



FRIENDS COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL LEGISLATION  
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**FY 2008 Budget Memo: Small Arms/Light Weapons Destruction**

February 2007

The abundance of small arms and light weapons (SA/LW) throughout the world fuels violence and human rights abuse, threatens humanitarian aid workers, and inhibits the process of economic development. Small arms and light weapons include weapons that can be used by one or two people and carried by a person, pack animal or light vehicle. Small arms, typically include self-loading pistols, revolvers, rifles (including assault rifles), sub-machine guns, and light machine guns. Light weapons include heavy machine guns, grenade launchers, small mortars, mobile anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns, and mobile rocket launchers. While robust export controls and enforcement are critical elements in the effort to curb illicit trafficking in SA/LW, the simplest way to prevent proliferation of illicit arms is through destruction of excess weapons and munitions.

Small arms and light weapons continue to kill an average of 300,000 people each year, primarily civilians. One reason why small arms are such common tools of violence for armed groups and individuals is their longevity. Small arms remain lethal for many years after manufacture and, even if sold legally, can be misused or used for unintended purposes long after the original intention of the sale has passed. Stockpiles of SA/LW left over from former wars are often poorly secured and susceptible to theft or illegal transfer, serving as a source of arms for various violent insurgent groups and criminal organizations. Arms collected in the aftermath of a peace settlement, if not quickly secured and destroyed, will often be dispersed into the community, exacerbating instability and violent crime, or fueling new conflicts. Destroying surplus, obsolete or confiscated weapons is the only way to ensure that they will not be illegally re-transferred and used to perpetrate violence in the future.

The threats posed by unsecured stockpiles of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons (together referred to as WMD) are extremely serious and well known. Through Nunn-Lugar and related threat reduction programs, the U.S. government spends around \$1 billion annually on programs designed to secure these weapons. Unfortunately, no similar effort exists to address the risks posed by conventional weapons. The threat of shoulder-fired missiles falling into the hands of violent extremist who use it to shoot down a commercial airliner is also very serious and very real. There may be as many as 750,000 man-portable air defense systems in arsenals worldwide. The State Department estimates that more than 40 civilian aircraft have been hit by such weapons since the 1970s. Yet, the U.S. currently spends only around \$8 million annually on programs to secure excess stockpiles of these and other small arms and light weapons.

Until recently, U.S. destruction of excess SA/LW had been largely an ad hoc effort. U.S. military forces frequently destroy arms seized or otherwise collected in military or peacekeeping operations.<sup>1</sup> Starting in 2000 the Bush administration and members of Congress realized the importance and effectiveness of these efforts and decided to design and fund a more organized program. The fiscal year 2001 foreign operations appropriations bill set up a small annual appropriation to assist countries with efforts to destroy and secure stockpiles of SA/LW. Since 2001, the budget has grown from \$2 million to over \$8 million annually. **For FY 08, the administration requested a \$44.7 million, a dramatic increase for this program.** The increase represents a renewed focus on shoulder-fired anti-aircraft rocket launchers, or man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS).

## Small Arms/Light Weapons Destruction

	Administration Request	House	Senate	Final
FY 2004	\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000	\$4,000,000	\$3,000,000
FY 2005	\$9,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$9,000,000	\$7,000,000
FY 2006	\$8,750,000	\$7,000,000	\$8,750,000	\$8,750,000
FY 2007	\$8,600,000	\$8,600,000	\$8,600,000	?
FY 2008	\$44,700,000			

The Small Arms/Light Weapons Destruction program is administered the State Department's Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement within the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs ([www.state.gov/t/pm/wra/](http://www.state.gov/t/pm/wra/)). Some programs are coordinated with the Defense Threat Reduction Agency ([www.dtra.mil](http://www.dtra.mil)). Since early 2001, U.S.-supported programs in 25 countries have resulted in approximately 900,000 SA/LW and 80 million rounds of ammunition destroyed, including over 18,600 MANPADS.<sup>2</sup> U.S. assistance programs consist of three steps. First, a U.S. government team assesses a foreign nation's current SA/LW stockpiles. Second, military personnel in that nation are taught how to secure SA/LW and encouraged to improve the physical security and stockpile management of their small arms and light weapons. Finally, the programs aid in the destruction of surplus weapons.<sup>3</sup>

The SA/LW Destruction program is a highly effective conflict resolution tool and should be expanded. It is time to increase the budget and expand these programs to reach post-conflict areas throughout the globe. Given that destruction is relatively inexpensive (costing generally between \$1-\$5 per weapon destroyed) and can generally be accomplished using locally available infrastructure and personnel, the program offers large returns for a modest investment.<sup>4</sup>

### February 2007

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1. "Destroying excess small arms: United States policy and programs." U.S. Department of State Fact Sheet. June 2, 2001. Available online at: <http://www.state.gov/t/pm/rls/fs/2001/3767.htm>.

2. Actions by the United States to Stem the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons. State Department Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement. June 6, 2006. Available online at: <http://www.state.gov/t/pm/rls/fs/67700.htm>

3. "Small Arms/Light Weapons." Defense Threat Reduction Agency. Available online at: <http://www.dtra.mil/Toolbox/Directorates/OSI/Programs/smarms/index.cfm>

4. U.S. Department of State, 2001.

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*This memo was produced by the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL). FCNL is a Quaker lobby in the public interest and is the largest peace lobby in Washington, DC. Founded in 1943 by members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), FCNL staff and volunteers work with a nationwide network of tens of thousands of people from many different races, religions, and cultures to advocate social and economic justice,*

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