

# Papua New Guinea: Small Numbers, Big Fuss, Real Results

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In:

## Inconspicuous Disarmament: The Politics of Destroying Surplus Small Arms and Ammunition

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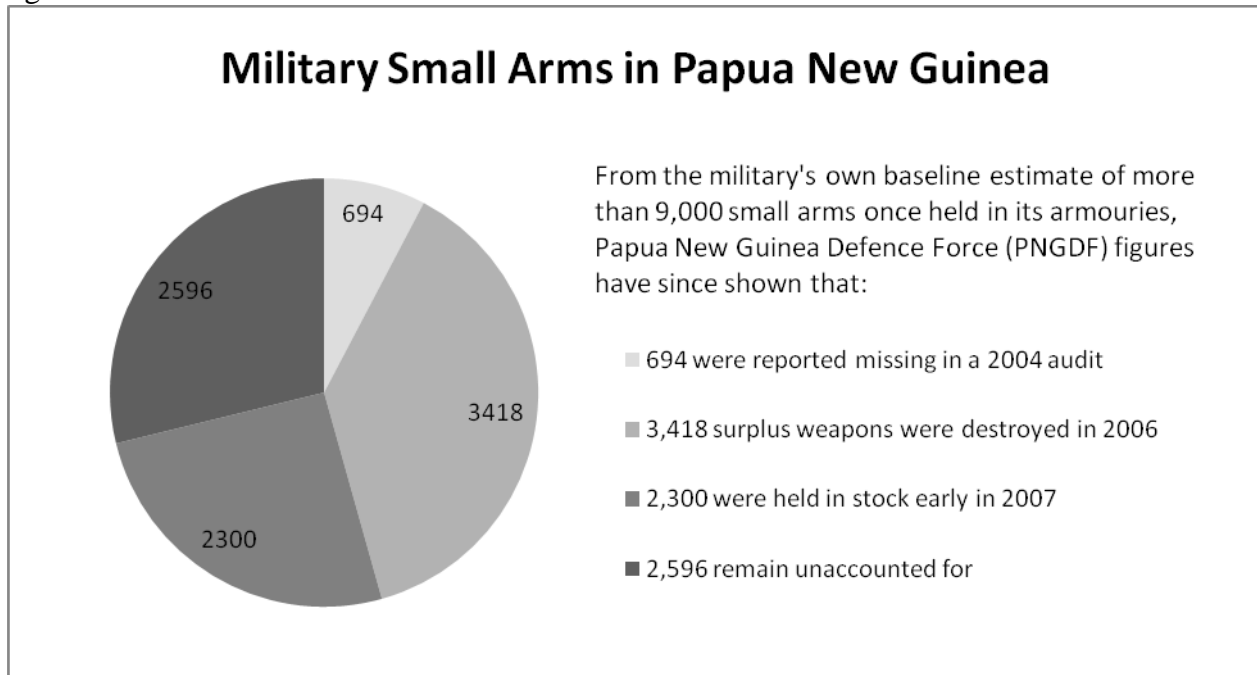
## Introduction

In a small island country where small numbers count, even a few illicit weapons can wreak havoc. Faced with large-scale leakage of firearms and ammunition from state armouries, followed by a dramatic increase in gun violence and social disruption, Papua New Guinea (PNG) destroyed more than a third of its remaining military small arms.

Although the number of weapons was comparatively small, the proportion of PNG's military arsenal destroyed was exceptionally high. The low absolute number of firearms was counterbalanced by high rates of leakage to illicit possession, local traditions of violence that small arms serve to exacerbate, and the willingness of their owners to kill. On the world scale, this disposal of surplus military small arms by the largest developing nation in the Pacific was low in volume, but markedly successful in both implementation and effect.

Disposal of small arms was made possible by four context-specific factors. While several *catalytic events* mobilised support for secure storage of military small arms, weapon destruction also meshed with a simultaneous, much broader drive to *rationalise and rebuild a defence force* flushed with inefficiencies, low performance and low morale. *Key individuals* acted as persistent agents of change during a remarkably stable five-year period of command. Importantly, a closely engaged *foreign donor government* was on the scene at all times. Without the confluence of all four factors, the chances of success could have been greatly diminished.

Figure I



### From Colonial Control to Lack of Control

Papua New Guinea, which shares the world's second-largest island with Indonesia, was administered by Australia from the early 1900s until independence in 1975. With a population of over 5 million, this country of 836 indigenous languages employs less than 10 per cent of its population in the formal sector. Of 12 Pacific nations, Papua New Guinea has the lowest human development index and the highest human poverty index.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, concern for the future of PNG has focused on the degeneration of law, justice, and the legitimacy of the state. The rapid proliferation of illicit small arms, their revolutionary role in crime, tribal disputes, resource allocation and political conflict, and the disruptive effect of illicit firearms on the delivery of essential services now rank among the country's most acute problems. Largely as a consequence of the ready availability of small arms, Papua New Guinea is widely identified as the tinderbox of the south-west Pacific.

In the mid-1970s, Australia established and trained the fledgling nation's security forces and equipped them with small arms. Most were manufactured in Australia, the United States and Belgium. Following independence, the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) and the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary (RPNGC) imported their own small arms and ammunition from the United States, South Korea, Singapore, and Great Britain.

For several years after independence, and with the continuing close involvement of in-country Australian military personnel, PNGDF armouries and magazines remained relatively secure. But as policies designed to develop national identity encouraged former colonial powers and their citizens to depart, military small arms and ammunition became casualties of casual documentation. Military service was increasingly treated as a sinecure for the well-connected, and professional standards declined accordingly. A decade after independence, the PNGDF was seen by some as just another civil service honey pot to be raided.

By the late 1980s, small but significant numbers of small arms and ammunition were leaking from state-controlled armouries to tribal fighters, criminals and politicians. Demand for illicit weapons was highest in the five mainland Highlands provinces, home to more than 2 million, or 40 per cent of the country's population. Here, firearms meshed seamlessly with long-standing traditions of inter-group conflict, the seizure of advantage and assets from others by intimidation and force, claims for compensation, and customary systems of reciprocity.

