



CENTER FOR TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

SHOULDER TO SHOULDER

Views from governments and civil society on cooperative security

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About this series

Shoulder to Shoulder is an interview series by the “Cooperative Security Program” at the Center for Transatlantic Relations (CTR). Cooperative security is increasingly perceived and shaped as a two-faced coin in which the interaction of state and non-state actors is both part of the problem and part of the solution. On the one hand, there is a need to redefine strategies and design responses to address transnational threats by rogue governments, non-governmental forces, and international networks. On the other hand, effective and sustainable solutions to those challenges require partnerships of states, civil society, and international organizations. As a first step, the CTR “Cooperative Security” program will address such interaction in the fight against terrorism. The program is one of the CTR’s projects that explore the crossover between transatlantic politics and global issues. The generous support of the Arca Foundation, the Fisher Fund of the Tides Foundation and an anonymous donor made the publication of the *Shoulder to Shoulder* series possible.

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In this issue

We feature the **Biennial Meeting of States** on the implementation of the 2001 UN *Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects*. This meeting took place in New York on July 7-11, 2003 as a follow up to the UN Conference on small arms and light weapons, the first global consultation on this topic, held two years earlier. It is estimated that small arms and light weapons account for **500,000 deaths each year** and are the weapons most prevalently used in post-Cold War inter-state and internal conflicts, as well as in community violence. This toll has prompted the UN to describe small arms and light weapons as today’s real weapons of mass destruction. In 2001, UN member states committed themselves to curb such proliferation and the illicit trafficking that fuels it. We asked for an assessment of progress from **Ambassador Kuniko Inoguchi** of Japan, who chaired the Biennial Meeting of States in New York, and **Rebecca Peters**, Director of the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), a worldwide coalition of more than 500 nongovernmental organizations that works to reduce and stem the flows and misuse of small arms and light weapons. These interviews were conducted separately at the UN in New York in July 2003.

CTR: Were there any big surprises at this meeting?

Ambassador Kuniko Inoguchi: I was positively impressed by the strong participation of African states and other countries most affected by the presence of small arms and light weapons. It was very good to hear their voices directly and very encouraging to see a truly cooperative spirit both in the informal consultations and at the Biennial Meeting with states delivering very focused statements.

Rebecca Peters: Participation was very impressive both from governments and nongovernmental organizations. This is particularly important because the



**Ambassador Kuniko
Inoguchi**

Biennial Meeting was not designed to make decisions, but only assess progress. The discussion revealed that we have come a long way from when small arms and light weapons proliferation was considered the poor relation of disarmament. The threat that these weapons represent to human rights, stability, security, good governance and development is now on everybody's radar screen.

CTR: What concrete progress have states made in implementing the *Programme of Action* and in making a difference on the ground?

Inoguchi: We have seen progress in institutional building, in the development of national action plans, as well as in the creation of legislation where legal frameworks were missing. While it is true that we have not yet seen the emergence of legally binding international instruments to address the threat of small arms proliferation, the national laws are closing important gaps.

Peters: There is a much clearer recognition that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons is not just a disarmament problem. However, states still have a long way to go to make a real difference on the ground and match the commitment and work undertaken by civil society at the communal, national, regional and international levels. IANSA published a report in which we evaluated progress since the 2001 UN Conference. This report was the sole comprehensive assessment on the implementation of the *Programme of Action*. Moreover, and most importantly, it revealed the patchy and overall insufficient engagement of states to confront this threat, particularly in the areas that IANSA considers basic priorities, such as domestic control, global norms, reintegration of former combatants into society, especially child soldiers, and arms destruction programs. In general, we can say that states' progress has been more evident when regional organizations drove the process. One clear area of success has been the increased dialogue with civil society.

CTR: IANSA has pointed out that trans-national legislation represents a crucial first step in reducing and preventing the global spread of small arms, since trafficking in these weapons knows no national or regional border. To facilitate progress, they have even offered model treaties in the areas of export controls, arms brokering and on tracing and marking

weapons. Is there any hope to see these models become a legal reality soon?

Inoguchi: In other areas of disarmament we have seen strong international instruments that have been accepted, but not implemented, at the national level. On small arms it is often the reverse. National legislation is developing, particularly regarding export and import controls and the licensing of transfers. On arms brokering there is now a widespread understanding of the role of arms middlemen in fueling the illicit market, but I am not sure that we will have an international treaty soon. Finally, concerning tracing and marking weapons, the expert group on this aspect produced a set of recommendations, including the commencement of negotiations on an international agreement. We are proceeding step by step, but I am satisfied that we are making good progress.

Peters: Unlike landmines, which mostly remain where they have been placed, small arms and light weapons easily cross borders. This is a threat that cannot be contained within national perimeters. Small arms and light weapons are traded across continents and often illegally every day. They cascade from conflict to conflict. Weapons left over by the civil war in Mozambique, for example, found their way to the streets of Johannesburg where they are used for rampant crime. The actors in the arms pipelines also travel frequently and locate their activities

where controls are weak. That is the reason why we pushed for global norms. However welcome, national controls do not quite cover enough territory. It is vital to understand that no country is unaffected by the policies and the negligence of other countries. By the same token, all countries benefit from the advances made somewhere else. This interconnection calls for international and concerted measures and action.

