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Georgia: A hostage to arms

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Weapons confiscated
from the streets of Tbilisi
PHOTO: PETER NASMYTH

Summary

In the early 1990s, Georgia was host to a number of ethnic and political conflicts, and the state gradually lost monopoly control over its law-enforcement and security agencies. This led to a sharp increase in SALW proliferation and a rise in crime that affected all levels of society. Although the situation has improved considerably since then, there are still a number of factors that continue to threaten stability in Georgia. The state is weak, organised crime is widespread, ethnic conflicts remain unresolved, and the public has little trust in the government security agencies. State bodies are woefully under-funded, and this encourages corruption, as officers supplement their income through bribery and coercion; meanwhile, government ministries have various economic interests which provide extra-budgetary revenue. The Georgian security sector suffers from weakly coordinated and overlapping roles and remits. Although the idea of political control over the military and security sectors is recognised in principle, in practice much of the relevant legislation is largely declaratory, with little real impact on the ground. Another problem is that even within the areas that Tbilisi supposedly has control over (ie excluding Abkhazia and South Ossetia), there are paramilitary groups and security actors who are beyond the control of the central government.

The most active period of SALW proliferation occurred when the Soviet military withdrew from the South Caucasus. Most Soviet weapons were transferred to the Georgian MOD, but significant numbers also ended up in the hands of paramilitary organisations. Some attempts have been made at weapons collection, but have so far had limited success.

Political and socio-economic background

The development of the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union is closely connected with the problem of illicit small arms and light weapons (SALW) trafficking and this is especially true of Georgia. On its way to independence, Georgia endured a period of confrontation between informal, quasi-political groups (which started out with a political agenda and evolved towards violent or criminal activities) and the Soviet administration, followed by two ethnic conflicts and a civil war. These processes ran in parallel with the painful collapse of the Soviet-era Transcaucasian Military District (ZakVO), the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the country, and the establishment of national armed forces and other agencies charged with maintaining national security. Relations with the Russian Federation, the legal successor of the USSR, impeded Georgia's efforts to ensure genuine independence. Even today, some loopholes still remain in the legal provisions justifying Russia's military presence in Georgia. Until very recently Russian political and military structures were unwilling to abandon the concept of domination in the former Soviet Union. Consequently they have sometimes provided backing for actors and processes in Georgia that have hindered state building. To a certain extent this has involved the 'privatisation' of certain branches of the security sector, involving not just the emergence of non-state paramilitary units, but also national 'power ministries'¹ openly pursuing corporate, as opposed to national interests, making civil and democratic control over the security agencies a mere formality.

As a result, the state apparatus that was built on the ruins of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic in the early 1990s was unable to maintain monopoly control over either law-enforcement and security agencies or SALW. The public immediately felt the negative humanitarian consequences of the state's weakness and the lack of a culture of democracy and respect for the law. Arms, notably SALW, were often used to exert illegal pressure for ethnic, political or economic reasons.

State weakness and crime

Illicit SALW trafficking was closely linked with the spread of other crimes, including corruption, kidnapping and drug trafficking. All these security challenges undermined national stability and worsened the humanitarian situation. The struggle for power and material resources was often tinged with criminality. It was difficult to distinguish between legitimate local politics, aimed at promoting Georgian independence and its territorial integrity, and overtly criminal practices. The behaviour of many actors in the Georgian political arena had clear criminal undertones.

Amid the ethnic and political conflicts, Georgia witnessed the emergence of a so-called 'war economy' – a phenomenon typical of weak, war-torn societies plagued with illegal activities. Under these circumstances, the role of politicians merged with those associated with warlords, suppliers of monopoly goods and services, and criminal bosses.² Armed struggle became a goal in itself since certain groups benefited from the volatile situation and the rampant arms proliferation that went with it. The state was powerless to resist those wanting to maintain conflict for the sake of conflict. As a result, armed people controlled all aspects of social life.

Armed conflicts and the merging of politics, business and crime were reflected in the illegal actions of many officials and military structures, in widespread corruption and in the growth of organised crime. Organised crime appeared to be penetrating certain sectors of the state, including the power ministries. The Soviet legacy is partly to blame. The Soviet system did not resolve the socio-economic problems in multi-ethnic republics, but froze them under the powerful apparatus of repression. With the demise of the Soviet Union, there was nothing to stop such conflicts and distrust

¹ The term 'power ministries' is commonly used in ex-Soviet countries to refer to the Ministries of Defence, of the Interior, and of State Security.

² Davis I, Hirst C and Mariani B, *Organised crime, corruption and illicit arms trafficking in an enlarged EU: Challenges and Perspectives*, (Saferworld, 2001), p 26.

coming into the open. Georgian history became 'national' again, after years of incorporation into the Russian/Soviet empire. However, this process was shaped not by international democratic values so much as by the dormant forces of a feudal and rural social culture that had previously been suppressed by the Soviet regime.

The growing influence of criminal elements in politics and in the economy was made possible by the uncontrolled circulation of SALW. This, in turn, promoted further proliferation. The general lawlessness created dangerous conditions for the further proliferation of arms, bringing social chaos, and worsening national and individual security. By 1992–3 the situation was reminiscent a Hobbesian 'total war'.

This anarchy is now in the past; in the late 1990s, the political elite has managed to at least partially stabilise the situation. The first signs of a new order began to emerge, based on the ideas of independence, democracy and a market economy. The armed conflicts within the country were coming to a halt, and Georgia at last began to develop a constitutional order. But it will be a long time before the country manages to overcome the consequences of the social and political instability and the lack of an institutional system of law and order.

These changes in domestic politics coincided with a number of external developments to spur Georgia's integration into the world community, and in particular drew it closer to the European and Euro-Atlantic system of democratic and security co-operation. Especially important were Georgia's accession to the Council of Europe in 1999, and closer co-operation with NATO through the Partnership for Peace (PfP) Programme and at the level of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC). The activities of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) also had a positive impact on domestic political developments: the OSCE promoted mechanisms to achieve peace between the ethnic groups in the country and set up an international framework (through the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE)) to resolve the dispute over Russia's military presence in Georgia. As indicated below, this issue is closely linked to the uncontrolled proliferation of SALW. International financial institutions were particularly influential in making it possible to stabilise the security situation and to develop Georgia's statehood. Bilateral security co-operation with developed countries, primarily the United States, was also extremely important for enhancing stability.

Destabilising factors

However, domestic political reforms and co-operation with the outside world have not yet put an end to the threat of destabilisation, though they have had some positive effect and helped solve many urgent problems. Although the activities of illegal paramilitary groups such as the Mkhedrioni³, various local militias and even the National Guard and the Army (in their 1991–3 incarnation) have all been halted, certain associated problems still remain, and sometimes even seem to be on the increase. Firstly, politics, economics and military affairs continue to be merged. Secondly, state bodies are still fragile, riven by localism and clan-based relationships. Political upheavals in 2001 demonstrate that stabilisation is still shallow, and that illegal paramilitary groups are far from being eliminated. In 1998, and again in summer 2001, crime and weapons re-entered the political arena.

Several factors contribute to the continuing volatility. First and foremost is the weak-

³ The Mkhedrioni (Warriors) emerged as an irregular militia in late 1988. In 1989–90, other paramilitary groups connected with different wings of the Georgian nationalist movement also began to appear. At first, there were dozens of units of varying size, from a few hundred to several thousand people. Under the first post-Communist government of President Gamsakhurdia and even after its removal in the winter of 1991–2, there was no significant change. Some detachments were integrated into the formalised structures of the National Guard and, later, the Army. However the Mkhedrioni continued to act independently. At the same time, new armed groups emerged which were formally dependent on those structures and enjoyed semi-official status. In reality however they were autonomous militias established along political, family, friendship or local community lines. Some of these units openly opposed the authorities. Until 1994–5, when Georgia started purging, integrating and suppressing paramilitary groups, these units took care of their own financial interests themselves and paid little heed to the law. They were more loyal to their leaders and comrades than to the government or the political leadership. This was typical of all armed groups and forces at that time.

ness of the state. According to various estimates, the state budget does not yet reflect the country's real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) because tax is not being collected. The tax authorities are powerless in combating the black economy, which accounts for 35–75 percent of the entire economy. Western experts suggest that defence spending should constitute 1–2 percent of GDP, whereas at present it reaches barely 0.5 percent.⁴

Funding for law-enforcement agencies is equally poor. Consequently their contribution to public security is extremely low. Another concern is the lack of well-trained officials. Since the mid-1990s, Georgia has been taking steps to rectify this, with help from Western countries and international organisations. Hundreds of civil servants get internships and re-training in Europe and the United States every year. There is even a joint Georgian-American project – the Georgian Institute of Public Administration (GIPA). About 200 officers are trained in Western countries every year to improve the situation in the security sector. There are also various short-term courses.⁵

Yet there has been no breakthrough so far in changing personnel in these state bodies, where nepotism is still rife. Many talented officials leave government service or combine it with business and other private activities. State services suffer from a lack of public confidence. The government's legitimacy is low because it is ineffective at providing for the population's basic security and welfare needs. The effectiveness of the state services is further undermined because people still prefer to resolve their problems without recourse to the authorities and the law.

In May 2002, the IMF regional co-ordinator openly criticised the Georgian government for reshuffling its senior officials too frequently, claiming this has a destabilising effect both on the exchange rate and on domestic politics. He also criticised continued falls in tax collection levels, which lowers the country's credit rating.⁶

Another problem is the lack of a strong civil society, which undermines attempts to build a stable political and legal system. Political parties are little more than vehicles for charismatic leaders or representatives of both central and regional government. Only in the capital do non-governmental organisations (NGOs) enjoy any influence at all. The existence of independent media is often proudly held up by the Georgian leadership as proof that the country has achieved democracy, but in practice the media suffer from a number of substantial shortcomings and limitations, especially outside Tbilisi.⁷ Further proof of the weakness of civil society is the inadequacy of the government's anti-corruption measures. The only punishment for senior government officials notorious for their crimes and for becoming rich inexplicably quickly, is 'voluntary' resignation, which allows them to keep the assets they have amassed. Even then, they have a good chance of soon being appointed to another senior position.⁸

This is due in part to a generally low level of understanding of legal matters and an adherence to traditional Georgian culture among the population. Those stained with corruption and illegal activities easily return to active politics. Cultural values in Georgian society have at best only an indirect influence on promoting ideas such as tolerance, professionalism and the protection of human rights. For most people, the most important factor for self-identity is not civic, but ethnic.⁹ It is clear, to use Johan Galtung's terminology, that the direct and structural violence that continues to exist in

⁴ According to the Department of Resource Management of the MOD, the Ministry asked for 71 million lari for 2002 (about \$32 million), which allegedly accounted for 1 percent of projected GDP. In fact, it received only 38.5 million lari, including 2.5 million from selling and renting its own facilities (note: at the time of writing, the exchange rate was 2.23 lari to \$1). Source: Interview with M. Kikalishvili, leading expert of the Committee for Defence and Security of the Georgian Parliament, 4 February 2002. Assessments of Georgian GDP vary significantly and, according to different estimates, the aforementioned figure makes only between 0.2–0.9 percent of the GDP.

⁵ For instance, every year about 20 Georgian officers and diplomats take short-term courses in the George Marshall Centre in Germany.

⁶ Independent television channel Rustavi-2, news programme Kurieri, 13 May 2002.

⁷ *Current Media Situation in Georgia*, Report of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. OSCE, Vienna 16 March 2001, pp 5–17.

⁸ For instance, former Security Minister Shota Kviraya (who had also been Minister of the Interior) was accused of shooting several people who allegedly carried out robberies while the combat operation against the supporters of overthrown President Gamsakhurdia was taking place. He was also accused of bugging politicians. He resigned, but still works on the staff of the National Security Council.

⁹ Hanf T and Nodia G, *Georgia Lurching to Democracy*, (Baden-Baden, 2000), pp 92–102.

Georgian society is legitimised by tacit (or, in some cases, quite vocal) support for the suppression of dissidents, which can be identified as cultural violence.¹⁰

Unresolved ethnic conflicts cause further destabilisation. The Georgian authorities have reluctantly agreed to tolerate Russian peace-keepers in South Ossetia since summer 1992 and in Abkhazia since spring 1994, since Tbilisi failed, either by force or political agreement, to put an end to separatism and ethnic violence in these autonomous regions. Taking 'conflict' in a wider sense, to mean not just regions that have already reached crisis point, but any situation where the views and aims of the two sides are mutually exclusive, the central Georgian government has problems not only with the *de facto* separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, whose borders are patrolled by Russian peace-keepers, but also with the Armenian-populated Javakheti region of southern Georgia. The Armenian majority there is also attracted to the idea of autonomy, which Tbilisi opposes.

Along with the criminal enclave in the Pankisi Gorge, where Chechen refugees are mixed with international criminal groups and militants allegedly commanded by Chechen warlord Ruslan Gelaev, conflict zones and adjacent regions are fertile soil for the aforementioned merger of politics, economics, crime and paramilitary activity. National laws hold little sway not only in Javakheti, but also in the autonomous region of Ajara, which is largely populated by ethnic Georgians. Azerbaijanis from Kvemo Kartli are also barely integrated into the national political and legal system.