### **Tribal Fighting Transformed**

In 1987 came the first reports of firearm-related deaths in Highlands tribal fighting. For several years the supply of firearms and ammunition remained intermittent, relying on small-scale pilfering or purchase from lawfully held state or civilian stockpiles. Then immediately following the 1992 national election, newly installed Members of Parliament began to deliver batches of state-owned small arms and ammunition to their constituents. As rival clans and tribes felt compelled to seek equal firepower, an arms race quickly followed.<sup>2</sup>

In 1996, one provincial hospital surgeon wrote in a medical journal: 'Up to 1992, only bows and arrows were used for shooting in tribal warfare... The introduction of guns in tribal fights in 1993 has led to a very high mortality.' As a proportion of injuries inflicted in tribal fights, gunshot wounds had risen from zero to 32% in only two years.<sup>3</sup> By shifting from blades, spears, bows and arrows to assault rifles, clan fighters and criminals had abruptly amplified the lethality of conflict and crime.

Particularly in the PNG Highlands, the long-term failure of government, law enforcement and justice systems to monitor and mediate disagreements also helped position armed violence as a widely accepted arbiter of interpersonal disputes, political dominance and resource allocation. As in few other places, clans now accord extraordinarily high importance to each and every high-powered firearm which can be brought to bear on a current or future problem.<sup>4</sup>

### **Low Numbers, High Intent**

By simple comparison with the quantities of loose small arms discussed in other chapters, the level of gun ownership in PNG could appear quaint. Between them, the half million residents of Southern Highlands Province—arguably the most problematic rural area for gun violence—own perhaps 2,450 factory-made firearms. Of these, 500–1,000 are likely to be high-powered weapons, mainly assault rifles taken from military and police armouries.<sup>5</sup> But these basic sums fail to reveal a crucial difference: intent.

While Southern Highlanders own 30–50 times fewer factory-made firearms per capita than nearby Australians or New Zealanders, their high-powered weapons are obtained almost exclusively for use against humans. As a result, an illicit, factory-made firearm in the Southern Highlands is two to five times more likely to be used in homicide than a similar gun in the world's highest-risk countries, namely Ecuador, Jamaica, Colombia, and South Africa.<sup>6</sup> It is perhaps the intensity of their misuse of each firearm, rather than the raw number of guns available, that is the Highlanders' point of difference.

Traditional Highlands tribal fighting, practised for aeons with far less likelihood of fatal outcomes, has been radically transformed by leaked military firearms. Professional shooters now ply for trade as mercenary 'hiremen,' bringing assault rifles to bear on enemies of their employers. Individual battle guns are often given a tribal name, signifying their importance to the survival of the clan.

Battle tactics include close protection of key marksmen, as much to retrieve the gun as to save the gunman. The value placed on a single high-powered firearm can push its black market price several times higher than it would fetch in a neighbouring country. And criminals, the bottom rung to whom market forces dictate that illicit firearms almost invariably descend, have become more willing to pay for, and to use military weapons.<sup>7</sup> In the Highlands, very few assault rifles are carried by bored foot soldiers unskilled at killing.

### **Even Small Numbers of Small Arms Affect Small Nations**

In PNG, as in the neighbouring Solomon Islands, and to some extent Fiji, even small numbers of illicit small arms, used disproportionately in gun violence and political disruption, can contribute markedly to social disadvantage. Vendors and buyers are kept away from markets, children from schools, and patients from health care. Development agencies, health workers, and public servants flee high-risk areas. Armed tribal fighters, criminals, and police commit human rights atrocities, for which they are rarely held accountable.

More organized conflict has also played its part. In the PNG island province of Bougainville, a nine-year war of secession (1988–97) was fuelled by as many as 1,000 small arms stolen or otherwise diverted from state sources to private possession. A substantial stockpile of illicit small arms had been created. As so often occurs, when the immediate needs of war finally faded, new buyers would seek these out. In 2001, the Bougainville peace process successfully linked disarmament and weapon disposal to aspirations for political autonomy and independence.<sup>8</sup> As hostilities subsided, many of the island's illicit weapons followed market forces to the mainland Highlands, where tribal fighting has created the highest sustained demand and prices for military-style small arms in the Pacific.<sup>9</sup>

This emerged as a recognisable pattern, and brought its own solution. Across the region, armed violence in Bougainville, mainland PNG, the Solomon Islands, East Timor—and to a lesser degree Fiji and Vanuatu—generated a common approach to curbing the proliferation of small arms. In areas of conflict, nothing is now accorded more urgency than the drive to collect and destroy firearms and ammunition. In the Pacific, there is broad consensus among governments, donor agencies, and civil society that disarmament and the security or destruction of small arms are essential prerequisites for human security, future development, good health and prosperity. And largely as a consequence of the ready availability of 'leaked' state-owned small arms, Papua New Guinea is now widely identified as the tinderbox of the south-west Pacific, a potential battle space in which the problem has become compelling.

### **Leakage from Military Armouries**

A key finding in recent research is that very few commercially made, high-powered firearms have been smuggled into the Pacific from foreign countries. Particularly in PNG, the majority of illicit small arms and ammunition were stolen from lawfully held, but insecure state and civilian stocks.<sup>10</sup> Lamenting 'non-enforcement of weapon accountability' in the PNG military and 'booming black marketing of PNGDF weapons,' a 1994 Defence Intelligence Minute found that: 'It is easier for criminals to acquire service weapons from the Defence Force than to smuggle them in from overseas'.<sup>11</sup>

In recent years, and by common consent, the most destructive firearms used in crime and conflict in PNG continue to be guns sourced locally, from police and military stocks.<sup>12</sup>

The most common PNGDF small arms diverted to illicit possession were the Australian-made self-loading rifle<sup>13</sup>, closely followed by M16s from the United States, and Browning Hi-Power pistols from Belgium. Hundreds of machine guns, sub-machine guns, mortars, grenade launchers, shotguns, rifles and other pistols are also known to have gone missing, often stolen by soldiers.<sup>14</sup>

In August 2004 an internal audit was conducted by PNGDF staff, assisted by Australian Defence Force (ADF) logistics advisers. The officer responsible for the project, Col. Joe Fabila recalls: 'To begin with, we had about 9,000 small arms on record. Almost all of them are firearms. The early figures could be incomplete, so that figure may have actually been as high as 10,000.' Col. Fabila's audit found that 1,501 (16 per cent) of military small arms of all types were then unaccounted for. An October 2004 revision of this audit concluded that 694 PNGDF firearms were currently 'reported missing'.<sup>15</sup>

Of the 5,463 SLRs delivered by the Australian government to PNG in the early 1970s, the 2004 audits found that 979 (18 per cent) remained in state armouries. Of the 2,300 to 2,400 M16s<sup>16</sup> delivered to the PNGDF in the 1980s and 1990s, 1,034 (43 to 45 per cent) were still in the possession of the defence force.<sup>17</sup> Although much of this 74% stock attrition is due to gradual damage and internal disposal, it is also acknowledged that of approximately 6,000 PNGDF assault rifles of all types which by 2004 were no longer on the books, a large proportion had been lost to theft.<sup>18</sup>

