme? Would an embargo be the most appropriate or efficient means of ending violent conflict in a country already satu-

rated with arms? Would stopping all weapons flows to a country make police forces reliant on existing stocks of unsuitable military armaments?

Several potential 'choke points' exist that might serve to alleviate the use of weapons. The most notable are efforts to reduce availability. This is particularly true of the most destructive forms of light weapons, such as mortars, RPGs, and grenade launchers.

The manufacture of cheap and powerful weapons, especially explosive varieties of light weapons, is clearly aimed at resource-poor states, which are frequently the most prone to conflict. Both production and trade in these armaments need to be more heavily regulated.

Stockpiled weapons are often insecure and their release can have drastic consequences in terms of increased loss of life and damage to infrastructure. Again, these negativities are potentially made greater by the firepower of stockpiled weapons. Better security is a must and destruction is the safest option for weapons not in use.

The same rationale is applicable to efforts to disarm former combatants. The simple fact is that readily available weapons are the ones most likely to be used in an armed conflict. Targeting the most destructive weapons in the immediate locality, or at the regional level, may control the rapid escalation of a future conflict.

At the organizational level, understanding social controls on the use of weapons by armed groups and their linkages with external actors and resource sources is essential to comprehending the potential effect of measures implemented. Violence is never random, but purposive. Addressing the effects of armed violence requires that one appreciate the social logic of a particular group and its relations with friends, foes, and the environment.

Group goals can offer great insight into whether and how a particular armed entity will respond to changes in the availability of weapons. This information is of critical importance for measures such as sanctions and for arms reduction programmes. Restricting local availability may have a strong impact on small, resource-poor, criminal groups, which may not have the capacity to source weapons far afield. Controlling the use of weapons by resource-rich or well-connected armed groups necessitates greater understanding of resource flow complexities and international connections.

Initiatives focused solely on resources, however, are insufficient. Groups that promise their members that they will fulfil long-term and comprehensive goals are able to mobilize human capital for a campaign of armed violence even though they lack significant material and financial resources. Efforts to tackle the use of weapons must extend deep into the politics of an armed struggle if they are ultimately to be successful. Nonetheless, simple controls on availability are crucial.

Finally, attempts to control the use of weapons by an armed group require understanding of its capacity to act in coordination. The ability of commanders to commit to peace processes and DDR programmes is of paramount importance. Fighters that escape oversight and are only weakly bound to command-and-control structures can engage in armed violence irrespective of commitments made at higher levels. Their use of weapons to satisfy personal ambitions is a fundamental obstacle to reducing fears of predation, which feature heavily in post-conflict societies across the globe.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AUC	Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia
CECORE	Center for Conflict Resolution
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration

DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EU	European Union
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia
ICG	International Crisis Group
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MANPADS	Man-portable air defence systems
MFDC	Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de Casamance
MPLA	Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NRA	National Resistance Army (Uganda)
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front
RPG	Rocket-propelled grenade (launcher)
RUF	Revolutionary United Front (Sierra Leone)
SNM	Somali National Movement
ULIMO	United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia
UN	United Nations
UNITA	União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola
UNRF	Uganda National Rescue Front
WHO	World Health Organization

ENDNOTES

1   This is an important point in research on small arms and light weapons. When a weapon is fired and a target is hit, or where a person is coerced into doing something against his or her will, one can say with some surety that the weapon generates an effect. The assertion becomes weaker the further from the 'scene' of the violence one goes. One could claim, for instance, that small arms and light weapons have a strong impact on development. Yet, one cannot say with any certainty that, given a conflict replete with many kinds of armaments, and characterized by drought, famine, and other sources of insecurity, small arms and light weapons are responsible for factor X.

2   State and non-state groups differ in many ways, but they do not differ greatly with respect to the varieties of weapons that are potentially available to them and their basic behavioural processes. The latter include the articulation of goals, habitual conformity by group members, the threat of sanction to ensure compliance with objectives, and oversight mechanisms. If the two factors do have different impacts on the groups concerned, they are arguably a function of scale.