The political framework of ethnic relations has no definite legal basis: not only is there no law on national minorities (the need for which is debatable), but the Constitution does not even mention the territorial organisation of the state, postponing the issue until territorial integrity is restored.

Corruption and organised crime are inter-related and feed off each other. The clearest example of this is the way entire sectors of the economy have been bought up as monopolies by senior officials or their accomplices, who pay for such patronage. Tax avoidance and the black economy flourish, thanks to an alliance between corrupt politicians, civil servants and well-connected businessmen.

The inter-relation of corruption and organised crime is obvious in conflict zones and neighbouring territories, which have turned into transit routes for smugglers. For many years illicit trade has thrived across the *de facto* borders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as has drug trafficking in the Pankisi Gorge, with the collaboration of some Georgian law-enforcement officials and their Ossetian, Abkhaz and Russian counterparts.

Two other destabilising factors are the general poverty among the population and the active interest of certain circles within the Russian military and political establishment in preventing Georgia's integration into Western security structures. These two factors suggest that all these weaknesses in the Georgian political system could persist – and could be used to instigate further domestic tension.

Gun culture and humanitarian consequences of SALW proliferation

Traditional Georgian culture attaches great importance to martial values and masculinity, which provides fertile ground for a gun culture to develop. Yet not all regions are the same. Perhaps it is merely coincidence, but guns enjoy greater popularity in some of the areas where there is a clear problem with uncontrolled SALW proliferation, particularly in Svaneti and the Kodori Valley in Abkhazia (part which is controlled by Tbilisi), and the Pankisi Gorge. These regions are situated high in the

¹⁰ Galtung J, *Peace by Peaceful Means, Peace and Conflict Development and Civilization*, (London, 1996). Some politicians have recently intensified their backing for restoring the legal privileges of the Georgian Orthodox Church. They also oppose the repatriation of the Meskhetian Muslims deported in 1944 and support the idea of restoring the 'ethnicity' category in the civil registry. These statements are accompanied by threats and assaults organised by street extremists. Their victims are representatives of the media, NGOs and non-traditional religious communities. Although such violence is not common, the inactivity of law-enforcement agencies is alarming. The new Minister of the Interior recently stated that the police should remain neutral in clashes between religious groups.

mountains, where patriarchal traditions are still strong. Javakheti, which is also thought to have a high rate of illegal SALW proliferation, is also a geographically inhospitable and socially underdeveloped region, though this is not the only reason for arms possession, either in Javakheti or in other areas (Mingrelia): the high rate of proliferation is also due to a number of social, political and economic problems. In the 1990s, many young people in urban areas also wanted to obtain weapons. Idealised images of the criminal who is loyal to his fellow thieves, inherited from Soviet times, gained a new popularity in that period of anarchy. Jaba Ioseliani, the leader of Mkhedrioni, became an idol for many teenagers. The phenomenon of using weapons as a status symbol also spread to the provinces, where it was easy to obtain weapons by joining a militia.

As far as the humanitarian consequences of these processes were concerned, many young people developed sentiments of bravado, dangerous opportunism and a passion for arms. Unfortunately, this impact was negative – the Mkhedrioni alone lost about 1,000 volunteers in hostilities. Many young men with arms who were not under anyone's control joined the criminal structures. Some of them later died in criminal clashes or were imprisoned, after the government had finished using the armed groups for its own purposes and then decided to get rid of them.

The swift suppression of anarchy demonstrates not only Shevardnadze's political skills, but also that the majority of the population was sick and tired of gunfire at night and sabre-rattling in the streets. The militants failed to become national heroes, which proves that despite the apparent belligerence of traditional Georgian culture no gun cult exists at a national level. On the contrary, there are strong elements in Georgian culture that resist this cult, believing guns are only for hunting; in Soviet times, many urban youngsters, who were just as obsessed with masculinity, considered the use of knives or guns in street fights to be beneath them. Perhaps gun culture became foreign to Georgian society during the Soviet totalitarian regime, and this alienation did not disappear even while ethnic and civil strife raged and some teenagers began to carry guns. Another explanation is that a large part of Georgian society has lost some (though far from all) elements of feudalism in the course of its development.

However, in some parts of Georgia, SALW continue to play a crucial role in public life, and indeed to some extent they have an effect on every single citizen. The humanitarian consequences are clear in the Pankisi Gorge and in the Kodori Valley, in conflict zones and adjacent regions, where armed clashes have as much of an impact on children as the books they read. In Pankisi itself, this criminality has had such an effect that ancient animosities between clans have been reborn, even leading to the murder of women by women. The TV company Rustavi-2 recently reported from Pichkhovani at the entrance to the Pankisi Gorge that two thirds of the inhabitants have abandoned the village because of the threat of armed violence.¹¹

Official crime statistics at first sight do not show any cause for alarm. According to the State Statistical Department, 15,735 crimes were recorded in 1995, including 489 cases of murder or attempted murder and 1,776 cases of burglary and robbery. By 2001, the overall figure was 15,662, with 430 cases of murder or attempted murder and 1,075 burglaries and robberies. In 1995, the authorities recorded 1,438 cases of illegal firearms possession, storage, sales or production; in 2001, this figure decreased to 809. A brief comparison of the 1995 and 2001 data shows that of all these figures, only hooliganism has increased, and then only slightly (412 against 437), while theft fell from 6,195 to 4,949. These statistics would not look too bad even in many more prosperous and healthy societies.

Yet it should be noted that official statistics in Georgia are not reliable. The new Minister of the Interior recently admitted that police stations had artificially lowered the crime rate in order to increase the recorded percentage of solved crimes in their

11 Kurieri news programme, 9 March 2002.

districts. After the minister changed the evaluation criteria for police activities in 2002, linking their success not to the amount of crimes solved but to the level of crimes recorded, the recorded serious crime rate began to grow.

Nevertheless, it would be an exaggeration to say that the average Georgian lives in fear of being attacked by criminals armed with SALW. Rather, people are more afraid of the power ministries, whose officers often engage in extortion to earn their living. Problems with discipline in some military units are also linked to SALW issues: according to the NGO Law and Freedom, the Military Prosecutor's Office recorded several dozen murders and suicides in military units in 2001.

In conclusion, one should also note the growing tension between the reformers, who believe that the current situation could lead to the collapse of the state, and the ruling elite, which is interested in maintaining and increasing its power and wealth. The near future will show whether Georgia will become a more democratic, prosperous, and safer place without revolutionary upheavals, whether the status quo will be maintained, or whether the country is on the brink of further trouble.

One mitigating factor is the interest of the international community, and the West in particular, which fears that if stability and sustainable development is not achieved in the South Caucasus, the economic and strategic interests of the Euro-Atlantic community might be affected. Another reason for optimism is public support for the peaceful development of independent statehood. However, there are also some alarming trends in the opposite direction. There are large numbers of weapons in Georgia, few of which are controlled by the political forces that wish to build a democratic and stable state and promote the rule of law. If it became necessary, additional weapons, particularly SALW, could be brought in through the unguarded gaps in Georgia's borders. The key issue is to remove grounds for armed confrontation, as arms can easily be found when there is demand. But the uncontrolled proliferation of SALW, and the easy access that anti-governmental forces have to such weapons, is another cause for concern, not just to the majority Georgian population, but also to the ethnic minorities aspiring to various degrees of self-determination. Unarguably, the problems caused by instability in Georgia, and, in particular, SALW proliferation, have a regional dimension and may have dangerous implications for the South Caucasus and beyond.

Socio-political profile of the key security actors

The issues of illegal SALW proliferation and the probability of social and political disturbances are closely linked to the state of affairs in the security sector and law-enforcement agencies. In the previous section, weaknesses in this area were briefly mentioned in terms of the general collapse witnessed in the period of transition. It is now time to take a more detailed look at both the negative and the potentially more hopeful characteristics of the main security actors in the Georgian state.

The Georgian military and security establishment is composed of staff from a mixture of three different backgrounds:

- Soviet police officers, security and military officers.
- Enthusiastic volunteers from the national movement and their young followers, whose values had been shaped by the Georgian education system, which implicitly stressed the need to defend the fatherland. This convinced them of the need for armed struggle, an attitude that was reinforced by the uncompromising line taken by opponents of the Georgian national idea.
- Dangerous opportunists with criminal inclinations and/or a criminal past, who surfaced in the favourable conditions of social turmoil.

In practice, the different elements that these three groups brought into the security sector often became inter-mixed, and after a while it was no longer possible to attrib-

ute the behaviour of individual officers to their background. Unfortunately, the lack of reliable control, the weakness of the state and the inexperience of some military and political leaders often led to the security structures being dominated by the criminal elements, who were able to recruit supporters both from those with a professional background, and from among the volunteers. Nonetheless, it is possible to try to identify some socio-political and organisational characteristics typical of each of the power ministries.

Ministry of the Interior

Until recently the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) was largely staffed by police officers of the late-Soviet mould. Despite their professionalism, they are indifferent to human rights, are more loyal to the ruling elite than to the rule of law and tend to obtain evidence by force. An exception to this was the presence of a few non-professionals in the MOI leadership at various times in the early 1990s. The strength and influence of various paramilitary groups left the MOI sidelined. At one point, the Ministry was even headed by a member of the Mkhedrioni¹², Temur Khachishvili. Even then, however, the ethos and working methods of Georgian policemen remained intact, for the system managed to absorb all comers, since they were not seeking to reform the MOI institutions.

Many MOI officers live off corruption and bribes. Journalists continue to uncover numerous cases of extortion and racketeering carried out by police officers against individuals and small businesses.

Under former minister Kakha Targamadze, the police used its protection of certain companies to control a significant share of the tobacco industry and the wholesale and retail trade. Either directly or through proxy firms, senior MOI officers maintained a monopoly on car maintenance checks. Some unofficial sources also claim that the MOI profited from the insurance market. The police were and still are influential in the petrol trade. It should be noted that it is precisely these businesses – the tobacco and petrol trade, and market trading of food and manufactured goods – that are closely linked to smuggling. The amount of tax collected from these sectors is far below what it should be, given the turnover of these goods.¹³

Other sources of income for MOI officials include illegally imposing fines on drivers, and registering the employees of private security companies as police officers belonging to the Ministry's Property Protection Department. MOI pressure has ensured that Georgia has no clear laws regulating the establishment and activities of private detectives and security firms, which are currently governed by the law on private enterprise and have no right to arm their employees.¹⁴ In order to get round the law, these companies pay the law-enforcement agencies to give their employees the status of police officers, and therefore the right to carry pistols. The police, in particular the Property Protection Department, then show little interest in what its newly registered officers get up to.¹⁵

For many years, the MOI was the stronghold of the ruling elite and enjoyed the unofficial right to engage in these illegal activities. Georgian law allows ministries, including the power ministries, to seek extra-budgetary funding. At the same time, there are no strict regulations covering how these funds can be procured and spent. For instance, the president may grant privileges to the ministries by special decree. But the reality was even gloomier than the law in this area. Of the nine sources of

¹² See footnote no.2 for more on the Mkhedrioni.

¹³ For instance, according to the Secretary of the Co-ordination Council for Anti-Corruption Policy (set up by the president in 2001), in the first half of 2001 the authorities collected taxes for only 27.3 percent of the petrol that was consumed. The situation is similar in the oil and tobacco trade. *Sakartvelos Respublika*, 6 September 2001.

¹⁴ The existing law on firearms allows individuals to buy rifles (not automatic rifles) with the right to store them, but not to carry them. Only law-enforcement officers and certain officials enjoy the right to carry arms, but this right does not cover representatives of private companies. In spring 2002, parliament discussed a bill aimed at eliminating this privilege even for certain officials. However, the bill was rejected and was openly opposed by the MOI.

¹⁵ Interview with a former employee of a private security company.

extra-budgetary revenues the MOI declared, mostly related to issuing licence plates and other car services, six violated current legislation.¹⁶ Some of the other activities that MOI officials engage in, such as protection rackets in the business sector, extortion and smuggling, are overtly criminal.

Until very recently, the state leadership took no effective measures to stamp out such practices. The Council for Anti-Corruption Policy set up by the president had little impact. The radical statements emanating from some of its members and from opposition parliamentarians did little to influence the president, who enjoys special powers in law-enforcement and security activities. As a result, the police system was partly privatised. In return for pledging its loyalty to the government in the event of mass anti-government demonstrations, the MOI was able to escape censure for its commercial and criminal activities.¹⁷

Since 1995, the MOI has succeeded in stopping extortion rackets run by paramilitary groups, a significant achievement in promoting stability and state building. Gradually, however, it became clear that the lawlessness caused by the civil war had simply been replaced by lawlessness caused by the police.

