

---

---

## Small Arms and Light Weapons

By

**Ambassador Robert G. Loftis**

**Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs**

[The following are excerpts of the remarks presented to the Organization of American States Small Arms and Light Weapons Meeting, Washington, D.C., April 12, 2005.]

The destabilizing accumulation and illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons (SA/LW) has proven a major obstacle to peace, economic development, and efforts to rebuild war-torn societies. Terrorist groups, insurgents and drug traffickers acquire arms primarily through illegal diversion, theft and smuggling, rather than through legitimate transfers. The United States supports in all aspects the 2001 *United Nations (U.N.) Program of Action (POA) on the Illicit Trade of Small Arms and Light Weapons*. We believe that small steps by individual countries and collective steps by regional and subregional organizations will go a long way toward establishing norms and practices that lead to the Program's effective implementation. With the U.N. Biennial Meeting of States in July and the 2006 Review Conference before us, we should pursue innovative and effective ways to implement the provisions of the *U.N. Plan of Action*. The Organization of American States (OAS) has made important contributions towards reducing the problem of illicit weapons proliferation and the U.S. encourages the organization and all its member states to continue to work in this area.

The entry-into-force of the *Inter-American Convention Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition and Explosives (CIFTA)* in 1998 made the OAS a leader in multilateral efforts to address the problem of illicit weapons trafficking. As a CIFTA signatory, the U.S. supports the Convention and OAS member states' efforts to aggressively implement it consistent with the implementation of the plan of action.

Effective export and import controls and their enforcement are the keystones to any successful effort to mitigate the problems of illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. The adoption by the OAS of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) model regulations on the control of transnational movement of firearms is an important step forward. However, these regulations must be adopted and enforced by member states in order to be effective. The U.S. encourages all member states that have not done so to implement control systems that contain reliable and meaningful mechanisms for the licensing and transfer of small arms and light weapons. The CICAD model regulations are especially important because they contain provisions regarding small arms brokering. As the OAS-Busby investigation demonstrated, licensing and regulating arms brokers is central to combating illicit arms trafficking. Both exporting and importing countries also need to exercise due diligence in authenticating end-user certificates to ensure that exported arms are destined for a legitimate end-user.

In addition, purchasing countries should make sure their import systems are transparent and provide maximum cooperation with the export control officials of exporting countries in certifying legitimate shipments. Unregulated arms brokers are additional sources of weapons for the black market.

Strict import and export controls are particularly important in regards to man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS). Although an incident has not happened yet in this region, even one attempt to shoot down a civilian airliner could have devastating psychological and economic impacts on the entire Western Hemisphere. It is crucial to our collective security that all states take focused steps to mitigate the threat from MANPADS. The OAS is the perfect venue in which

---

to enhance regional cooperation to address the MANPADS threat and adopt Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) like MANPADS guidelines for the hemisphere.

Many MANPADS already are not under government control and are widely available to non-government actors. Many more may be vulnerable to transfer to terrorists, insurgents and other criminals because they are inadequately secured or because they are not subject to stringent national export standards. The small size and relatively light weight of MANPADS makes them easy to transport and conceal and very attractive weapons for terrorists.

In many cases MANPADS are a national liability, rather than a national asset. The cost of properly securing and maintaining national stocks of aging MANPADS often far outweighs their military utility. Therefore, the U.S. encourages all states to adopt APEC-like guidelines on control and security of MANPADS stockpiles and offers its assistance to interested states. We already have worked with some states in the region to control, secure, and reduce their MANPADS and welcome requests for assistance from additional states.

The U.N. Second Biennial Meeting of States in July 2006 affords us all the opportunity to focus our attention on implementing the *U.N. Plan of Action*. We think the focus of the meeting should be on assessing implementation of the Plan of Action to date, and looking ahead to the U.N. POA Review Conference in July 2006. The Biennial Meeting of States is neither the time nor place for introduction or negotiation of new initiatives.

At the final two-week session of the Open-Ended Working Group on the Marking and Tracing of Illicit Small Arms And Light Weapons in June, we will have the opportunity to finalize an international instrument that will facilitate monitoring of arms trafficking. The successful negotiation of this instrument will bridge the gap between existing legally binding law enforcement instruments to combat illicit trafficking in firearms and the *U.N. Plan of Action*. Today's comprehensive presentation by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) highlights the importance of effective marking and tracing in the fight against illicit trafficking.

The U.S. believes that this instrument should be practical and effective, enabling the timely and reliable identification and tracing of illicit small arms and light weapons, and should not counter already existing commitments in other fora including the OAS. Our preference is for an instrument that can be swiftly and effectively implemented by all states.

Recognizing that surplus SA/LW can be destabilizing and harmful for the entire continent, member states are urged to limit purchase levels to the minimum required to support legitimate defense needs and to refrain from excessive purchases that might fuel arms races and increase the possibility of these weapons being diverted to non-state actors.

Given the close links between terrorism, organized crime and drug trafficking, the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons has the potential to affect any country in the world at any time; it is not limited to regions of conflict, instability, or poverty. Focused efforts to identify and curb the sources and methods of the illicit trade via robust export controls, law enforcement measures, and efforts to expeditiously destroy excess stocks and safeguard legitimate stocks from theft or illegal transfer are the best ways to attack the problem.

The U.S. continues to offer its assistance so that states party to CIFTA can implement that agreement and the *U.N. Plan of Action*. We encourage other states in a position to do so to render financial technical assistance in small arms and light weapons destruction and stockpile management and security, export controls, and law enforcement training. Working together, we can further our mutual goal to reduce the illicit spread of small arms and light weapons and reduce the danger these weapons pose to our citizens, peacekeeping forces and soldiers in our hemisphere and around the world.