BOOK SUMMARY

THE SMALL ARMS TRADE

By Rachel Stohl, Matthew Schroeder and Dan Smith

The Small Arms Trade provides a gripping overview of the global impact of nearly 640 million small arms and light weapons – pistols, carbines, assault rifles, light machine guns and surface to air missiles – in circulation around the world. In the hands of irresponsible government armies, rebel groups, and terrorists, these weapons cause tremendous human suffering.

The wars that ravaged Central America and that continue in Afghanistan, Iraq, Liberia, the Sudan and dozens of other countries – wars in which millions of innocent men, women, and children have died and millions more have been deprived of economic opportunities – are fought primarily with small arms. Drug lords use them to eliminate competitors and assas­sinate government officials; abusive governments use them to suppress internal dissent and silence opposition; insurgents use them to kill soldiers on patrol; terrorists use them to elicit fear…the list goes on and on.

“Small arms are the true weapons of individual destruction,” said Rachel Stohl, senior analyst at the World Security Institute’s Center for Defense Information. “Controlling these deadly weapons requires national governments, regional organizations, and international institutions to work cooperatively. They must simultaneously control supply, take existing weapons out of circulation, end misuse, and address demand.”

The “terrorist delight” – portable, guided missiles that have become a favorite weapon of terrorists and insurgents – are plentiful, easy to use, and extremely effective. Nearly a million missiles have been produced by over 20 countries, and thousands of those missiles are now outside of government control.

“Shoulder-fired missiles are a terrorist’s dream and a law enforcement nightmare,” said FAS analyst Matt Schroeder. “For less than the cost of a used car, a terrorist can cripple a commercial airliner, and with it the airline industry.”

This guide reveals the disturbing reality behind the murky underworld of international arms trading. Full of insight and anticipating the danger of ever lighter and more powerful weapons, this is required reading for anyone who wishes to understand one of the key threats to development, prosperity and international peace in the world today.

Matt Schroeder is the Manager of the Arms Sales Monitoring Project at the Federation of American Scientists (FAS). Since joining FAS in February 2002, he has researched and written on U.S. arms transfers, arms export policies, and the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

Rachel Stohl is Senior Analyst at the Center for Defense Information in Washington, DC, and is chairperson of the Small Arms Working Group.


“The international trade in small arms has large consequences. This book goes a long way in clearing the ideological fog that so often clouds the analysis of a problem that urgently needs the kind of clearheaded, well informed analysis found in these pages.” — Moisés Naim, Editor of Foreign Policy magazine and author of Illicit: How Smugglers, Traffickers and copycats are hijacking the global economy

“The Beginner’s Guide is a tremendous resource for all those who wish to learn about the pandemic of smalls arms violence. Countless people each year are killed or left with debilitating injuries caused by these weapons in conflicts around the globe, conflicts fuelled by the small arms trade. For those who wish to help prevent this needless suffering, this book will provide invaluable insight.” — Martin Butcher, Senior Advisory for policy and programs, Physicians for social responsibility