In autumn 2001, President Shevardnadze was unexpectedly forced to dismiss Minister Targamadze, the founder of the MOI empire. He was replaced by his deputy, Koba Narchemashvili, a young investigator with not much experience in the police. Pressure for Targamadze's replacement had come from Zurab Zhvania, the former parliamentary speaker who had joined the opposition to the president in the parliament. Zhvania's own resignation had been an attempt to lead by example in order to force Targamadze and Shevardnadze's hands and to lower the political temperature. In summer-autumn 2001, tension was building up in the Pankisi Gorge, and Chechen militants appeared at the *de facto* border with Abkhazia (resulting in illegal Georgian and Chechen paramilitary units operating in Abkhazia). Not just the Russian media and the Abkhaz authorities, but even Georgian journalists began to say openly that the Georgian power ministries were directly involved in planning such dangerously opportunistic operations in the zone of conflict and in kidnapping and drug trafficking in the Pankisi Gorge. These events coincided with the still unsolved assassination of the popular Georgian journalist Giorgi Sanaya, with Targamadze's statement that he was invincible and no one could touch him, and with the raid by the security services on the office of Rustavi-2 (an independent TV company) on the pretext of checking its financial records. All this resulted in mass demonstrations demanding the resignation of certain power ministers, or even the entire leadership of the country. On 1 October, the president was forced to dissolve the government.

Many hoped that the public was no longer willing to stand passively by and that the MOI would be reformed. It is too early to assess the actions of the new minister. Some of Narchemashvili's statements on the need for reform raise some hopes. Such reforms may include the elimination of some functions of the police (eg the struggle against economic crimes) and giving independent lawyers access to detention centres. The new minister publicly admitted to villagers in areas near the Pankisi Gorge that the MOI was responsible for the upsurge of crime and drug trafficking in the region.

Narchemashvili argues that he belongs to a new generation of lawyer-reformers and would like to leave a positive legacy. Some district police officers were dismissed. However it is difficult to say whether the reforms are genuine or if this is merely a tactical move by the police. Besides, many friends and associates of the former minister remain at their posts in the MOI. The new minister is in no hurry to reform the Property Protection Department, which cannot be done without giving private

¹⁶ *Sakartvelos Respublika*, 6 September 2001.

¹⁷ In a private conversation a senior official has recently admitted that police and other law-enforcement and tax officers were, with their own ends in mind, allowing one of the largest wholesale markets in the country to pay only \$2,000 of taxes per month, despite its multimillion dollar turnover. However, he pointed out: 'If such a practice is eradicated, who will maintain order in the streets if there is an emergency?'

security companies a sound legal basis. Nor does he appear to fully accept the protection of religious minorities from Orthodox extremists as his constitutional duty. The success of these changes will depend not just on the MOI, but on all the other political and security actors in Georgia.

The MOI has never been just a law-enforcement agency. It also has responsibility for the security of the state and hence has Interior Troops under its control. In the extent of its influence, the Georgian MOI of the late 1990s/early 21st century resembled the military of Latin American Praetorian regimes. The former minister used to say that he had police, the Interior Troops and Special Forces ready for action in case tensions in the zone of Georgian-Abkhaz conflict intensified.¹⁸

Ministry of State Security (MSS)

Since independence, Georgia continues to have power structures with parallel functions and duplicate mandates. The Ministry of State Security is another power agency inherited from the Soviet era. When the national movement came to power, the KGB in Georgia suffered no less than the MOI as a symbol of the hated Soviet order. The MOI managed to recover, whereas the political standing and resources of the intelligence service remained lower than those of the MOI and the MOD, with the brief exception of a two-year period between 1993 and 1995. This may have been because the Georgian KGB was considerably more integrated into the Soviet organisational structure, leaving it less able to act autonomously. The MOI, on the contrary, had deeper roots in Georgian society, and the newly-founded MOD enjoyed even greater public support. Many experienced and talented Georgian KGB officers preferred not to break their ties with Moscow. Besides, the clichéd image of a KGB officer discouraged national activists from joining the security service. During the Soviet era, MOI officers were drawn from the local Georgian population and tended to work in the population, while senior KGB officers tended to be regularly moved to new posts throughout the Soviet Union. As a result, the KGB had less local loyalty.

In 1992, the Georgian authorities attempted to create a qualitatively new security service. The KGB was disbanded and reorganised into an information and intelligence bureau, headed by a young philosopher from the national movement, Irakli Batiashvili. The United States gave assistance to this body and helped to set up a special forces division. However, the bureau failed to become a strong national security agency. This was at a time of chaos, when every power ministry had its own intelligence units, which acted on their own initiative with no co-ordination. In late 1993, Shevardnadze initiated a strategic rapprochement with Russia, and Moscow (at least, many Russian politicians and officials involved in managing relations with Georgia) had its own opinions on the security sector of its 'junior partners'. Batiashvili resigned. The Ministry of State Security was reconstructed under the leadership of a professional KGB officer, Igor Giorgadze, who was later accused of plotting to assassinate President Shevardnadze and of working for Russia against Georgia.

Until he fled Georgia in autumn 1995, Giorgadze worked hard to strengthen the positions of the MSS in the political and economic life of the country. He maintained friendly relations with Gen Fyodor Reut, who commanded the Group of Russian Forces in the Transcaucasus (GRVZ), and with his assistance he established an airborne brigade under MSS command. Where business was concerned, he competed successfully against other power structures (the MOD, the MOI, and the leader of the Ajaran autonomous republic¹⁹) and also tried to make friends with the Mkhedrioni, who were still quite influential at that time. He was reputed to be involved in arms trading. At one point Giorgadze seemed to be the most powerful political player in Georgia, but in a country with numerous competing clans (including the power ministries) and a president experienced in divide-and-rule tactics, this was a very

¹⁸ Statement by Kakha Targamadze on the Rustavi-2 TV Channel, 12 September 2001.

¹⁹ Ajara is a region of south-western Georgia that has broad autonomy from central government.

difficult position to maintain. Giorgadze had to leave the political scene, together with the leader of the Mkhedrioni, Jaba Ioseliani. The MOI then became the leading ministry. The airborne brigade was re-assigned to the leaders of the MOI, then became part of the Interior Troops, which also belong to the MOI.

A few years later, Giorgadze's successor, Shota Kviraya, who was notorious for his bad temper, was forced out of office, and the MSS became an unofficial branch of the MOI. Many police officers started to work there and even the new minister, Jemal Gakhokidze, was a former policeman. He was not head of the ministry for long. A mutiny in an army brigade in October 1998, which did not show him in a particularly good light, cost him his job, though he managed to find a position on the staff of the National Security Council. Under his successor, Vakhtang Kutateladze, who used to head the Special State Guard Service (see below), the Ministry soon gained the reputation of an organisation engaged solely in illegal economic activities. MSS officers, along with the police, provided patronage for businessmen and encouraged them, instead of paying official taxes, to hand over bribes or a share of profits. This was helped by the fact that the MSS, along with the MOI, were responsible for investigating economic crime, meaning they had legal tools to interfere in business activities.

Formally, the MSS had responsibility for dealing with anti-government plots and terrorism. There was a special counter-terrorist centre in the ministry, which as the 21st century began was run by a former head of the Transport Police. According to some unofficial sources, he acted as a middleman between kidnappers from the Pankisi Gorge and the relatives of their victims. The MSS collaborated closely with the MOI on this issue. It is impossible to say exactly who did or did not have criminal links, but this is certainly the image that the MSS had.

Kutateladze left the MSS along with his colleague from the MOI in autumn 2001. The new Minister of State Security was a young lawyer with an unblemished reputation. Valery Khaburdzania used to work as a member of staff at the National Security Council and then served as parliamentary secretary to the president. The new minister, like his MOI counterpart, backs the idea of deep structural and personnel reforms. He aims to create a modern national security service based on the German model, which will defend the constitutional order. He demands the complete de-politicisation of the Ministry and does not want it to be responsible for investigating economic crimes. Khaburdzania has already replaced some of his deputies and the head of the counter-terrorist centre. He officially recognised the existence of Chechen and Middle Eastern militants in the Pankisi Gorge after initial denials by the Georgian authorities.

However, reforms will have to go a lot further before yielding any tangible results. Besides, there is an evident lack of co-ordinated policy as far as law-enforcement and security sector reforms are concerned. The agencies lack co-ordination and co-operation. It was recently reported that one MSS officer, whose activities were under investigation by the prosecutor's office, found work at the MOI.

Other security structures

The system of law-enforcement agencies includes the penal system of the Ministry of Justice. The ministry used to have a special anti-riot prison unit set up by Minister Mikhail Saakashvili, a reformer who resigned in 2001 to lead the opposition party – the Democratic Forum-National Front. Saakashvili is famous for publicly accusing senior officers of the MOI and the MSS of corruption. Reportedly, this unit effectively ceased to exist after Saakashvili's resignation.

Other agencies that have the right to carry arms include the prosecutor's office, whose staff are also armed, customs officers, and members of the Special Unit established in 2000 by the Ministry for Taxes and Revenues, which has recently merged with the Ministry of Finance. However, such agencies cannot be regarded as power structures, as they are not intended to protect law and order in emergencies. In such

circumstances, customs officers and the Special Unit would have to rely more on the MOI and other power structures.

Military structures

According to the 1995 Constitution, external security and defence are maintained by the so-called Military Forces. Their major constituent component is the MOD and its armed forces. In addition, the Military Forces are also comprised of the Border Guard, the Interior Troops, and the State Guard Service. Therefore, some military and police functions are mixed without any clear division of responsibilities. Several months ago parliament charged the General Staff with a co-ordinating role over all military forces in times of mobilisation or martial law. Nonetheless, this amendment to the Law on Defence does not distinguish clearly the functions and levels of co-ordination within the security system. The amendment itself is the result of recommendations by Western experts. Yet their key demand – to put an end to the overlapping of responsibilities among the power ministries and to distinguish between military and police functions – has not yet been fulfilled.²⁰ This is all the more urgent because the current situation, where the Interior Troops have been declared part of the military forces while remaining subordinate to the MOI, violates the Constitution, which categorically forbids any merger of the defence, police and security forces.

The division of police and military functions is a complicated issue even for developed countries. This became obvious after the attacks on the US on 11 September 2001, as the concept of asymmetric wars became more prominent. Nonetheless, the problem should be resolved, especially in Georgia, which has many, poorly co-ordinated power structures and scarce budgetary resources. At the moment, the MOD is just one of the bodies responsible for the defence of the country. Moreover, within its ranks is the semi-autonomous National Guard, the purpose of which, it has recently been declared, is to act as a reserve for the Armed Forces and to provide the government with assistance in a state of emergency. Thus, the government created another field for overlapping roles and remits between the Interior Troops and the MOI's Department for Emergency Situations.

The National Guard's identity owes much to its short history and to its officers, who have developed a strong collective spirit. The Guard was set up in 1991, before the establishment of the MOD, and was largely made up of volunteers, many of whom were not professionals. The first commander was Tengiz Kitovani, an artist by profession. From the mid-1990s until quite recently the Guard was led by Gen Jemal Chumburidze, who did not have a military background either. The personnel and status of the Guard have varied over time. In 1993, it was even renamed the Rapid Reaction Corps, at a time when the new Minister of Defence, Giorgi Karkarashvili, who was previously in the Guard, was attempting to integrate and unify the armed forces. Yet soon the Guard returned to its old name, and it managed to preserve a certain degree of autonomy even under Gen Vardiko Nadibaidze, a general from the Russian Army, who was fighting to eradicate the factionalism and insubordination that had characterised the period of civil and ethnic wars.

In 1991–3, the Guard did not differ much from the Mkhedrioni or smaller units with obscure status, combining legal and illegal ways to procure funds and resources. When Shevardnadze consolidated his power, the golden age of the Guard was over. Many volunteers left the unit and joined veteran organisations; some were imprisoned. The Guard could not compete with the MOI or the MSS in gaining extra-budgetary revenues, but also did not intend to rely solely on its modest budgetary funding.

²⁰ These recommendations were devised by the International Security Advisory Board set up in 1998 and headed by Gen (ret.) Sir G. Johnson from the UK. Recommendations made at the end of 1998 suggested that the Interior Troops be subordinated to the MOD and the Border Guard to the MOI. The Georgian authorities gave general agreement to such recommendations, but have not yet taken any steps to implement them.

As far as the MOD is concerned, construction of the military began in spring 1992, when the ministry acquired the 1st Motor Rifle Brigade of the 1st Army Corps (the so-called 11th Brigade). The National Guard was also formally subordinate to the MOD leadership. However, the plans for military construction were interrupted by war in Abkhazia. In 1994, tensions eased and Minister Nadibaidze reduced the armed forces to a more stable structure, made up of several brigades, the Navy, the Air Force and the Air Defence Forces. By 1996, the armed forces, including the Guard Brigade and the various Guard units, consisted of about 30,000 men in peacetime. The 1997 law on conscription and military service set clearer rules and procedures for conscription.

From the very beginning, there were a lot more Soviet-trained officers in the armed forces than in the Guard. Under Nadibaidze, they gained the upper hand over the volunteers. On the one hand, this improved discipline, but the armed forces began to resemble units of the late Soviet era, with their bureaucracy and embezzlement of public funds. The practice of *dedovshchina* (where younger soldiers are bullied by the more experienced soldiers) thrived. One of the army's shortcomings was the lack of appropriate human resources. Most of the top officers charged with personnel management used to serve in logistical support rather than explicitly combat roles. They had vast bureaucratic and procurement experience gained during the Soviet era, but were not able to lead and train soldiers for the armed forces of a young independent state.