Opportunistic, weapon-by-weapon pilfering accounts for most losses, but there have also been large-scale thefts. Many hundreds of PNGDF small arms were captured by, or otherwise diverted to rebels in the Bougainville conflict. At home, disaffected soldiers raided their own armouries on several occasions. Thefts of PNGDF small arms which made it into the news range from a single assault rifle stolen, to a minimum of 128 firearms lost in a single army insurrection (see box). Missing defence force weapons frequently surface in armed crime, often in the hands of serving or former PNGDF personnel.<sup>19</sup>

### **Tradition Encourages 'Sharing' of State-owned Weapons**

In the years before government storage facilities were improved (see box), much of PNG's high rate of weapon loss can be attributed to ramshackle buildings and lax record-keeping. But according to both procurers and users of illicit small arms, leakage from military, police and other state-owned armouries was also facilitated by cultural attitudes, notably the *wantok* tradition of reciprocity. In Melanesian Pidgin, *wantok* (one talk) 'literally means someone who speaks the same language. In popular usage it refers to the relations of obligation binding relatives, members of the same clan or tribe, as well as looser forms of association'.<sup>20</sup> In rural areas in particular, obligations to *wantoks* are at the core of an enduring, robust gift economy that links reciprocity, socio-economic obligation, status, and prestige often just as acceptably within criminal activity as in legitimate commerce.<sup>21</sup> In contemporary community interviews, the *wantok* system remains an ever-present obligation to obtain and share available means of influence—including firearms. In a community positioning for advantage, threat, or conflict, it is commonly taken for granted that a member of the wider family, clan, or tribe with access to guns or ammunition—for example politicians, military, police and corrections personnel—should feel an obligation to share these with *wantoks*.<sup>22</sup>

In the span of only three five-year election cycles, these cultural factors, along with insecure armouries and sizeable imports of military- and police-issue small arms and ammunition, either gifted by or purchased from foreign powers, have combined to provide PNG—and the Highlands in particular—with sufficient guns to dramatically alter a traditionally combative, but previously less lethal, social landscape.

### **Box 1: The Moem Barracks ‘Mutiny’**

In March 2002, with national elections looming and demand for firearms soaring in the Highlands, 11 men, including several civilians in military uniform, entered Moem Barracks at Wewak, East Sepik. Under the guise of a rebellion over PNGDF retrenchment plans, the former soldiers merged with 70 active defence force personnel, broke into the armoury, held seven officers hostage, burned down two buildings and took over the barracks. In the two-week siege which ensued, renegade soldiers, fully armed and clad in battle gear and camouflage paint, caused panic when they mounted a machine gun on a vehicle and drove through Wewak town.<sup>23</sup>

But behind the theatre, the real business was gunrunning. The self-styled ‘mutineers’ were stealing to order for the Southern Highlands elections. As described years later by the PNGDF commander in charge at the time: ‘It was a gun theft – that’s all it was.’<sup>24</sup> Denying unsourced reports of 700 missing weapons, Defence Force chief of staff Captain Tom Ur provided a more credible account, assuring reporters that only 128 small arms had been taken. Away from the barracks, police caught several men selling stolen guns to buyers from the Highlands.<sup>25</sup>

In a surprise raid on the second weekend of the rebellion, the defence force recaptured Moem Barracks. Defence intelligence reports suggested that the burning of the buildings had been a diversion aimed at shifting attention from the armoury.<sup>26</sup> Missing were 96 SLR and M16 assault rifles, plus an unknown number of semi-automatic pistols and hand grenades.<sup>27</sup> Just before Christmas 2002, 24 of the 27 soldiers charged with mutiny were found guilty.<sup>28</sup> Most of the stolen small arms remain at large, and the Moem Barracks affair commonly sits near the top of any list of justifications for secure storage of PNGDF small arms and disposal of surplus weapons.<sup>29</sup>

### **Assistance from Close Neighbours**

All 20 nations of the south-west Pacific, and in particular the 16 member nations of the Pacific Islands Forum, enjoy a ‘good neighbour’ tradition which engenders close cooperation. High on the agenda of the region’s two industrialised donor nations, Australia and New Zealand, is the need to reduce leakage of lawfully owned small arms to illicit use. Australia’s Defence Co-operation Programme (DCP) and the New Zealand Defence Force Mutual Assistance Programme both provide training in small arms use and storage, assistance in refurbishing and securing state armouries, and in weapon and ammunition disposal.

Australia’s bilateral Defence Cooperation Programme is that country’s umbrella delivery mechanism for foreign military aid to a range of countries. As its major source of funds for three decades, the DCP is also the most important external influence on the defence force of Papua New Guinea. Ever-present as a source of cash, expertise and advice to PNG since the nation’s independence in 1975, Australia’s DCP contributed AUD 30.1 million (USD 22.5 million) in military assistance to South Pacific nations in the financial year 2005–06. Of this, AUD 19.2 million (USD 14.4 million), or 64% of Australia’s military aid to the Pacific region, went to the

PNG defence force.<sup>30</sup> Priorities for DCP spending are jointly agreed between the bilateral partners, in this case Australia and PNG.

Australia's motivation in all this goes undisguised. With typical Canberra candour, the published aims of the DCP include:

- Working with allies, regional partners and others to shape the global and regional environment in a way favourable to Australia and the ADF;
- Consolidating acceptance of Australia as an obvious and legitimate participant in deliberations on issues that affect regional security.<sup>31</sup>

From its inception in the 1970s, and while Australia was shipping more than 10,000 small arms to the newly established PNG security forces, the Defence Cooperation Programme is unlikely to have been specifically tasked with the destruction of any eventual surplus.<sup>32</sup> Yet three decades later, when early weapons had become obsolete, and many were clearly leaking to illicit use, the DCP became a ready supporter of the regional drive to secure, audit and dispose of these and other military small arms and ammunition.