3   Participatory research involving former combatants, Mali, September 2004 (Small Arms Survey, 2004b).

4   Interview conducted by Ryan Nichols, Small Arms Survey consultant, with General Seyea Sheriff, a former LURD force commander in Monrovia, Monrovia, 1 March 2005; interviews conducted by Ryan Nichols, Small Arms Survey consultant, with an official of the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration and two local informed observers, Monrovia, 2 March

2005; correspondence with Lisa Misol, Human Rights Watch researcher, 10 March 2005.

5   Participatory research involving former combatants, Mali, September 2004 (Small Arms Survey, 2004b).

6   This is largely because, unlike states, diasporas are more reliable in providing funding and are less likely to seek to exert control over a movement (Byman et. al., 2001, p. xv).

7   Participatory research involving former combatants, Mali, September 2004 (Small Arms Survey, 2004b).

8   No organization, though, permits outright domination of individuals and all members enjoy at least some freedom of action. In sociological terms, 'return' is always a part of the equation (Simmel, 1971). A certain amount of personal freedom relinquished by the individual to the group may be 'returned' in a number of ways. For instance, through the provision of a salary and social welfare, through the furtherance of political ambitions, or, in the extreme, through the ability to shoot, rape, and pillage at will. Nonetheless, groups differ considerably with respect to articulation of goals and tolerated forms of behaviour and the degree to which sanctions are applied.

9   Participatory research involving former combatants, Mali, September 2004 (Small Arms Survey, 2004b).

10   This chapter views leadership as a crucial factor in the articulation and implementation of group goals, but it does not see it as the crucial factor. The norms, rules, and habits that define an individual's perception of 'correct' behaviour are equally attributable to relations

with 'regular' group members, as they are to interaction with group leaders. Nonetheless, group leaders enjoy a higher degree of decision-making autonomy than do most group members. Hence, one would expect decisions to be made and executed with some degree of freedom and in accordance with broad organizational objectives. The oversight mechanisms that they institute and their latent capacity to sanction make them an important variable in evaluating conformity to group goals.

[11] A focus on greed as a motive for armed conflict often masks more fundamental phenomena, such as hopelessness and a commitment to justness through a cause that offers a way out of poverty and a means of empowerment (Ballentine and Sherman, 2003; Agbonifo, 2004). Goals may be articulated in a number of ways and incentives may be *financial, cultural,* or *spiritual.* In a professional army, for instance, economic rewards may be prevalent, but combatants also claim to fight for reasons of loyalty to friends and defence of a country. In non-state groups, a similar mixture of aims and motivations prevails. Identification with a particular class, language, or ethnic group, which may be communicated through reference to historical factors (constructed or not) or rituals (swearing dedication to a certain cause), may reinforce these goals (Humphreys and ag Mohamed, 2003; Stewart, 2002).

[12] Modern Western-style militaries have a combination of short- and long-term motivations with respect to gain. Soldiers are paid a regular salary to meet immediate needs, but they are also conditioned through training (and by a long history designed to increase loyalty to 'king and country') and are controlled within a very tight organizational structure.

[13] Not all members of armed groups are necessarily armed. Members perform functions other than combat-related duties. In better-organized groups, these tasks include record-keeping, controlling armouries, and managing finances. In all groups, they include cooking or even hunting and farming. Nor do armament levels remain stable. As with all consumable resources, stockpiles of arms and ammunition fluctuate according to rates of supply and consumption. At times, therefore, such actors may be armed; at other times, they may be unarmed or without ammunition.

[14] Participatory research involving former combatants, Mali, September 2004 (Small Arms Survey, 2004b).

[15] *Comando Vermelho, Terceiro Comando, Amigos dos Amigos,* and *Terceiro Comando Puro.*

[16] Participatory research involving former combatants, Mali, September 2004 (Small Arms Survey, 2004b).

[17] Participatory research involving former combatants, Mali, September 2004 (Small Arms Survey, 2004b).

[18] Participatory research involving former combatants, Mali, September 2004 (Small Arms Survey, 2004b).

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