It was under Nadibaidze that the MOD leadership developed regular methods of gaining extra-budgetary and illegal income. On the one hand, this supplemented the wages of Georgian officers, who still have extremely low pay, even in comparison with their colleagues from other former Soviet states.²¹ Yet the lion's share of illegal income found its way into the wallets of a few MOD generals, while field officers had to invent their own methods of earning money. Other state bodies, including power ministries, often use the same methods as the military leadership, most notably the abuse of budgetary funds.

Western experts claimed in 1998 that the MOD received unregistered income from farms under its control. According to an expert of the parliamentary Committee for Defence and Security, the unaccounted spending of extra-budgetary revenues from the economic activities of businesses belonging to the MOD remains a major source of illegal income for senior military officers. Neither parliament nor the Ministry for State Property Management has any real opportunity to investigate how these profits are made or how big they are, though the law requires that all ministries be accountable for their extra-budgetary income.

According to the Board of Auditors, the Ministry is breaking the Budget Law by not spending its budget in the way it has been allocated. MOD officials claim in their defence that the Treasury consistently fails to give them all the money they have been allocated, meaning that they constantly have to reallocate budgetary funds. For example, funds earmarked for wages or food may be spent on fuel or business trips.²²

Despite rules on state tenders for MOD suppliers, the Ministry signed contracts with various companies without explaining why that company had been chosen. Tender processes were transformed into a mere formality. The law does not permit state officials to enter into financial deals with their relatives, but MOD officials often ignored this. The ministry signed a large number of dubious contracts with suppliers,

²¹ The wages of an MOD officer, including the so-called food allowance, do not exceed \$60–80 per month. This amount is roughly the same as the minimum cost of living for one person, but it is not enough to feed a family. After the resignation of Nadibaidze in 1998, the situation deteriorated because of arrears in payment. The government still owes the military several months' wages. As a way out, some officers have taken on some black market work out of hours (interview with officers of the Georgian Armed Forces). However, not all officers are lucky enough to find an extra job. Besides, the law on the status of the military prohibits any part-time work, except academic activities and teaching.

²² According to the Board of Auditors, in 1999 the MOD spent only 66 percent of the amount assigned to it for wages in the budget. At the same time, expenditure on business trips amounted to 142 percent. Nor did the ministry have much trouble finding 127,000 lari for compulsory fire insurance. The 'Services' section exceeded its budget by 363,000 lari. Sometimes these were forced spending measures in order to keep the armed forces functioning properly. However, poor planning and the loopholes in the legal basis related to budgetary expenditure did not allow a clear definition of whether the spending was justified or merely served the private commercial interests of a few officers.

which dragged the MOD into debt. Such debts are recovered from the state budget in conformity with court decisions. They are subtracted from the defence budget, reducing it still further. As many experts suggest, these offences clearly reflect the private interests of corrupt officials. This was at least partially acknowledged by David Tevzadze, who replaced Nadibaidze as Defence Minister in 1998, and under him the problem of corrupt dealings within the MOD was exposed. Nonetheless, financial regulations continued to be broken.²³

As far as the situation in the military units is concerned, illegal revenues here come from small-scale corruption in officer-soldier relations and from selling some military equipment, including even ammunition and weapons.

Such abuses do not involve all generals or officers. Not all units are in such a bad state. The armed forces are undergoing serious reform under Tevzadze, who has received Western assistance for such reforms. Gen Tevzadze does not come from the usual stock of Soviet officers; he reminds one more of the volunteers of the early 1990s, but with a Western military education. Before joining the army he was a philosopher. In 1992, he participated in the establishment of the *Orbi* (Falcon) paramilitary group, which later joined the National Guard. In the late 1990s, Tevzadze took security courses in Germany and Italy and finally graduated from the General Staff College in the United States. Under his command, Georgia moved away from military co-operation with Russia and the number of young officers with Western training in the MOD leadership increased. At the same time, however, a number of former MSS officers of a similarly young age, old friends of Gen Tevzadze, also appeared in the Ministry.

Since 2000 reform has intensified. With US help, Georgia set up the centre for defence resource management. Rapid reform of the General Staff is under way. New rapid deployment units have been formed. US instructors recently launched a training programme for 2,000 soldiers and officers. After training they will be awarded special contracts and a significant pay rise. Georgia is at the same time scaling down the armed forces to release funds.

So far, however, the results of the reforms are too modest to talk of a breakthrough. The army has not yet reached the required level of professionalism and unconditional loyalty to the state. Corruption, desertion and discontent dominate this part of the national security sector and impede reforms. Another obstacle to reform is the diverse character of its personnel – a combination of volunteers, ex-KGB officers, former Soviet staff, graduates of Western military academies and civilians who have transferred from the Presidential Administration and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). The MOD has been forced to tolerate the defiant attitude, reminiscent of the early 1990s, of some of its commanders. In May 2001, there was an attempted mutiny by the National Guard. On this occasion, the situation was resolved without too much difficulty, but the Army's role in promoting stability and democracy in Georgia is still somewhat contradictory.

Border Guards

The State Department of Border Guards is a separate structure assigned to the military forces. At first, the Border Guard was subordinate to the MOD, but since 1994 the situation has changed. Now it is attached to the MOD at an operational level only during war. For the last few years the Guard has been commanded by Gen Valery Chkheidze, who used to serve in the Soviet KGB. In 1995, Chkheidze could not imagine the Georgian Border Guard existing without close Russian co-operation. But as Georgia's military and strategic orientation changed, the Border Guard became the first Georgian military structure to co-operate with the United States. Chkheidze noted

²³ There were also financial irregularities concerning budgetary expenditure at the time when armed paramilitary groups were dominant, since the military had a privileged position and controlled certain businesses, as the MOI and the MSS did later once they had sidelined the military. For instance, in the early 1990s, the MOD authorised \$7,000 to purchase software worth just \$500 (interview with an official of the Board of Auditors). During the hostilities, the military often distorted information about purchases, actual use and losses of arms, ammunition and food (interview with a former logistics officer).

repeatedly that the Guard's level of funding was insufficient to guard those sections of the border that were plagued with drugs and arms smuggling effectively. It is hard to say how large the illegal revenues obtained by the agency are, but the amount of smuggling that goes on (for which the customs department cannot be solely to blame) testifies to the existence of corruption at the borders. The Border Guard also has holdings which are not accountable to the Georgian tax authorities. On the other hand, Chkheidze is known for spending budgetary funds sensibly and for his attention to his soldiers' needs.

Special State Guard Service

The youngest military agency is the Special State Guard Service. It was set up in 1994, taking officers from the MSS and MOI. For many years the service was headed by Vakhtang Kutateladze, who later became the Minister of State Security. It is now headed by a Mr Papaskiri, who is particularly well trusted by the political elite. The staff of the State Guard are in a privileged position, since they are allowed (though it is against the law) to make contracts to guard foreign missions, as well as private and state-run commercial facilities. The Guard is responsible for protecting the Baku-Supsa oil pipeline. There are also conscripts in the Guard who, unlike their counterparts in other agencies, receive a regular wage and may spend the night at home when they are off duty. Some privileged officers have business interests, paying for their share by using their special relationship with the Presidential Administration, law-enforcement and tax authorities to benefit the business.

The power ministries of the Abkhaz autonomous republic in exile (who were driven from Abkhazia when the Georgians lost the war in 1993 and were forced to transfer their headquarters to Tbilisi) include the MOI and the MSS, but these structures have few personnel and are integrated into Georgian agencies. The situation is different in the case of Ajara, which has a very real autonomy (see below).

The reform process

As mentioned above, Georgian national security actors tend not to have clearly defined roles, are weakly co-ordinated and have overlapping roles and remits. It is not clear where the work of the law-enforcement agencies ends and that of the traditional security sector begins. Furthermore, all of these agencies are in some way privatised – despite legal limitations, they pursue private and commercial interests. Until recently, the activities of some officers were clearly criminal in nature.

Recognition of the need for fundamental reform of the system is increasing. Reform is underway in the MOD, but its pace and results leave much to be desired. Reform is also imminent in the MOI and the MSS. There is talk of disbanding the ministries, diminishing their powers and creating a unified Department for Investigations. Some in the government and in the Council for Anti-Corruption Policy speak of the need to enforce a strict ban on the commercial activities of the power ministries. Georgia's Western partners, notably the United States, also insist on reforms. Washington has become particularly interested in strengthening the Georgian security structures after 11 September 2001. It was not just pressure from the public and from the opposition that achieved the recent personnel reshuffles in the MOI and the MSS, but also the growing dissatisfaction of the US donors with the situation in these agencies. In December 2001, President Shevardnadze set up another commission for institutional reform of the law-enforcement and security bodies, headed by the Chairman of the Supreme Court. The latter has strived to intensify co-operation in this sphere with the heads of foreign (mainly Western) missions.

If the reforms of the power ministries are intended not just to protect the interests of the state, but also to ensure personal security, then the creation of an efficient system

of civil democratic control is just as important as better internal management, strengthening discipline and improving budget spending in the MOD and the MOI. Firstly, no agency can become democratic on its own or with Western assistance without the support and co-ordination of an effective national government. Secondly, civilian democratic control is necessary to ensure the loyalty of the power ministries and to control SALW trafficking in the country. The problem of SALW proliferation is primarily related to the behaviour of the power ministries, for they are more able than any other political agency to stop uncontrolled SALW trafficking and their use against civilians. This is especially true in Georgia, where most smuggling and illicit trafficking, including arms trafficking, takes place with the participation or patronage of the law-enforcement agencies and the military. To curb these practices, an answer is needed to the classic question of who watches the watchmen.

Resources, funding and armament of the government military and paramilitary forces

Table 1: Government Military and Paramilitary Forces

	Budget (in million lari)	Personnel	Weapons
Ministry of the Interior of which MOI Interior Troops	42 4.2	29,800 6,400	Mostly Kalashnikov machine- and sub-machine-guns Grenade launchers, anti-tank guided missiles, mortars, heavy machine-guns, tanks, APCs. Airborne brigade
Ministry of Defence of which Army Air Force Naval Defence Force rapid deployment forces National Guard	36	20,000 10,000 1,200 2,000 500–900 1,000	Combat and auxiliary vehicles, aircraft, helicopters, tanks, armoured vehicles, artillery, anti-aircraft missile systems.
Ministry of State Security	7.2	4,000	No large combat units
Ministry of Justice penal system		3,000	Some armed personnel
Ministry of Finance special legion		370	
State Department of Border Guards	9.8	8,700	Mostly Kalashnikovs, small number of armoured vehicles
Special State Guard Service	6.8 (+4.1 extra-budgetary)	3,300	Mostly SALW.

The **Ministry of the Interior** is the largest of the official structures. In 2002 the MOI officially had 29,800 officers with a budget of 42 million lari. 6,400 MOI enlisted men belong to the Interior Troops, whose budget amounts to 4.2 million lari. There is also the Gen Gulua Special Forces, which report directly to the minister. The MOI is equipped with combat small arms, mostly various types of 7.62 mm calibre Kalashnikov machine-guns and sub-machine-guns. The Interior Troops are armed with grenade launchers, anti-tank guided missiles, mortars and heavy machine-guns, and even a small number of tanks and armoured personnel carriers. The MOI even possesses small aircraft. The Interior Troops are comprised of two operational brigades and separate units. They are deployed across Georgia. The units guard the checkpoints at the entry to the Pankisi Gorge, which is notorious for its high crime rate and the periodic presence of Chechen militants there. From time to time Interior Troops have been employed in clashes on the *de facto* border with Abkhazia in the Security Zone.

The **Ministry of State Security** has 4,000 personnel and receives 7.2 million lari from the budget. After the transfer of the airborne brigade to the MOI, the MSS has no large

combat units, though some special force detachments and combat guard units do exist.

The penal system of the **Ministry of Justice** consists of 3,000 staff. Only some of them are armed, however.

The special legion of the **Ministry of Finance** contains only 370 people.

According to the 2002 Budget Law, the **Ministry of Defence** had 20,000 enlisted men and received 36 million lari from the treasury. Apart from the General Staff, logistical and educational facilities, the forces belonging to the MOD include:

- rapid deployment forces – several hundred men, set to grow as reform progresses
- the Army – about 10,000 people divided into several brigades
- the National Guard – about 1,000 men
- the Air Force – 1,200
- the Naval Defence Forces – 2,000

The Armed Forces are equipped with several dozen light combat and auxiliary vessels, about a dozen aircraft (mostly Su-25 attack aircraft) and a dozen helicopters. Moreover, they are armed with 80 T-72 and T-55 tanks, about 200 armoured vehicles and roughly the same number of artillery pieces. SALW and ammunition are primarily of Soviet and Russian origin, though there are some Romanian sub-machine-guns and Czech sub-machine- and machine-guns. They also have a small number of locally made mortars. The military also possess some portable (*Strela* and *Igla*) and stationary anti-aircraft missile systems.