### **Box 2: Bolting the Stable Door**

In recent years, leakage of small arms from PNG defence stocks has been dramatically reduced. With Australian funding and assistance under the bilateral Defence Cooperation Programme (DCP) and its Pacific Small Arms Project, seven new PNGDF armouries were constructed at a cost of more than PGK 7 million, or USD 1.8 million.<sup>33</sup> Since the new facilities were handed over in 2002 and 2003, the only acknowledged thefts of PNGDF weapons were in January 2003, when four M16s were taken from an insecure warehouse at Murray Barracks, and in September 2003, when six SLRs (since recovered) were taken from the Murray Barracks armoury.<sup>34</sup>

While the country's military weapon armouries have all been hardened, improvements to the security of PNGDF ammunition magazines have been delayed by such complications as land ownership disputes. Nevertheless, DCP-supported safety and security upgrades are ongoing. The need for continuing improvement was highlighted in 2005 by a theft of 9,560 rounds of military ammunition from the Lombrum Naval Base, where a new magazine has since been built.<sup>35</sup> A published police report of 26,673 rounds taken from Goldie River Barracks in 2006 remains unverified, and this event is disputed by PNGDF.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to facilitating the identification and destruction of surplus small arms and explosives, the DCP's Pacific Small Arms Project has also provided stockpile management, security and logistics training for PNGDF staff, and assisted with its stock-take of all military small arms.<sup>37</sup>

Although hardened storage facilities, tightened inventory protocols and ongoing training for those in charge have greatly lessened the risk of small arms leakage in PNG, the 'human factor' vulnerabilities of any such system remain. As shown in Fiji, the Solomon Islands, on previous occasions in PNG and recently also in Australia, armoury and magazine security can only be as reliable as those who hold the keys. Nevertheless, PNGDF efforts to prevent the loss of military small arms and ammunition far surpass anything achieved by the constabulary. In the same period, little has been done to staunch the much more widespread and ongoing leakage to illicit use of weapons and ammunition under police control.

## Quantifying the Loss

In 2002, a muster of all weapons and ammunition held by the PNGDF was conducted with DCP funding assistance. Joint teams of PNGDF and ADF personnel physically inspected each armoury, weapon and ammunition magazine. As they compiled a central, computerised database at Defence Headquarters, suspicions were confirmed that Standard Operating Procedures for inventory control had been neglected.<sup>38</sup> As previous records were found to be inaccurate and incomplete, best-guess baseline figures were often relied upon to estimate the quantity and type of weapons and ammunition unaccounted for. As the muster proceeded, significant holdings first recorded as missing were found to be still in PNGDF possession, but held in previously undocumented locations. When the small arms component of the PNGDF weapon audit was made public in 2003, it was acknowledged that many, if not most of the missing firearms had been stolen.<sup>39</sup>

Following the muster, all PNGDF Commanding Officers were instructed to provide monthly weapon and ammunition stock-takes to PNGDF headquarters. The PNGDF Supply Company, which carries overall responsibility, began a schedule of cyclic spot checks to be completed by unit commanders. These were to be augmented by periodic physical inspections of unit weapon holdings and accounting documents by Supply Company staff.<sup>40</sup> In its subsequent country report to a UN small arms control conference in New York, PNG reported that in all its military armouries the Duty Officer was now charged with completing a daily stock-take of weapons.<sup>41</sup>

## Shrinking the Stockpile Available for Leakage

In 2003, as a result of the armoury and magazine audits, the DCP funded PNGDF staff and their ADF logistics advisers to destroy nearly 4,000 military small arms and related items. These were mostly unserviceable weapons, ammunition and explosives whose use-by date had passed, the bulk of them imported by a contingent of Sandline mercenaries whose short-lived expedition to PNG in 1997 led to arrest and expulsion. In contrast to the 2006 controversy yet to follow over the destruction of still-serviceable small arms, this earlier disposal of surplus PNGDF *matériel* went unopposed.

The method of disposal was to cut all weapons into unusable parts with an electric metal saw. News media representatives were invited to attend, and both defence and government officials were heartened at the 'good news' angle accorded to the event in national press, radio and television coverage.<sup>42</sup> The cut-up weapon parts were then mixed with wet concrete in 44-gallon steel drums and dropped into a sea trench off Port Moresby. Surplus ammunition and explosives were dumped at the same time, but to ensure maximum corrosion these were loose when thrown overboard.

In its country report to the UN small arms control conference in New York in July 2005, PNG stated that during this entire process, 'Destruction of SALW was the only means' of disposal.<sup>43</sup> Neither the Commander, Defence Force nor his Chief of Staff saw any justification for small arms to be exempted from the disposal process. No surplus weapons or ammunition were exported, sample batches were destroyed rather than being returned to the donor, and no small arms were allowed to pass to museums or to civilian collectors. According to the PNGDF decision makers, there was 'no debate' on this score, and 'no romantic issues' were entertained.<sup>44</sup>



## Rationalising the PNG Defence Force

At the same time that mounting public alarm pushed small arms proliferation and gun violence into the headlines, a much broader initiative was gathering speed. Since the 1980s the PNGDF, along with many of the country's government sectors, had been gradually starved of resources, competent planning and budgeting, and political commitment. A variety of domestic and foreign voices, among them PNG's neighbours in the Pacific Islands Forum, became increasingly concerned at the degeneration and lack of morale evident in the region's largest developing-nation defence force. In Pacific capitals, talk of security sector reform focussed most commonly on Melanesia, with PNG and Fiji in the forefront. These regional concerns also came to be shared in Port Moresby.

In May 1999, according to a foreword signed by then-Prime Minister Bill Skate, the first Defence White Paper to be developed internally by the PNG Defence Council and its advisors since independence in 1975 was 'prepared in response to the Government's concerns about the current state of the Defence Force and the urgent needs that it has for rebuilding and modernisation.' In the PNG government's 'most searching examination of our security and defence needs ever undertaken,' the 1999 Defence White Paper heralded 'a significant reduction in the overall size of our forces but an increase in their combat power and effectiveness'.<sup>45</sup>

Although surplus small arms were not mentioned—let alone their disposal—the White Paper did emphasise themes of efficiency, downsizing and an overall programme of '*Building Up Through Building Down*.' In its sole reference to the topic, the White Paper noted that 'standardisation on a common range of infantry weapons is a pressing requirement'.<sup>46</sup> In hindsight, although it is nowhere suggested in the available documents that rationalisation of the defence force and disposal of small arms were in any way dependent on each another, it does seem that the destruction of surplus weapons was accepted within PNG defence circles—to the point of not commenting on it—to be an organic component of defence reform. Clearly in agreement, foreign sponsors now stepped forward with promised support.

In October 2000, following a meeting at the Sydney Olympics with his Australian counterpart John Howard, the newly elected prime minister of PNG, Sir Mekere Morauta, announced a pledge from Canberra to advise and to fund significant downsizing of the PNGDF.<sup>47</sup> A month later, responding to a related request from Sir Mekere, the Commonwealth Secretariat in London recruited and dispatched an Eminent Person's Group (EPG) of mainly regional representatives to provide outside advice on the reform of the nation's military. The EPG's 2001 *Review of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force* was quickly leaked to the media, where its contents exploded into instant controversy.