CTR: Two months after the UN conference on small arms wrapped up, the September 11th attacks on the US took place. Has the fight against terrorism distracted from, or contributed to, the debate on small arms?

Inoguchi: The September 11th attacks and their aftermath had a decisive impact on the debate. They alerted the international community of the crucial role that small arms and light weapons play in fostering terrorism. Although the attacks were not carried out with small arms, the linkage between small arms proliferation and terrorism has come to the mind of many countries. The attacks were possible because of the global reach of terrorist organizations. These organizations' arsenals are made prevalently of small arms and light weapons. With such weapons they build their power-base, they exert and barter power, they attract and train new recruits. There is almost a synergistic relationship between terrorist networks and small arms.

Peters: For some time after September 11th, it has been difficult to get states to focus on the linkage between these two threats. But now this nexus has become more apparent.

CTR: The US was singled out at the 2001 UN Conference as the state that more than any other precluded progress. Has the link between small arms and terrorism changed anything in the US position?

Inoguchi: Many countries, including the US, realized that the [twin] fights against terrorism and the proliferation of small arms are interlinked. They also realized that these threats couldn't be fought alone by any one state. The US has come back to the Biennial Meeting in full swing. Their statement at the meeting was in support of this multilateral process. On July 7, [Secretary of State] Colin Powell sent me a letter in which he fully endorsed this process and expressed his hope that the meeting will see the [active] participation of many affected countries. His letter was a very uncommon initiative, which, I am sure, he took to underscore the US commitment to this [UN] process. We need to build confidence. One of the best ways to deal with disarmament issues in an era, in which disarmament is fighting uphill battles on all fronts, is to proceed gradually. Success is often [measured] in small steps. But the patient accumulation of successes builds up states' confidence that the final goals are [worth] working for. It also



Rebecca Peters

restores trust in multilateral endeavors.

Peters: The US has not been as obstructive as it was at the Conference in 2001. It has made good progress in helping other countries destroying excess weapons, and in reporting implementation of controls. We noted, however, that in its statement before the assembly, the US delegation found it fit to restate its position regarding private ownership of guns by praising the "well-informed" advocates in that camp who had assisted states' deliberations. Those advocates represent the pro-gun lobby. Many of our members, who come from areas of conflict or from communities whose well being and prosperity is undermined or even precluded by private actors' small arms' trafficking, did not appreciate this position.

CTR: What is your assessment

of IANSA's contribution?

Inoguchi: IANSA's message was very clear and very well articulated. It accounted for all the diversity of the network. I was particularly moved when IANSA members addressed the assembly of states in five different languages. It gave us an idea of the diversity, growth, and maturity of IANSA. In sum, I can say that from both the government and nongovernmental sides, diversity flourished. And this was the unusual message of this forum.

Peters: More than 90 IANSA participants from 35 countries attended this meeting. The wealth and depth of information, experience, activities they brought to the debate were absolutely remarkable. Many delegates conveyed to us their appreciation, and many greeted a compendium of our work that we offered in the presentation to the assembly with a true ovation. We took heart from these reactions.

CTR: At the Biennial Meeting Ambassador Inoguchi took the unusual step of reprimanding a pro-gun organization that attacked Canada's record in domestic controls. What prompted you to do so?

Inoguchi: I tried to work within my mandate with a sense of balance. When an organization begins to speak about the irrelevance of domestic laws, it is not within my mandate to [arbitrate] that. It would have been better if this organization presented its concerns directly to Canada. It would have also been better if its representative had

pointed out to us how the law in Canada could be improved. The matter at hand is very complex and the process surrounding it still fragile. If one prejudices the outcome, states will lose confidence in the chair and the process itself.

Peters: Ambassador Inoguchi spoke for all reasonable people when she highlighted how inappropriate the commentary of that pro-gun lobbyist was. It was particularly tasteless in an international forum full of victims and delegations from countries where millions of people have been brutalized, impoverished and murdered at the point of small arms and light weapons. Clearly, "more guns" is not the answer.

CTR: What would you like this process to achieve ultimately? What is your personal vision of goals?

Inoguchi: I want to make sure that the number of small arms victims is reduced and that we are not just producing another mound of paper without making a difference on the ground. That is what I want to see. We are engaged in preventive diplomacy, and we are in a strange position in that we can never be sure of how to measure success. If we can prevent weapons from ending up in the wrong hands, if we can destroy arms left over by conflict we would at least know that weapons that may take many lives have been put out of the reach of people who might misuse them. If we can achieve this, then we would have done part of the job.

Peters: Our goal is to save lives. To achieve this goal, we would like to see states take full responsibility, truly implement their commitments, prevent weapons from falling in the hands of human rights abusers, stop diverting scarce resources from development to beefing up arsenals, enable peaceful coexistence to prosper in communities around the world. ■



Ambassador Inoguchi (third from right) presides over the Biennial Meeting of States on Small Arms, at the UN in New York City.

UN Photo by Stephanie Hollyman