The **State Department of Border Guards** consists of 8,700 people with a budget of 9.8 million lari. Until recently, the Border Guard units were equipped with a small number of armoured vehicles. Beside border posts and detachments, they also have a motorised rapid reaction force, as well as some armed vessels. Most of the SALW are Kalashnikovs.

The **Special State Guard Service** is 3,300-men strong and receives 6.8 million lari from the budget. Its declared extra-budgetary funds amount to 4.1 million lari. The agency is mostly equipped with SALW, though it has its own special force. Bodyguards protecting the president and other important officials are also part of the State Guard Service.

Political leadership and civilian control over the security sector

In the previous section it was suggested that reforms were necessary not only within the security sector, but also to the system of political oversight and control over the security and law enforcement sphere. Generally speaking, the underdevelopment of any system of democratic control results from the low legitimacy enjoyed by the authorities and a weak civil society. In fact, issues such as complete civilian control over the power ministries and tackling SALW proliferation and use are part of the more fundamental task of democratising and enhancing the legitimacy of the state system in Georgia. At the same time, it is also necessary to iron out a number of flaws in the rules and procedures pertaining to the co-ordination and control over military and other armed bodies at the highest political level, to make these bodies more transparent and to provide more information both to legislators and the general public on the activities and funding of these structures.

Political control over the power ministries is based on the Constitution and various laws. The President and parliament are charged with formulating law-enforcement and defence policy. The President is the Commander-in-Chief. Georgia cannot use its armed forces during a state of emergency or to meet its international commitments without authorisation from the legislature. Legislators also approve nominees to the

ministerial posts and have the right to impeach them. Parliament adopts the state budget, including expenditure on defence and law-enforcement.

Couched behind these universal democratic norms, however, there are several serious shortcomings impeding the establishment of the rule of law and civilian control. This is particularly true of the process of drafting the budget. For many years parliament was given only a one or two page draft budget for each of the power ministries, meaning that deputies were unable to investigate expenditure thoroughly. In 2002 the MOD submitted a so-called 'programme' budget to parliament for the first time, giving a more detailed breakdown of spending. The details of this document, which raised many questions (it said nothing, for example, about the reduction in the armed forces that is supposedly planned), cannot be considered here. As it happened, the Ministry of Finance did not approve it and the President, as the head of the executive branch, also later rejected it. In the end, spending was reduced by more than 40 percent, but the logic and arguments concerning the redistribution of this money remained unclear to most deputies. No time was left for such considerations and the executive branch did not bother itself with explanations.

Parliament does not have the right to amend the budget without the consent of the president, who is the only person authorised to submit official budgetary drafts or amendments. The legislature has only two options – to agree the overall figures or to reject the entire draft. To reject the draft would require enormous political effort and compliance with numerous conditions, and so far legislators have not resorted to such measures. Nor was any action taken on the many occasions when the parliamentary taskforce responsible for reviewing the power ministries' spending on classified activities found that it knew no more than the other deputies.²⁴

One reason for this state of affairs is that much of the legislation is declaratory, with little real impact on the ground. Parliament has no right to approve plans for specific large purchases by the power ministries. The law on the taskforce does not specify the parliamentary review procedure for defence programmes. It is not clear what the group should do if the president ignores a warning against the advisability of an individual programme.²⁵

Other legislation is similarly declarative. For example, in theory the President approves the structure of the armed forces, while Parliament approves their numerical strength. Different legal acts, however, define the term 'structure' in very different ways. Likewise, during a state of emergency the President is not supposed to have the right to mobilise the armed forces (including the Interior Troops) without the consent of Parliament. Hence both of these acts require consensus between the two, for which there is often neither the time nor the will. The only other options are for one branch of government to hold sway over the other, or for these laws simply to be broken. Normally, it is one of the last two options that is chosen, and it is the President who prevails.

Parliament's weak role is one indication that democratic control is still incomplete. The civilian element of control is also underdeveloped, as the Ministers of the Interior and of Defence, and the heads of the security departments are all generals.²⁶ The President and the Secretary of the National Security Council are almost the only civilians with any real power at the top levels of the executive. As far as the National Security Council and its Secretary are concerned, the 1996 law regulating their activities is quite confusing in defining their status and role. On the one hand, this is a consultative body to the president and thus does not answer to parliament. On the other, the agency is charged with co-ordination and control in the security and law-enforcement sectors, and it may submit some bills to parliament for consideration.

²⁴ Revaz Adamia, former Chairman of the Committee for Defence and Security and leader of the parliamentary confidence taskforce, stated in March 2000 that he was aware of some military information, but when it came to expenditure he was no more informed than other legislators.

²⁵ Interview with L. Alapishvili, one of the authors of this law.

²⁶ Until recently, the first exception to this rule was the new Minister of State Security Valery Khaburdzhania.

The President has had overall responsibility over the military, police and special services since 1995. But the style of this supervision is reminiscent of Samuel Huntington's model of subjective civilian control.²⁷ The model implies that during a power struggle the political groups or government branches try to gain the support of the power ministries. They are aided in this by the lack of clarity over who controls what part of the armed forces. There is no prospect in this model of the public good being used to impose checks on the commercial activities of the power ministries. On the contrary, it is prone to the commercialisation and politicisation of the military and other power structures. There is a danger that this could eventually lead to a formal or informal seizure of power by the security structures.

To prevent such a scenario, the President cleverly pursues a policy of divide-and-rule and creates numerous parallel power structures without encouraging co-ordination among them. Such a pattern of civilian-military relations is well known from the history of authoritarian regimes.²⁸ It helped the president to consolidate his powers in 1995 and to suppress attempted mutinies in 1998 and 2001. However, such a policy can hardly be regarded as an adequate and stable alternative to democratic civilian control. Either way, it implies that the power ministries can get away with certain things. This is not beneficial to society, and means that problems involving illegal SALW use remain unresolved.

Security actors beyond the control of the central government

There are also armed structures in Georgia, however, which are only nominally, or in no way, subordinate to the central government in Tbilisi. This is not a reference to the armed units of the separatist regimes in Abkhazia or South Ossetia, which do not recognise the principle of Georgian territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders – that is a separate issue. Rather, there are also semi-official, informal and foreign armed groups in the rest of the country, whose relationship with the central government and legal status are unclear.

As has been shown, the legitimate state structures' control over the power ministries is quite weak and subjective, and this inevitably causes serious concern. However, there are also other armed bodies, whose relationship to central government is unclear, or are established and financed by certain members of the elite to pursue personal interests. Others are completely independent of the authorities and are sometimes anti-government or anti-state.

Ajara

One region where the relationship of the local authorities to the central government is questionable is Ajara, where it is unclear how loyal and subordinate the law-enforcement and security sector is to Tbilisi. The Constitution and Ajaran legislation do not distinguish between the role of the central authorities and those of the autonomous authorities in this sphere. The autonomous region has its own MSS and MOI dating from the Soviet era and they are more loyal to the authoritarian regime of Aslan Abashidze than their superiors in the power ministries in Tbilisi. In the early 1990s, Abashidze, fearing that civil war might spill over into the autonomous republic and careful to strengthen his own power, formed popular militia units which he supplied with sub-machine guns imported from Romania. These weapons were ordered by the Gamsakhurdia government, which by that time had already been overthrown by rebels from the National Guard and the Mkhedrioni.

Then, according to the Batumi media and public, the militia was disbanded and the arms were surrendered to the local authorities²⁹, though from time to time the press

²⁷ Huntington S, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*, (Harvard, 1995).

²⁸ Brooks S, *Political-Military Relations and the Stability of Arab Regimes*, (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1998).

²⁹ Interviews conducted by the author in Batumi, April 2001.

reported that Abashidze had his own patrol boats and numerous detachments of his personal guard. According to unofficial reports from members of the Georgian power ministries, Abashidze does indeed have a security unit well trained by the Russian military. Initially it was commanded by a close relative of the local leader, then by a Russian officer. Journalists believe the unit is funded using black market money made by the ruling Ajaran clan. Abashidze's guard amounts to several hundred people, though he has repeatedly stated that the autonomous republic possesses several thousand reservists trained by the Russian Border Guard and at the Russian military base in Batumi. The security unit is armed with Soviet/Russian SALW. Ajarans serve in the Georgian Armed Forces as well, but mostly in the units deployed on the territory of the autonomous republic – the 25th Brigade of the MOD and a battalion of Interior Troops.

Russian military bases

The Russian military base in Batumi is also considered to provide support for the Abashidze regime. Abashidze traditionally has warm and cordial relations with the commander of this base. He has also repeatedly rendered financial and material assistance to the base. Abashidze has always been committed to the idea of strategic partnership with Russia, sometimes opposing the steps and statements made by the central government. The Russian military have several times conducted exercises at Ajara's administrative border with the rest of Georgia without notifying Tbilisi. These acts were perceived by the Georgian authorities as demonstrating foreign political and military support to the regime, which had repeatedly ignored the central government. However, it should be noted that this has never resulted in open confrontation. Abashidze has recently been appointed Shevardnadze's special envoy for the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, and the Russian military wait for decisions on their future to be taken by the leaders of two countries in accordance with adaptations to the CFE Treaty specified and approved at the OSCE summit in Istanbul.

The 1999 CFE guidelines provided for the closure of the Russian bases in Vaziani and Gudauta by 1 July 2001. The parties agreed in Istanbul that Russia and Georgia should come to a mutually acceptable solution on the future of two other bases (in Akhalkalaki and Batumi) by late 2001. So far, these decisions have been implemented only in part – the base in Vaziani has closed, and heavy arms have been withdrawn from the Gudauta base in Abkhazia. Yet the Georgian authorities do not agree with the Russian claim that the Gudauta base has also been shut down since its facilities now constitute part of the peace-keeping mission in the zone of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. According to Georgian data, about 500 Russian soldiers armed with SALW are deployed at Gudauta.

The parties also failed to come to an agreement on the other two bases. Georgia demands that they be closed within two to three years, while Moscow insists they remain for another 14 years. Therefore, about 5,000–6,000 Russian military personnel from the GRVZ and the personnel of the Gudauta base remain in Georgia on questionable legal grounds.³⁰ The Georgian authorities have limited control over their activities, particularly in relation to transfers of SALW and equipment, though heavy weapons are subject to verification procedures agreed in Istanbul.

Beside these Russian troops, there are about 2,500 Russian peace-keepers deployed in Georgia.³¹ Several hundred peace-keepers are deployed in the zone of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict. They act in conformity with the Russian-Georgian agreement supported by representatives of South and North Ossetia. The rest of the Russian peace-keepers are deployed in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict zone under a CIS mandate. Various sources report that Russian peace-keepers and employees from the

³⁰ The Gudauta base has never been part of the GRVZ and was directly subordinate to the Air Force or Airborne Troops commanders.

³¹ Some of these forces are sometimes attached to the peace-keeping contingent from the Gudauta base or the GRVZ.

bases are heavily involved in the illicit trade in various goods, including SALW and ammunition.

The White Legion and Forest Brothers

The Georgian guerrilla units conducting operations in the zone of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict are known as the White Legion, associated with Zurab Samushia and Ramin Pirtskhalava, and the Forest Brothers, led by Dato Shengelia. Most of their members are internally displaced persons (IDPs), many of whom come from the Gali district. Their activities first came to prominence in 1995–6. At first, they were widely reported to be connected to the Georgian power ministries, especially the MSS and the MOI of the Abkhaz government in exile. The groups' leaders do not deny their attempts to gain financial support from the Georgian authorities, but deny the existence of any close co-operation with the government in exile.³² They are mostly active in the upper and lower zones of the Gali district. The lower part is considered to be under the Forest Brothers' control. There may also be some smaller independent armed groups.

Guerrilla groups are armed with grenade launchers, sub-machine-guns and Soviet/Russian landmines. These weapons are either purchased or captured. It is hard to say how many guerrillas there are. The core of the Legion or the Forest Brothers is unlikely to be more than a few hundred people. But if the need arises and adequate funding is provided, they may quickly be reinforced by IDPs, who live in desperate circumstances.

There is a lot of talk about these guerrilla groups being involved in smuggling and illegal business activities, including partnerships with representatives of the Abkhaz authorities. The trade in hazelnuts grown in the Gali district is particularly profitable, and trade in oil, cigarettes and weapons is also known to occur in the security zone. It is hard to imagine that the guerrillas have absolutely no involvement in this. This combination of combat and commercial operations (even including business with the enemy) is typical of low-intensity conflicts. Recently attacks were carried out not only along the conflict border zone, but also in Zugdidi and in Abkhazia. These clashes may have been related to illegal business.