Many of the EPG's observations dealt with systemic inefficiency and lack of morale, but those which touched on small arms noted 'indiscipline, drunkenness and theft of arms ... [and] uninvestigated and unexplained losses [of small arms].' It also lamented the low penalty for loss of a weapon—PGK 40, or USD 12.<sup>48</sup> In the surrounding debate, one defence diplomat commented that the PNGDF had 'far too many weapons for the size of its force.'

Again without explicitly mentioning any weapons which might be surplus, the EPG found that the PNGDF 'has in the past been plagued by the whims of Ministers, Secretaries and Commanders. The Defence Force's lack of standardised kit has in the past been a significant burden. Costs of both spares, servicing and training have been unnecessarily high. We recommend that the Government's current freeze on new procurements of equipment be maintained for at least another two years, until the reorganization of the force is complete'.<sup>49</sup>

Six years later in 2007, in the face of continuing budget constraints and a high burden of debt—much of it incurred years earlier in the Bougainville conflict—PNGDF maintenance and procurement spending remained at a low ebb.

By far the most contentious recommendation of the EPG was to slash troop numbers from as many as 4,400 to just 1,900. On 14 March 2001, confirming the report's assessment of their low morale and lack of discipline, a group of about 100 soldiers raided the armoury at Port Moresby's Murray Barracks and equipped themselves with M16 assault rifles and sufficient ammunition for a siege. PNGDF commander Carl Malpo, asked why guards at the armoury had not stopped the break-in, replied: 'What guards? There are no guards here. You just lock the place and go home. What break-in? There was no break-in. The soldiers just walked in.'<sup>50</sup>

After barricading themselves into their quarters and demanding that the reforms be abandoned, the mutinous troops not only forced the prime minister to back down on staff cuts, but received an amnesty for their actions. Five days after the Murray Barracks rebellion began, the National Executive Council of cabinet confirmed the PM's decision not to implement the recommendations of the Commonwealth Eminent Person's Group report.<sup>51</sup>

### **Retrenchment Gains a Home Grown Champion**

Despite this initial setback, three months later in June 2001, the Defence Force Council approved its own restructuring plan. The Commonwealth EPG report had raised a nationalistic spectre of foreign (Australian, New Zealand and British) influence in PNG's defence policy, along with heated comment and headlines. Forced into a defensive position by journalists briefed by his critics, then-PNGDF Chief of Staff Peter Ilau assured reporters that 'there was no foreign input or influence in this home-grown option'.<sup>52</sup>

Four months later in October 2001, Naval Captain Peter Ilau, by now consistently portrayed as being the man most responsible for implementing the 'home grown' PNGDF restructuring, was elevated first to the Army rank of Brigadier-General for procedural reasons, simultaneously received the equivalent Navy epaulettes of Commodore, and was appointed by the National Executive Council as Commander, PNG Defence Force.<sup>53</sup>

Commodore Ilau remembers that his most significant and immediate task was to implement the PNGDF reform programme as outlined in the 1999 Defence White Paper, as approved and signed by his predecessor, Maj.-Gen. Jerry Singirok.<sup>54</sup> Canberra, poised and waiting for this moment, promptly 'refocused' its DCP funding program to assist.<sup>55</sup>

In March 2002, Commodore Ilau recalls that the Moem Barracks 'mutiny' and large-scale gun theft (see Box 1) had 'strengthened my command, and my case' for weapon security and surplus small arms disposal.<sup>56</sup> By this time he was telling reporters that the four 'next step' models proposed for PNGDF rationalisation in the 1999 White Paper were 'not in the conceptual stages anymore,' that all were being refined and implemented concurrently. These were:

- The Status Quo model, which argued that given the PNGDF's budgetary constraints, costs involved in feeding, clothing, exercising and deploying the force must be compared with the budgetary allocations.
- The Building Up through Building Down Model, which reduces military personnel by attrition. Here, soldiers 'left out of battle' and those medically unfit for service were to be

retrenched. This model illustrates what can be achieved at current expenditure levels by way of a fully trained, maintained and effective force.

- Reducing Manpower Levels Through a New Force Structure, to be provided for in revised national legislation.
- Commercialisation of Non-core Assets of the defence force through a commercial support program, for example outsourcing catering, cleaning and some maintenance.<sup>57</sup>

### **Regional Interests and the Determined Persuasion of Neighbours**

Like all senior PNGDF personnel, Commodore Ilau spent his career developing close ties with allied Pacific Rim defence forces. Frequent foreign visits, secondments, lengthy periods of military training and high-level briefings allow all PNGDF commanders to absorb regional strategic interests, priorities and defence doctrine, primarily those of Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and the United States. As his vision of a much leaner, more efficient, better-budgeted and ‘clever’ PNG Defence Force was publicly articulated, Commodore Ilau echoed years of policy advice from Pacific neighbours.<sup>58</sup> His 2005 Vision and Mission Statement promised a ‘Young, Professional and Affordable... Clever Force’ to be achieved by ‘Building Down followed immediately by Building Up’.<sup>59</sup> Among the new commander’s aims was a strong preference for the PNGDF to dispose of all its surplus small arms and ammunition.

PNG’s loyalty to regional defence interests is not merely that of a natural ally. In the financial years 2000–01 to 2005–06, Australia’s Defence Cooperation Programme delivered AUD 100.37 million (USD 64.6 million) in military aid to the PNGDF, including the cost of in-country ADF advisers.<sup>60</sup> Of this, AUD 38 million (USD 24.5 million) was a direct grant from the Australian federal government to fund PNG defence reform, mainly by reducing the PNGDF payroll to ‘no more than 2,000 personnel’.<sup>61</sup> Essentially, this sequestered amount financed the staff retrenchment program recommended in the 2001 review of the Commonwealth EPG. Administered under the direct political control of the PNG Department of Defence by an independent accounting firm in Port Moresby, the retrenchment fund calculated and paid final entitlements to 1,300 redundant defence staff.<sup>62</sup> Separately, the Government of PNG took responsibility for future superannuation payments to retired personnel.

In little over 5 years, the PNG military establishment had been reduced from well over 4,000 staff: first down to 3,300 by the time Australian support commenced, and then down again to just under 2,300 personnel by early 2006.<sup>63</sup> In May of that year, Commodore Ilau announced that the programmed troop retrenchment—a 42% reduction in defence force personnel—was almost complete.<sup>64</sup> Although yet to be officially enabled by revised legislation awaiting enactment since 2005,<sup>65</sup> restructuring of the PNGDF and the comprehensive reorganization of its remaining resources was well under way.

At around the same time, a much less-publicised funding decision was arrived at by the bilateral DCP. In what amounted to a small-change addition to a large, existing military downsizing and reform programme, Canberra agreed to contribute AUD 49,708 (USD 38,784) to facilitate the disposal of surplus PNGDF small arms and ammunition.<sup>66</sup> Just a few months later it became apparent that, second only to shedding staff, the most fiercely debated and publicised component of the PNGDF overhaul would be this Australian-funded destruction of PNG military *matériel*.

## **A Collection of Unconnected Small Arms**

The key PNG defence publication ‘Foundations of Papua New Guinea Military Doctrine’ states: ‘It is unlikely that future major operational deployments by the PNGDF will be unilateral in nature, but rather a part of a coalition or major UN peace support operation.’ Accordingly, the principle of interoperability is central to the nation’s military doctrine, as are ‘niche warfighting’ and the ability to ‘fight smart’ to compensate for the small size of its military.<sup>67</sup> Running through this published doctrine is a strong theme of downsizing; stripping the PNGDF of any impediments to efficiency and low-cost operation.

PNGDF personnel receive advanced training in Australia, New Zealand and Fiji, and are expected to mesh smoothly into regional operations as members of a multinational unit. In pursuit of force doctrine, weapon systems—indeed all systems—must reflect this, with procurement and retention decisions aimed at minimising incompatibilities. Although PNG is not specifically bound by the ABCA (America, Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand) Armies Quadripartite Standardization Agreements (QSTAGs) for army interoperability, PNGDF military doctrine does require adherence to ABCA standards.<sup>68</sup> Yet by 2005, in addition to standard-issue weapons, PNGDF armouries had also accumulated a mishmash of unrelated, unsupported and obsolete small arms.

Small batches of weapons had been acquired without central planning or approval. While on overseas trips, and perhaps making mention of the 9-year Bougainville crisis with its implied need for the PNGDF to re-equip, several military envoys, some sanctioned by superiors, but others at best quasi-official, made contact with foreign arms dealers. Offers were made and accepted to trial one or more weapon systems on offer.<sup>69</sup>

As a result, PNGDF armouries collected a range of esoteric small arms systems from countries as varied as Israel, Singapore, Austria, France, Germany, Belgium and the United Kingdom. Few, if any of the trial weapons were returned to the suppliers. Many were kept in PNGDF armouries despite a complete lack of maintenance information and tools, training and expertise, replacement parts, or even suitable ammunition. Other weapons were simply redundant, such as rocket-propelled grenade launchers and their projectiles, either purchased for the Bougainville conflict or seized from the Sandline expedition’s mercenary force.

In addition to the ‘odds and ends’ cluttering PNGDF armouries were nearly 1,000 remaining SLRs, manufactured under licence in Australia prior to PNG’s independence three decades earlier. These semi-automatic versions of the 1950s-era FN-FAL assault rifle had been rendered obsolete by M16s received in the 1980s from the US, and were now largely limited to the parade ground. Yet while many remained fully functional, with suitable ammunition readily available on the black market, the SLRs were seen as a liability. Their continuing leakage to illicit possession and violent crime was identified as a threat to national security which outweighed their ceremonial use.

### **Box 3: The Loose Guns of Bougainville**

The nine-year war of secession (1988–97) on the PNG island province of Bougainville was the longest and most devastating conflict to have occurred in the Pacific since World War II. A four-year blockade by the PNG government led to the complete collapse of the health system and contributed significantly to the casualties of war, estimated to include 12–15,000 civilian deaths.<sup>70</sup>

Three years into the Bougainville conflict in 1991, small arms and ammunition imports to PNG hit the highest levels recorded, with declared US exports to PNG of about 1,500 units of the customs category ‘military weapons’. These shipments, which included US-made M16s and machine guns for the PNGDF, along with AR15s for police armouries, were valued at USD 788,259, or PGK 2.4 million. Subsequent imports of 687 additional ‘military weapons’ from the United States in the years 1996–2002 were valued at USD 111,694 (PGK 335,000).<sup>71</sup> According to a separate US State Department report, which largely corroborates the figures above, 1,800 American-made M16 assault rifles, eight carbines, six machine guns, 3,575 ‘non-military’ rifles (which could have included semi-automatic AR15s for police), and 457,120 rounds of small arms ammunition were shipped to PNG from the United States in 1991–92 alone.<sup>72</sup>

In the nine years of the Bougainville rebellion, PNG military, police and prison services lost as many as 1,000 of these and other small arms to rebel forces by capture, theft and other forms of diversion. In also facilitating wartime weapon acquisition by the pro-government Bougainville Resistance Forces (BRF), the PNG government effectively added to the number of small arms available for misuse, both during and after the Bougainville conflict.

In addition to losing small arms in Bougainville, the PNGDF had lost the confidence of ruling politicians. In 1997, judging his military forces to be failing, Prime Minister Julius Chan secretly hired the Sandline organisation to fly in British and South African mercenary troops to crush the rebellion. Amidst public outrage and an internal uprising of senior PNGDF officers, the Sandline mercenaries were detained and deported before they reached the conflict zone. Prime Minister Chan was forced to resign, and military solutions to the conflict were effectively discredited.<sup>73</sup>

**Table 1: PNGDF Small Arms Stocked, Destroyed and Retained, 2004-2006**

Description	Type	Origin	2004 Stock	2006 Destroyed	2007 Retained
AR15	Semi-automatic rifle	USA	5	5	
SLR (L1A1 F1)	Semi-automatic rifle	Australia	979	979	
FAMAS F-1/2+A8	Automatic rifle	France	13	13	
G3	Automatic rifle	Germany	20	20	
H&K 33E/79	Automatic rifle	Germany	13	13	
M16A1	Automatic rifle	USA	1,034		1,034
SA-80 (L85A1)	Automatic rifle	UK	19	19	
SAR-80	Automatic rifle	Singapore	36	36	
SR-88	Automatic rifle	Singapore	86	86	
Galil	Sniper rifle	Israel	2	2	
Lee Enfield	Bolt-action rifle	UK	28	28	
KP-36	Rifle		106	106	
various	Shotguns	Various	320	?	?
Browning L9A1	Pistol	Belgium	184	184	
Gecado	Pistol	Germany	3	3	
M1911 Colt	Pistol	USA	5	5	
SIG Sauer	Pistol	Switzerland	88		88
SS1V1	Pistol	Indonesia	35	35	
F1	Submachine gun	Australia	60	60	
P-90	Submachine gun	Belgium	3	3	
AR (FN L2A1)	Light machine gun	Australia	41	41	
Bren L4A4	Light machine gun	Australia	57	57	
Ultimax-100 Mk2	Light machine gun	Singapore	290	?	?
Russian type	Light machine gun	Russia	10	10	
M-60	Medium machine gun	USA	51		51
MAG-58	Medium machine gun	Belgium	32		32
M2	Heavy machine gun	USA	28		28
M-203	Grenade launcher	USA	80		80
RPG-7	Rocket-propelled grenade launcher	unknown	2	2	
models unknown	Rocket-propelled grenade launcher	Singapore	25	25	
unknown		various	2,045	1,686	987
<b>Totals</b>			<b>5,700</b>	<b>3,418</b>	<b>2,300</b>