Other armed groups

Other armed groups exist in various parts of Georgia. In Mingrelia and Svaneti, which are adjacent to Abkhazia, paramilitary groups did not disband at the end of the Georgian-Abkhaz war in 1993 and the earlier civil war. They are not connected with the guerrillas, and mostly stay in the woods, only occasionally coming out into the open. In Svaneti these groups are either overtly criminal or are related to the Hunter militia battalion in the Kodori Gorge. The battalion is subordinate to the central government and was established by Emzar Kvitsiani, a special envoy of the Georgian President in the lower part of the Kodori Gorge, the only area of Abkhazia that recognizes the central government. The battalion was attached to the Interior Troops, then to the MOD. Its status is again under question, as UN-sponsored negotiations are being held on changing the security regime in the gorge.

Both in the Kodori Gorge and in Svaneti itself, arms possession and criminal groups are hard to control. The only levers of influence, which are not always effective, are those of kinship and family ties. In low-lying Mingrelia, there are various uncoordinated clandestine armed groups made up of former supporters of President Gamsakhurdia. A couple of years ago the central government apparently became reconciled with one of the leaders, Akaki Eliava, then assassinated him in a strange 'incident' in 2000. Gocha Esebua, who had kidnapped a number of United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) observers, was killed two years earlier. Yet

³² Interview with the Zugdidi guerrillas, March 2001.

such groups are still rumoured to exist. One of Gamsakhurdia's former armed supporters, Zarandia, set up the Association of Georgian Patriots. He has not been harassed by the authorities, however, and even helps break up regional meetings of the anti-Shevardnadze opposition. The opposition claims that Zarandia and his associates are armed and hired by the local authorities. Zarandia also has authority among local criminals. It is noteworthy that a few months ago Zarandia met Jaba Ioseliani, the founder of Mkhedrioni, after he was released from prison. Zarandia has admitted more than once in the local press that he has access to arms, and has boasted that he could mobilize a thousand fighters if necessary.³³

There are reports that there are also armed groups in Kakheti in the eastern part of the country. Here, too, local elites could rely on support from paramilitary structures if the political situation were to worsen. As tensions grew in the Pankisi Gorge, the neighbouring Georgian village set up an armed unit. This group soon disbanded, but its fighters kept hold of their weapons. Their leader, Luka Ramazashvili, enjoys the patronage of M. Mezvrishvili, the head of the Telavi administration, and might be used by the administration to intimidate opponents.

As far as the Pankisi Gorge is concerned, the armed groups include Chechen militants who come from the north and the clans among the local Kists (an ethnic group related to the Chechens) – the Khangoshvili and Margoshvili. According to the Georgian press, the Pankisi Gorge is also home to an armed group led by a former Guardsman, Chachiashvili, who now engages in criminal activity. As is well known, Chachiashvili, Kist clans and other criminals did not hesitate to join the rebel Guardsmen in May 2001, when the latter captured the Interior Troops' base in Mukhrovani and made various demands, mostly concerning social and economic issues. This mutiny was suppressed. The President himself met the rebels and promised to address the problems facing the armed forces. The criminals scattered.

There are also armed groups in Javakheti, which is populated mainly by Armenians. These groups emerged several years ago, when they blocked the path of a column of Georgian MOD troops who wanted to conduct an exercise at the local training ground. Those locals who support the concept of autonomy for their ethnic group in Javakheti and oppose the deployment of Georgian forces in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda, regarded these manoeuvres as a veiled attempt by Tbilisi to strengthen its presence in the region. According to the Georgian press, apart from political groups calling for autonomy and irredentists with links to the Armenian Dashnak Party, there is also an illegal paramilitary organisation in Javakheti called *Parents*.³⁴ Local non-governmental organisations and the local administration deny the existence of such a group.

Due to the protracted political and economic crisis and the unresolved social and ethno-national problems in the country, it is possible that other groups armed with SALW either exist or could spring up at any moment. Such groups might span a range of ideologies and objectives, from pursuing social and economic aims to the purely criminal. There are too many desperate and disillusioned people in Georgia with combat experience. The Pankisi Gorge, for instance, is a classic example of how various motivations for the acquisition and stockpiling of weapons become merged. What is left of Gamsakhurdia's armed followers were recently trying to acquire weapons, as were Chechen militants (and they have been known to collaborate on more than one occasion). There are kidnappers and drug dealers, who are also mixed up in the arms trade, as some of the money made from drugs and hostages is used to buy guns for political purposes or to protect their criminal enterprises.³⁵

³³ *Mtavari*, 22 December 2001.

³⁴ *Dilis Gazeti* (Morning Newspaper), 27 March 2002. The *Alia* newspaper (5 March 2002) reported on an organisation called Feydan supplied and trained at the Russian base in Akhalkalaki.

³⁵ Interview with MSS officers and representatives of the Institute of History of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, April–May 2002.

Since certain sections of the border and conflict zones are not under control, and control over the activities of the military and law-enforcement agencies is weak, obtaining a small amount of weapons is not particularly difficult. Fortunately, the majority of the population and most of the political groups are fed up with the state of chaos and are seeking peaceful changes. Although the culture of violence and counter-violence in society has not reached a critical level, there is still cause for concern, and less and less time remains for systemic changes to be implemented. Otherwise, weapons possessed by official, semi-official or unofficial structures, and those that are still in free circulation, may become much more noticeable than they are at the moment.

SALW proliferation in Georgia: sources, import-export issues and transit

SALW available to the Georgian power ministries and Russian troops, as well as to some paramilitary non-state actors, include the following models:

- 5.45 mm and 7.62 mm sub-machine-guns (AK-74, AKS-74, AKM, AKMN, AKMS, AKMSN);
- 7.62 mm machine-guns (RPK-74, RPK-74N, RPK, RPKM, PK, PKM, SGIT, SGMB, PKT);
- 7.62 mm sniper rifles;
- 5.45 mm and 7.62 mm pistols (PSM, PSS and MPSS);
- 9 mm pistols (PM, ChZ, PMB, SIG Sauer);
- MO-251 rocket rifles;
- 12.7 mm, 14.5 mm and 20 mm machine-guns (DShKM, NSV, KPVT);
- grenade-launchers (RPG-7, SPG-9);
- rocket-launchers (RPG-18, RPG-22 and RPG-26);
- PG-25 grenade launchers;
- 50 mm, 60 mm, 82 mm mortars;
- 23 mm and 37 mm light anti-aircraft machineguns;
- portable anti-aircraft systems (*Igla*, *Strela*).

These are mostly of Soviet or Russian origin, though there are also weapons from Romania (AKM and AKS sub-machine-guns), the Czech Republic (sub-machine-guns, machine-guns and pistols) and Uzbekistan (sub-machine-guns). In some cases, ammunition was bought in Ukraine. There are also a small number of German SIG Sauer pistols.

Local production

The Georgian military-industrial complex was made up of 28 enterprises, research institutions and design bureaus subject to central Soviet control. Today less than 10 percent of its productive capacity is used.³⁶ However, plants such as *Tbilaviamsheni* (Tbilisi Aircraft Manufacturers, previously Factory 31) not only continue to manufacture and repair Su-25 attack aircraft (though in small quantities), but also to produce light weapons. Tbilaviamsheni has the capacity to manufacture 82 mm mortars, which are 11 cm shorter than the Soviet model, and RPG-7 grenade launchers.

Yet the low level of investment means this production is insignificant in scale. The Georgian research centres *Delta*, *Orbi* and *Skhivi* designed and produced test runs of optical devices, detonators, anti-tank grenades and grenade launchers, bulletproof vests, original Gorda automatic rifles and Armazi pistols. Attempts were also made to produce SIG Sauer pistols and cartridges for automatic weapons. However, virtually all these projects are either suspended or still at the design and testing stage. Besides these mortars, they also managed to manufacture small quantities of bulletproof vests,

³⁶ Interview with N. Dzhaiani, former MP, member of the Committee for Defence and Security responsible for overseeing the problems in the defence industries, April 2002.

which were a success at international exhibitions.³⁷ Yet because of the lack of funding, bureaucratic obstacles and competition between the various groups engaged in arms production and import, it has not been possible to launch industrial production. Thus, most of the SALW and ammunition stockpiles in Georgia have either been there since Soviet times or were imported from Eastern Europe and former Soviet countries.

The Soviet withdrawal

The most active period of both SALW and heavy arms proliferation in Georgia occurred when the Soviet military withdrew from the South Caucasus and the remaining Russian units came under the GRVZ. The most widespread arms in Georgia prior to this, not counting short-barrel weapons in the hands of a few criminal groups, hunting rifles owned by the general population, and sport and training rifles for certain armed guards and volunteer forces, were the arsenals of the local MOI and KGB. The latter had fewer personnel and arms than the former. The MOI possessed pistols and small quantities of machine- and sub-machine-guns. Of course, in the Soviet era the possibility of arms falling into the hands of the civilian population was all but ruled out. Illegal SALW proliferation from Soviet Army stores in Georgia was equally unlikely, though even back then, if someone really wanted to get hold of ammunition from the Soviet forces, they normally could.

The militia and volunteers began to procure arms from the moment they were established in late 1988. Besides private hunting rifles, they obtained arms from training centres, armed guards, and from the quickly developing black market, in which more and more officers from the Soviet military units gradually became involved.

Another significant source of SALW proliferation was the MOI. As the national movement was developing, local police stations became frequent targets of attacks aimed at seizing arms. In 1990–1, the MOD issued about 1,000 pistols to different groups and organizations, including representatives of the new national authorities, political leaders and their bodyguards. According to official MOI statistics, in April 2002 a total of 2,256 automatic rifles, 949 pistols and 36 machine-guns were missing from the Ministry. Most of these losses occurred between 1990 and 1995.

In November 1991, the Gamsakhurdia government declared the nationalisation of property possessed by units of the Transcaucasian Military District and by certain other military structures deployed on the territory of Georgia, such as the Frontier Guard and the Navy. In other words, the Gamsakhurdia regime claimed that all Soviet military equipment based in Georgia was now the property of the Georgian state. Yet this order remained an empty declaration, and arms and equipment began to be withdrawn from Georgia. However, these weapons were with increasing regularity captured or purchased by various paramilitary groups. By 1992, Gamsakhurdia was no longer in power, and the Russian Federation, as the successor state to the Soviet Union, became the legal inheritor of all the property belonging to the military structures left in Georgia. Throughout 1992, the Georgian government repeatedly raised the issue of transferring this property to the Georgian MOD. At that time, the Russian military possessed about 200,000 small arms and anti-aircraft and artillery pieces. In 1992, the Georgian MOD received (in different ways, including transfer, seizure and purchase) about 22,000 firearms for close combat and 800 anti-aircraft and artillery systems.³⁸

Given the chaos of the time, the MOD was not the only recipient of Russian combat weapons, and the aforementioned statistics are incomplete. Firstly, the Mkhedrioni were not part of the MOD structure, but they too acquired arms from the Russian troops. There were also other groups who obtained weapons, including the Interior

³⁷ *Army and Society in Georgia*, CCMRSS, Tbilisi, October 1999; September–October 2000.

³⁸ Figures from the Georgian MOD. Unfortunately, more exact data on the types and quantity of weapons is not available, since the Georgian agencies have only recently started to categorise SALW. Many experts assume that of the aforementioned arms available to the Georgian MOD only a few hundred weapons may not be regarded as SALW. The anti-aircraft and artillery systems mentioned above are normally categorised as light weapons.

Troops. Secondly, in many cases the transfer documents indicate different figures – the Russian military transferred one amount, the Georgian MOD received another.³⁹ It appears that both parties were privately selling the difference. It is unlikely that in the near future there will be reliable figures as to how many weapons were left in Georgia, and how many went elsewhere. According to the Georgian MOD, the Russian military withdrew weapons and materiel to a value of \$4 billion, but it is impossible to verify this figure independently.

One may conclude that the lion's share of the Soviet/Russian weapons that were left in Georgian hands up till 1993 went to the MOD. Russian SALW not mentioned in the official MOD registers but left in Georgia illegally may amount to several thousand weapons.⁴⁰

The Georgian MOD officially lost 16,000 firearms and 200 anti-aircraft and artillery systems in the 1992–3 hostilities. Other groups might also have lost some weapons. Some of these lost weapons might be in Abkhazia, but according to ex-combatants' recollections, a reasonably large quantity of weapons was left in Mingrelia and Svaneti. In many cases, ex-combatants claimed to have lost their sub-machine-guns, and then kept them for themselves. Sometimes no one even asked them to return their weapons.⁴¹

Arms imports

An increasing quantity of arms was also entering the country from abroad. The above figures do not include several hundred automatic rifles from Romania in 1992, some of which ended up with the Ajaran authorities, some in the hands of the Mkhedrioni. During the 1993 hostilities, the MOD and other units replenished their SALW arsenals partly with Romanian, Russian and Ukrainian supplies (taking advantage of the old ties that Georgian commissioned officers had with former colleagues), partly from the GRVZ's storage facilities.

With the exception of several thousand 5.45 mm Kalashnikovs from Romania,⁴² the 1993 transfers could not have been particularly large; at any rate, no more than the amount received in 1992, which was considered to be the largest consignment received. Moreover, because of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgian-Russian relations at that time were not particularly good. Nor is there any record of large amounts of supplies coming from Ukraine – it is unlikely that such a deal could have gone unnoticed, had it actually taken place. Moreover, the government constantly suffered from a lack of funds. However, it is also important to point out that not all new shipments were properly registered.