*Notes:* The 2004 stock figures are drawn from estimates provided in a series of interviews with two senior PNGDF logistics officers.<sup>74</sup> From these estimates were deducted the number of each weapon system listed as ‘unaccounted for’ in the August, 2004 PNGDF audit published by the Small Arms Survey (Alpers 2004, 2005). When the exact quantity of each weapon system destroyed was unavailable from PNGDF, these two columns contain estimates based on the Stock column.

In the table above, the large number of ‘Unknown’ small arms in the Stockpiles column results from a discrepancy between the total of weapon-by-weapon stock estimates provided by PNGDF logistics officers following the 2004 audit, and the total stock of PNGDF small arms held prior to the destruction programme (5,700) as declared by Commodore Peter Ilau in July, 2006.<sup>75</sup> As numbers were frequently re-assessed between interviews spread over 3 years, the smaller figures in this table should be taken as guidelines.

## Surplus Weapon Disposal Sparks Debate, Opposition

Ever since the Murray Barracks mutiny in 2001, opposition to the government's plan to retire ageing soldiers, then to build a much leaner, 'clever' defence force had simmered, but was publicly voiced only occasionally by two former PNGDF commanders.<sup>76</sup> When a leaked Defence Administrative Instruction finally confirmed plans to destroy thousands of 'surplus' military weapons, this opposition came to the boil, as did political, public and media interest.<sup>77</sup>

In June 2006, a Defence Headquarters directive to PNGDF commanding officers announced that in a move towards standardisation, 3,418 military weapons were slated for immediate destruction. Of the 58 weapon systems identified as being held in PNGDF armouries, only 11 were to be retained. The remaining 47 would be quickly sold, destroyed or otherwise disposed of.<sup>78</sup> From its total defence force inventory of 5,700 weapons, the newly formed PNGDF Weapons Disposal Team was preparing to effect a 60% reduction in the number of military arms held in PNG.<sup>79</sup> The target stock of small arms would be approximately 2,300.<sup>80</sup>

Fanned by the leaked military document, then by news articles and editorial comment in the country's leading newspaper the *Post-Courier*, the sudden announcement that PNGDF 'firepower' was about to be reduced by more than half created instant controversy.<sup>81</sup> An unnamed 'group of senior soldiers' publicly blamed foreign interests for 'disarming the PNGDF.' Accusing the military hierarchy of 'being dictated to by Australian military advisers' inside PNG's defence headquarters, the dissident officers' anonymous letter to a national newspaper claimed the destruction of weapons was 'certain to compromise our national security,' and called the decision an 'evil tactic by the Australian Defence Force to weaken the PNGDF'.<sup>82</sup>

References to 'foreigners in the ranks' were based in truth. Under the provisions of an Enhanced Defence Partnership signed by the defence ministers of both countries in December 2004, four Australian military advisers were imbedded at PNG Defence Headquarters and in the Department of Defence. All lieutenant-colonels in the ADF, the Australians filled senior 'in-line' positions in training, personnel, budget and policy development roles.<sup>83</sup> In addition, as many as 13 lower-ranked military advisers at a time were seconded to the PNGDF from Australia, among them ADF warrant officers whose tasks included the national audit of weapons.<sup>84</sup> Versed in the procurement of military *matériel*, logistics and disposal, these officers advised on the retention, security, documentation, maintenance—and destruction—of military small arms and ammunition.

## National Sovereignty Debate Fanned by Small Arms Disposal

The media-borne controversy quickly flared into a debate over PNG's national sovereignty, self-determination and military strength—all hot-button issues among a population often aggrieved at Australia's influential role in domestic decision-making. With nationalistic sentiments primed and released by their anonymous correspondence with the *Post-Courier*, the dissident military letter-writers continued to lead the opposition voiced in PNG news media. Retired generals Tony Huai and Jerry Singirok, both former commanders of the PNGDF, were often cited only as unnamed 'military insiders.' Yet these two retired officers, representing by their own account significant opposition among serving and former PNGDF personnel, ignited a heated debate among politicians and stakeholders who felt they should have been consulted.<sup>85</sup> Provincial governor Luther Wenge MP, a prominent nationalist, was 'angry the military top brass seemed to have succumbed to foreign advice.' A true nationalist, argued Wenge, would never have allowed Australian military advisers into the country's arsenals.<sup>86</sup>

In August 2006, as the controversy continued amid claims that troops in PNG would no longer have enough rifles even for the parade ground, Australia announced its decision to raise two additional Army infantry battalions, recruiting 2,600 new troops at a cost of AU\$10 billion (US\$7.8 billion). Prime Minister John Howard cited the primary reason for this expansion of defence capability as preparing Australia to 'deal with increasing instability in the Pacific region'.<sup>87</sup> On the day of this announcement, the *Australian Financial Review* observed: 'The ultimate—and thoroughly justifiable—concern behind the Howard government's decision to substantially increase the size of the army is the seemingly perpetual instability in Papua New Guinea'.<sup>88</sup> While encouraging and funding a dramatic reduction in PNGDF military personnel, Canberra had been simultaneously planning to increase its own troop numbers for deployment in the same region.

Calling the Australian decision hypocritical, former defence force commander Maj.-Gen. Jerry Singirok (PNGDF, retd.) told reporters: 'Australia has deliberately reduced our defence force to bare bones, they have successfully destroyed surplus weapons... to safeguard Australian national interests' and: 'There was no proper justification and merit for the weapon disposal... the damage done to date in the Defence Force is irreversible and catastrophic'.<sup>89</sup>

### **The Military and Political Rationale for Disposal**

In defence of Defence, Commodore Ilau described the rationalisation and destruction programme as being 'designed to dispose of unserviceable, trial, obsolete and surplus weapons that did not support the operational effectiveness of the PNGDF'.<sup>90</sup> Ilau denied any sinister motive behind the move, citing the need to comply with international agreements,<sup>91</sup> to stem the proliferation of small arms in the Pacific, to support the gun control recommendations of a 2005 PNG Guns Summit,<sup>92</sup> and to 'keep the weapons out of reach of troublemakers who could disrupt... general elections.'