Meanwhile, MOD officials also turned to suppliers in the Czech Republic. Some elite units are known to have received 7.62 mm AKM sub-machine-guns made there, but these were relatively few – no more than a few hundred.

It was only a few years later that serious amounts of SALW were obtained. In 1997, the MOD received about 8–9,000 Kalashnikovs in Uzbekistan in exchange for cars from the Kutaisi car plant. Co-operation also continued with partners in the Czech Republic, who supplied Georgia with a small quantity of heavy machine-guns in 1997.

Since then, there are no records of the Georgian power ministries importing any substantial amounts of SALW. According to unofficial sources, the largest Georgian consumer – the MOD – meets its demand for SALW and ammunition by making

³⁹ For instance, according to a participant in these events, during the transfer of tanks from the Russian division in Akhaltsikhe to the Georgian MOD in 1992, the record of transfer stipulated one tank more than the record of receipt. Clearly in the case of SALW the number of items would be much larger.

⁴⁰ Georgian consumers (paramilitary groups and civilians) were not able to buy more.

⁴¹ Interview with former members of the Georgian military who fought in Abkhazia. Many ex-combatants assured us that during the retreat in autumn 1993, the Georgian Army may have left some tanks, artillery and mortars, but not automatic rifles. Many Georgian soldiers were disarmed in Mingrelia by Gamsakhurdia's supporters, who launched a new cycle of civil war against Shevardnadze after his defeat in Abkhazia.

⁴² *Army and Society in Georgia*, CCMRSS, Tbilisi, December 1998.

secret deals with the GRVZ, and in exchange does not prevent the Russian military from making similar deals with other parties. The other Georgian power ministries have not increased their firepower over the last few years either, but this is understandable, given that recent reductions in personnel mean fewer arms are required anyway.

Retransfer and transit trade

In order to estimate the amount of SALW available at present for the Georgian power ministries and the Russian military, individuals and non-state formations in Georgia, it is necessary to touch briefly on the issues of retransfer and transit of arms. There is no need to consider exports, since Georgia does not manufacture SALW in significant amounts.

As mentioned earlier, in the early 1990s Russia began withdrawing SALW and other property belonging to the Soviet forces from Georgia. In 1992, without the consent of the Georgian government the Russian military began to unilaterally withdraw weapons and relocate them in third countries, notably Armenia. In some cases, Georgian units stopped these weapons from being transported south. However, by the end of 1992/start of 1993, some Georgian military personnel actually started to assist the GRVZ in exporting weapons, including to the Balkans.⁴³ The most important role, however, was played by the Russian military, and in particular Gen Reut, the then head of the GRVZ, while the Georgians helped facilitate this trade. There is no information available as to whether it was possible for the leaders of some Georgian paramilitary units to buy large amounts of unregistered arms from the Russians and then sell them abroad themselves.

Between late 1993 and 1995, the chaos in Georgia subsided, and some personnel and structural changes in the security sector were carried out. This process was accompanied by clashes not just between political groups, but also between the power ministries. It is an open secret that Minister of State Security Giorgadze and Defence Minister Karkarashvili had a serious quarrel in early 1994. Soon afterwards, Deputy Defence Minister Kekelidze, who was known for his ties with Czech arms suppliers, was killed, and Karkarashvili resigned. This was followed by growing animosity between Giorgadze and Abashidze, the Ajaran leader. At first glance, the reasons for this antagonism seemed to be political, stemming from a power struggle, and from attempts to force Ajara to be more loyal to the central authorities in Tbilisi. Personal resentment might also have played a role. The murder of Kekelidze remains unsolved, but there is another theory about what happened, which links this rivalry to competition over arms exports. According to this version, which needs further investigation, there were two informal groups involved in exporting Russian arms to third countries. Gen Reut was aided in these deals by Giorgadze, while the commander of the Batumi base, under the patronage of the famous Russian General Aleksandr Lebed, plied his trade with Abashidze's assistance. In late 1993/early 1994, however, a third channel emerged, independent of the Russian military: Kekelidze was arranging arms supplies from Central Europe. Some analysts believe that Kekelidze was interested not only in supplying the Georgian armed forces independently of Russia, but also in establishing his own channels for the retransfer of Central European weapons. As later events demonstrated, this attempt, if it did actually happen, had a fateful ending.

From late 1995, illegal exports began to diminish, although smaller amounts of weapons still found their way out of Georgia even after the restoration of order in the country. These were mainly unregistered SALW kept by civilians after the conflicts. In 1997–8, small arms and grenade launchers kept by ex-combatants were brought into the Pankisi Gorge in small quantities and then transferred to Chechnya via narrow paths in the mountains or under the patronage of corrupt officials on the Russian and Georgian sides. These supplies were initially maintained by individuals, but quite soon

⁴³ *Army and Society in Georgia*, CCMRSS, Tbilisi, September–October 2001.

MOI and MSS officers began to take control of these operations, benefiting from their links with criminals in the Gorge and with Chechen militants. By the late 1990s, there were several cases of weapons missing from MOD units, which suggested the possibility that weapons possessed by representatives of the Georgian power ministries were being sold on the spot, perhaps also for further transit. However, according to the accounts provided to the author by officers of the Georgian armed forces, by inhabitants of Batumi and regions adjacent to the conflict zones, by Georgian parliamentarians and by the media, the main source of arms both for the local market and for export (including *de facto* separated territories) were the personnel of the Russian military bases and peace-keeping forces. The GRVZ denies such allegations. Yet since the Georgian power ministries often resort to the services of the GRVZ in order to procure SALW and ammunition, one may assume that the Russian military may have sold these weapons to third parties as well. In any case, Georgian partners participate in deals made since 1995 just as they did before.⁴⁴

The new leadership of the power ministries, which strives to put an end to corrupt practices, and the media, argue that Georgia cannot be regarded as a classic SALW supplier to conflict zones beyond its borders. Firstly, there are enough weapons in the North Caucasus and in the *de facto* separate territories, so it makes no sense for Georgia to play a significant role in supplying these regions with arms. Armenia and Azerbaijan have other sources, notably Russia. Shipments to other countries are also problematic – Georgia does not possess enough weapons to become an attractive supplier. Besides, in 1998, under US pressure, Tbilisi adopted a law governing the production and export of arms, military equipment and dual-use goods. As a result, if any export license is granted to the GRVZ, for example, this may have negative international repercussions. Finally, Georgia continues to import arms. Even if this is not on the same scale as before, the Georgian power ministries and the GRVZ are stocking up their arsenals. Illegal SALW are also being imported from conflict zones. Sources suggest it is possible to buy a Kalashnikov from Abkhazia for \$100–200, while an *Igla* anti-aircraft system can be obtained from South Ossetia for a few thousand dollars. If larger amounts are needed, sources in North Ossetia may be found.⁴⁵

Recently, shops that sell short-barrelled weapons have opened, since the law allows weapons to be acquired for private possession at home (but not carried). In Tbilisi alone there have been more than 12,000 registered sales. According to some sources, the owners of these shops are normally under the patronage of the power ministries and may be involved in illicit supplies within Georgia and abroad by writing off weapons. However, this supplies relatively few arms in comparison with the other methods described above.

The following conclusions can be made concerning the availability of legal and illegal SALW in Georgia, their movements, and the major actors involved in this business:

- The total strength of official and semi-official (ie Ajaran) power structures, civilian agencies with registered arms and deployed Russian forces amounts to 80–85,000 personnel. They possess at least the same number of SALW, but given their mobilization plans there may in fact be at least twice as many weapons, though their financial difficulties and reported cases of shortages should also be borne in mind.⁴⁶ The total quantity of registered privately-owned pistols and revolvers is probably twice the amount in Tbilisi, ie about 25,000. The total amount of legal SALW may reach 200,000 arms.
- As for illegal SALW in Georgia, any estimates are even more of a gamble. The MOD currently lists 14,000 missing weapons, the MOI more than 3,000. There may have also been smaller losses from other ministries. Curiously, none of the power ministries

⁴⁴ In April 2002, journalists of Rustavi-2 TV Company carried out an independent investigation into the links between former MOD officer Tsitelashvili and SALW buyers in Chechnya. He intended to purchase arms from the Russian peace-keepers in South Ossetia. According to the journalists, this was one of the routes for SALW trafficking in Georgia and beyond.

⁴⁵ Interview with journalists in Zugdidi and journalists of Rustavi-2 TV Company.

⁴⁶ More precise data on SALW cannot be obtained, since this information is classified in accordance with Georgian law.

have any information on total SALW losses.⁴⁷ In actual fact, given the chaotic and illegal purchases, problems with transfer contracts and registration and other developments of the early 1990s, these figures seem clearly to be too low. Moreover, illegal arms deals have continued to take place since then. Individuals and paramilitary groups must possess at least twice as many arms as the official claim, ie at least 40,000 weapons.⁴⁸

- One may assume that the number of weapons possessed by civilians in Georgia since the end of conflict is roughly the same as it was before, and that these weapons are primarily concentrated in certain districts. These are the Pankisi Gorge – which acts not only as a transit route for Chechnya, but also as a base for storing illegal arms and drugs – Mingrelia, Svaneti and Javakheti, and perhaps Tbilisi as well, where small stockpiles have repeatedly been discovered.⁴⁹
- After the end of hostilities in Abkhazia, some weapons possessed by ex-combatants were exported, but there is no evidence of mass supplies of SALW to Chechnya from Georgia: it is more likely a matter of a few hundred weapons, not thousands. Since 1995 some arms may have been illicitly exported to Armenia or Azerbaijan. Bearing in mind the relative stability in these countries and the ceasefire in Karabakh, any such deals were not likely to have been particularly large. On the other hand, weapons were actually being imported, weak controls allowing both legal and illegal arsenals to be built up. As far as the 1993–5 retransfers were concerned, they mostly involved Russian weapons and only involved Georgian actors in a minor or indirect way.
- There is some illegal arms circulation, but on a relatively minor scale. Its pace has diminished since the late 1990s. Apart from Chechnya, a region which it is not particularly easy to deliver weapons to, there is no other significant market where there is a new demand for arms. Nor is there much domestic demand – not many guerrillas in Georgia are in search of new weapons, and the criminal underworld is not getting much larger, so there is not much demand there either. Informal armed groups belonging to politicians and local leaders are also limited in size. Therefore, however much illegal SALW there may or not be in Georgia, the amount is not generally increasing or decreasing. These weapons are stored or acquired just to be on the safe side.
- As far as the number and quality of SALW in Georgia is concerned, it is no exaggeration to say that official structures are better equipped than paramilitary groups. It would appear that any arms trafficking is either carried out or controlled by the power ministries. There is no strong mafia trading in arms independent of state structures.

All of the above points to the solutions mentioned at the beginning of this article – reform of the power ministries and real civil democratic control over the armed forces and law-enforcement agencies. These efforts should be part of a wider programme to revitalise the political system. Were this to happen, it would hopefully be possible to significantly curtail further arms proliferation and seize illegal arms. This hope is not unfounded – reshuffles in the MOI and MSS inflicted a serious blow to arms traffickers and their patrons. But much remains to be done.

⁴⁷ Official statement to the author by a Deputy Minister of the Interior and a representative of the Main Armament Directorate of the MOD. For instance, while the MOD claims losses of 14,000 weapons, the MOI states that the registered number of missing weapons in the MOD amounts to 7,648 firearms.

⁴⁸ All these calculations of registered and illegal SALW in Georgia, not including hunting, sport and gas guns, may be inaccurate and the author admits this. Unfortunately, if exact figures exist at all, they are classified. However, estimates presented in this article follow some logic. The author believes that the most realistic ratio of legal to illegal arms is 1:5.

⁴⁹ Children playing in Tbilisi recently found several sub-machine-guns in the cellar of a dwelling house. Rustavi-2 TV company, Kurieri news programme, 16 March 2002.

Initiatives to combat SALW proliferation

Public opinion is concerned about SALW proliferation both in narrow and in more general terms (ie SALW and rising crime, corruption, weak control of power ministries, human rights abuses, and the potential for further destabilisation). It would be wrong to suggest that the government is not doing anything about it. Several laws and presidential decrees pertaining to SALW proliferation have been adopted, and Georgia also participates in a number of international initiatives. The power ministries themselves have also launched several schemes to collect SALW from the civilian population.

The aforementioned laws include the Law on Firearms, passed in 1994, which allows citizens to possess short-barrel arms, which they may keep, but not carry. It is the government's responsibility to control arms production, sales and movement, including the export, import and transit by issuing licenses. However, this law seems outdated. A new bill, containing some amendments, proposes that some categories of retired officers should be allowed to carry arms, and provides clearer definitions of the different categories of arms and how they should be stored and transported.

If parliament adopts the bill on private security companies and private detectives, it may have a positive effect in bringing a degree of order to small arms distribution. Such a law could eradicate the corrupt practice of registering private security officers as policemen so that they can carry arms, without clearly defining what powers they have in comparison to MOI officers. The law could also provide people who wish to hire a guard with a more transparent range of options. Without such a law, arms purchased by private security firms for their employees cannot be registered as such, increasing the confusion over possession and responsibility for weapons. However, opponents of the bill argue that without adequate domestic gun control mechanisms and a culture of respect for the law, this act will only help to legitimise criminal groups.

In 1998, Georgia approved a special law governing the production and export of arms, military equipment and dual-use goods, specifying the powers and responsibilities of the state structures. There are also certain regulations concerning transit and re-export. The law names the Permanent Inter-agency Commission on Military-Technical Issues at the National Security Council of the President as the special institution charged with these matters. This body submits recommendations to the President as to whether certain items should not be exported, and whether the production of certain items should be licensed. The President grants permission for export, transit and re-export, and also approves the list of items and services that are subject to control. It is parliament's job to supply the commission with a list of states to which Georgia should restrict its exports. The law does not make compliance with this list obligatory. The final list of such countries is adopted by the President. The law specifies the responsibilities of commercial companies involved in export or transit (a contract and a certificate signed by the importer stating that the goods will not be transferred to third countries without Georgia's consent are required).

The Inter-Agency Commission is chaired by the Minister of State and was established some time ago. A presidential decree of 15 October 1997 invested the commission with responsibility to co-ordinate the use of scientific and industrial potential for the sake of national security. The Defence Minister is Deputy Chair of the commission; many other ministers, including power ministers, are members, as is the Chair of the Parliamentary Committee for Defence and Security. It is worth noting that Georgia has the post of Chief Engineer for Arms, Materials and Equipment, who is also a member of the commission. The secretary of the commission is an officer of the National Security Council (head of the Defence Industry Department of the Council's staff). The commission passes particularly important issues on to the National Security Council for consideration.

Therefore, the commission is a mixed civilian-military body with consultative powers, whose decisions are taken by consensus. The licensing agent is the Ministry of Justice,

which performs these duties in conformity with the Resolution on Licensing of Export and Import of Military Production, Technical Documentation, Works and Services. Again, the law and the resolution, which contain detailed rules of military-technical co-operation with foreign countries, give the President the decisive role.

These legal acts create a basis by which the legal authorities can gain the upper hand in matters of SALW proliferation. Yet at the same time, many issues are still left to the subjective decision of the President and his advisors, including military advisors.

One provision of the commission's statute specifies that it is the Foreign Ministry's role to observe the implementation of Georgia's international commitments in this sphere. International commitments have played a significant part in curtailing the export of arms to third countries, which was so typical in the early 1990s because of collaboration between corrupt GRVZ and Georgian officials.

Georgia's obligations to the United States prevented it from striking a deal with Iran to supply Su-25 attack aircraft manufactured by *Tbilaviazavod*. Georgia has joined the 1980 UN Convention banning or limiting the use of certain conventional weapons. Since 1996 Georgia, like many other countries, has declared a moratorium on the use, stockpiling, production and export of landmines. These developments may have a positive impact on attempts to curtail SALW proliferation. At the Washington NATO summit in April 1999, the GUUAM countries (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova) issued a statement announcing their readiness for international co-operation to prevent arms supplies to conflict zones and to curb illicit arms trafficking.

It is important to note that the United States has since at least 1997 been providing technical assistance to the Customs Department in Georgia and to the Frontier Guard in tightening border controls. The programme, which includes seminars on the control of arms proliferation and on the security of SALW storage facilities, is also attended by MOI officials.

As for SALW collection, the power ministries have been concerned about this issue since the early 1990s. In 1992, and again in 1994–5, attempts were made to organise the voluntary surrender of arms in the hands of civilians and unofficial paramilitary groups. The process involved the MOI, the MSS and also members of parliament. However, it did not yield significant results. Operations by the law-enforcement agencies aimed at seizing arms were more effective, and have intensified since then. A programme for the voluntary surrender of arms, which frees the owner from criminal liability unless the weapons are implicated in a specific crime, is still in operation, as are forced seizures. The MOI reports a high rate of seizure in Mingrelia.

According to the MOI, 1,500 firearms for close combat and 45 anti-aircraft and artillery systems on the official register of missing weapons have been found by the law-enforcement agencies or handed in voluntarily. In the last three years, the MOI seized or collected more than 700 automatic rifles, about 750 pistols and 900 rifles. The press has frequently reported stories of grenades and missiles being recovered.

Recently, the OSCE has also been involved in the process. In the area of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, peace-keepers and law-enforcement agencies funded by the European Union, Norway and the United Kingdom have been carrying out a voluntary SALW collection program. By early 2002, 205 kg of explosives and 1,270 arms had been collected from Georgian and Ossetian villages. Money from Western donors is used to equip the centre for co-ordinating Georgian and Ossetian law-enforcement agencies, and to create material incentives for the population to comply. The money is not paid directly to the owner in exchange for his weapon. Rather, the OSCE strives to promote collective efforts, and suggests that communities exchange their arms in return for financial support for community development projects.

These civilian initiatives are largely symbolic, since there are plenty of arms available to the population illegally. The MOI operations are also important, but insufficient.

Many people who have no legal or moral right to use weapons are able to get access to them and do so quite openly. As has been demonstrated above, much remains to be done to reduce the quantity of illegal SALW and, more importantly, to eliminate political and criminal incentives for their proliferation by improving the situation in the power ministries.

Conclusions and recommendations

Georgia provides a good example of the range of humanitarian and security problems caused by insufficient control over SALW in the country. It also indicates that when the problem is unresolved in one country, it inevitably has an impact across the region and sometimes even beyond the region. In the case of Georgia, the influence is two-fold: weak control and proliferation of SALW is a result of wider, regional instability, but problems in Georgia undermine attempts to resolve these issues, and may enable illicit trafficking in the region to continue. Another feature of the SALW problem in Georgia is the amalgamation of SALW issues with the problem of organised crime and corruption. There is an inter-relationship between SALW proliferation and such serious crimes as drug trafficking, kidnapping and racketeering.

Finally, the SALW issue becomes highly relevant in a society torn by domestic political conflicts, which the state machine has been unable to resolve by peaceful political methods. As a result, the parties begin to prefer the use of force and rely not only on legal military and enforcement structures, but also on alternative, parastate institutions and practices. This relates not only to rebels rejecting a state order that may be weak and ineffective, yet is still more or less legitimate, but also to state officials, who may resort to illegal methods in order to overcome the constraints of national and international law.

In Georgia there is also the matter of unresolved inter-ethnic disputes, which often develop into armed clashes, and remain volatile. Neither Georgian politicians nor the general public have yet reached a broad consensus on the territorial organisation of the state. Furthermore, when a dispute arises in Georgia, violence is still seen as the best way to resolve the argument. The balance of power in the country is such that it is impossible to completely defeat one's opponent, regardless of the internal or external support they can muster. Under these circumstances, the SALW problem seems to be a result of the Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-Ossetian ethnic and political conflicts. It is also due to the lack of trust between political circles in Tbilisi, on the one hand, and Batumi and Akhalkalaki on the other, with their competing visions for Georgia's future.

Unresolved political problems – whose roots lie in the socio-economic, social and cultural peculiarities of Georgian society – include the monopolistic grip on power and the profitable sectors of the economy by certain interest groups, the weakness of civil society, and the lack of respect for the rule of law at all levels of society. The economy and politics are highly personalized: family relations and friendly clans of influential people (based on links that emerged among the *apparatchiks* of the late Soviet period) have become a crucial factor for ensuring welfare and social security. Reasonably progressive, democratic legislation, proclaiming equal opportunities for all and the superiority of individual freedoms, has not yet been properly put into practice. The situation in the provinces, where the influence of independent media and NGOs is minimal, is particularly miserable.

The most dangerous phenomenon is the domination of clans and corporate interests in power and law-enforcement agencies. As mentioned above, until recently the power ministries strongly defended their private and corporate financial and political interests, sometimes in violation of the law. It is too soon after the appointments of new heads of the MOI, the MSS and the Prosecutor General's Office to be certain of

any positive changes in these structures. Considering the weakness of civil democratic control in this fundamental area, it would come as no surprise if one day the arsenals of the power ministries, including SALW, were turned against citizens and the national interests of a country that has declared its commitment to democracy.

In a country where normal life depends on having influential patrons whose activities are not always legal, where the state cannot ensure adequate living standards for its citizens, including government officials, and where taxes are paid only by the under-privileged, every individual pursues and protects his interests as much as he can by himself. The unresolved ethnic problems encourage different ethnic groups to come together to form inter-ethnic alliances for self-protection, and allows the 'war economy' that so benefits criminals to continue. The only factors that act as a constraint on the illegal trafficking and use of SALW are time and money. Paraphrasing Chekhov, one may say that the existence of reasons for conflict leads to the existence of guns, and sooner or later these guns will be fired.

The availability of uncontrolled SALW in society has its own dynamics and becomes an important factor in itself. Traders in the war economy, who distribute arms and profit from the continuation of war, become an independent variable in this complex equation, which can explain but not justify SALW proliferation. The SALW in the hands of the population, especially those of criminal groups, requires an immediate and adequate response from the authorities. But without a comprehensive approach, without addressing political, social and economic issues, the success of such a war against illicit arms trafficking will be quite limited. The same relates to arms collection programmes. Overt criminality can be beaten only by combating barely noticed corrupt practices in the state structures, by eliminating the dominance of corporate interests over national interests, and by resolving urgent political and social problems.

Yet the history of SALW in Georgia suggests that even without a permanent solution, there is hope that the problem can be eased. Arms proliferation is largely confined to conflict zones and areas that are not under full central state control, and even in these areas not everyone possesses weapons. Weapons are possessed primarily by influential people, paramilitary groups and criminal organisations, and these make up only a small proportion of the population. If the problem of weak state power can be solved (by endowing the government with greater legitimacy by diminishing corruption, sacking unpopular figures and implementing socially-oriented programmes), if order can be established within the power ministries, and if even tentative settlements are reached in the conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, then the problem of uncontrolled arms is unlikely to remain so potent. Except in the conflict zones and in certain enclaves (the Pankisi Gorge and Svaneti), SALW are used only occasionally as a last resort to resolve disputes, and are used mainly in completely criminal circles. Organised crime does not reach the level of national drug syndicates, for example. Rather, it is mostly a matter of distinct groups with patrons in political circles and the power ministries. Although this is dangerous, Georgia has not yet become a classic mafia-governed failed state. Political will may be crucial in ensuring success by improving the social, political and economic environment. Only then will specific measures for SALW control be effective.

The following specific measures are necessary:

- Conduct special research on the amount of SALW possessed by legal state structures and set up an inter-agency databank.
- Analyse the trends and estimate the quantity of illegal arms in the country.
- Improve the implementation of legal norms concerning arms export, import and re-export controls, and make the licensing process more transparent.
- Make it easier for the power ministries to obtain weapons and ammunition legally (eg cut taxes and/or customs duties on legal SALW imports for the power ministries, in order to encourage them to avoid smuggling and illegal deals with the GRVZ).

- Solve the issue of the withdrawal of the Russian military units deployed in Georgia, and ensure effective control of their SALW with the help of international organizations.
- Launch a national programme encouraging people to surrender their SALW voluntarily.
- Set up public councils within the power ministries, which include NGOs and enjoy the right to monitor both spending and the human rights situation. (Such councils are unlikely to obtain the right to control weapons, since specific data on the amount of SALW is classified. However, they may monitor the situation on the premises of the Armed Forces and, thus, make it less likely that SALW are removed from military stockpiles or that SALW control regulations are violated).
- Devise a state programme on the control of explosives and related materials. Household chemical goods are a dangerous potential source for such weapons (according to the MSS, some criminals have recently stolen 35,000 detonators from a civilian institution in Chiatura which may be used for home-made explosives).

About the author

David Darchiashvili graduated from the History Department of Tbilisi State University in 1987. In 1991, he completed his doctoral thesis on Russian policy in South Caucasus in the nineteenth century. His work has since focused on issues of national security. He is now Director of the Centre for Civil-Military Relations and Security Studies at the Caucasian Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, Head of the Research Department of the Parliament of Georgia, and a lecturer on national security in the International Relations Department of Tbilisi State University. In 1997 he was a research fellow at the Center for International Security and Arms Control at Stanford University, and in 2001 he graduated from the executive programme on security studies at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies. David has published a number of books and articles on security issues in Georgia, and frequently participates in international research projects, seminars and conferences.

Saferworld's research project on arms and security in the Caucasus

This chapter is part of a wider Saferworld report, entitled *The Caucasus: Armed and Divided – Small arms and light weapons proliferation and humanitarian consequences in the Caucasus*, which collects together case studies from local experts on the situation in their particular geographical region. The report focuses on the conflicts in the region, the relationship between conflict and levels of arms possession, and the effects of small arms proliferation since the break-up of the Soviet Union. It also includes a chapter on Russia's policy towards the small arms issues in the Caucasus.

To obtain a copy of the complete report, please contact Saferworld at: general@saferworld.org.uk or visit www.saferworld.org.uk