In addition to reducing the risk of weapons and ammunition leaking out to illicit use and violent crime, Commodore Ilau told reporters that the PNGDF committee identified compelling internal reasons for the disposal of surplus small arms. He said the defence force lacked trained personnel to service anything but a limited range of core weapon systems, and that soldiers' lives had already been put at risk by using weapons which were incorrectly maintained. Aside from the obsolete SLRs, said Ilau, most of the weapons identified for destruction had been received as gifts—small trial batches for evaluation and possible arms replacement which were no longer needed. In a July, 2006 press statement he was quoted as saying: 'The weapon rationalisation will increase the operational preparedness of the PNGDF by allowing the logistics staff to concentrate on limited resources to maintain a standardised set of in-service weapons'.<sup>93</sup>

The internal PNGDF recommendation to decommission a selection of weapons and ammunition, said Ilau, 'came from the appropriate committee that is responsible for small arms... as the commander, I endorsed that recommendation'.<sup>94</sup>

This Force Capability Review Committee, a joint PNGDF/ADF group whose initial recommendations were made in 2004, included three ADF officers based in Port Moresby and Canberra. Asked if the PNGDF felt manoeuvred, Commodore Ilau was emphatic that 'There was NO pressure to adopt a particular weapon system. The M16 was cheaper, and we made that decision before Bougainville. The M16 was OK [with everyone], and there was no pressure to adopt the [Australian-made] Steyr.' Describing the process which pared 58 small arms systems down to 11, declaring the remainder to be surplus, Ilau recalls that: 'These decisions began and were made well below our level. It was the in-house advisers who came up with this, not the chief who drove it.'



Operational responsibility for surplus small arms disposal then fell to the PNGDF Weapons Disposal Team. Those who did the work included a senior ammunition technical officer, a quartermaster, an armourer and an intelligence officer, along with an ADF warrant officer.

#### **Box 4: Australia's Sensitive Role**

As the largest aid donor to island nations in the Pacific, Australia promotes the safe storage and security of weapons across the region. For several years, through its bilateral Defence Cooperation Programme, the ADF joined other regional voices in encouraging the PNGDF to rationalise and secure its stocks of military weapons. When the decision to dispose of surplus small arms was approved by the PNG Defence Council, ADF logistics advisors seconded to Port Moresby provided technical advice, specialist equipment and tools, and helped destroy unsafe ammunition stocks. In 2006–07, at the request of the Commander, PNGDF, Australia supported the PNGDF Support Command's weapon standardisation program at a cost of AUD 49,708 (USD 38,784).<sup>95</sup>

Without a doubt, Australian advisers and ADF personnel in line positions at PNGDF HQ were both helpful and influential in the surplus small arms disposal process—as they were in the wider PNGDF program of downsizing and reform. To the author, military personnel in both countries were unwavering in their insistence that every key decision relating to surplus weapon disposal was made by the Commander, PNGDF. Nevertheless, given the sensitivity of Canberra's continuing influence, and with national self-determination once again a potential trigger in the mid-2007 PNG elections, Australian officials declined all requests for interview. Emphasising the delicacy of this topic in an election year, Commodore Ilau opened an interview by advising the author: 'We were very strongly advised not to talk to you. That was not internal, that was foreign. Canberra.'

As evidenced throughout this book, Australia and PNG are not alone in casting around for a level of transparency appropriate to the disposal of surplus military small arms. In this case, balanced against a potentially flammable political wedge issue and the national security of PNG is the good news that by working together, one neighbour has helped the other to substantially reduce the threat of weapon leakage in the Pacific region.

#### **The End Result: Disposal, Retrenchment As Planned**

Despite five years of outside opposition, both the PNGDF troop retrenchment programme and its surplus small arms disposal programme were completed as planned. On 20 November 2006, Col. Fabila advised Commodore Ilau that the destruction of small arms had been completed.<sup>96</sup> The PNGDF weapon rationalisation had reduced the defence force inventory of small arms to 2,300. At the same time, the country's military establishment had been reduced to 2,300 personnel.<sup>97</sup> This ratio of one weapon to each serving soldier is similar to the ratio of armed forces personnel to available military small arms in the United States (1.2 firearms per soldier), but lower than, for example, nearby Malaysia (1.6), and Australia (2.9). The average ratio of 25 countries surveyed in 2006—most of them much wealthier than PNG—was 3.2 firearms per soldier.<sup>98</sup>

Although the published count of remaining PNGDF small arms in early 2007 was 2,300, this figure is likely to shrink again before it grows. As remaining weapons rotate through maintenance, some are declared unserviceable and set aside for destruction. In pursuit of its doctrine of 'Building Down followed immediately by Building Up,' early 2007 saw the PNGDF embark on its final stage of restructuring. The small arms component of this could see worn weapons replaced by imports, most likely with the M16 weapon system at its core, and perhaps with the assistance of existing allies.

Commodore Ilau is aware that, following years of underfunding and neglect, ‘the whole inventory now needs rebuilding.’ In the meantime, he is repeatedly on record as saying that PNG defence force still stocks ‘quite enough small arms to do the job.’<sup>99</sup>

## Looking Back

In the course of the five-year weapon disposal process in Papua New Guinea, no definition of a ‘surplus’ military small arm was attempted, or arrived at. No ratio of operational small arms to active personnel was determined as an advance target. When asked how surplus weapons were identified, officers thought for a few moments, then cited the importance of military doctrine—which contains no such definition—and the 1999 White Paper. At no point does the White Paper mention surplus or disposal, but it does focus hard on standardisation and saving money. When pressed, PNGDF decision-makers agreed that identification of surplus *matériel* was largely intuitive, with final numbers arrived at by a process of attrition and elimination, rather than by advance planning. A surplus small arm was just: ‘Something we no longer use. Something we don’t have the skills or the spare parts to maintain.’<sup>100</sup> An Australian official who declined to be named described the surplus weapons as ‘stuff we were all happy to get rid of.’ Despite this lack of taxonomy, it seems clear that neither the PNGDF nor its Australian advisers felt hampered by the absence of a definition.

Looking back at the process, Commodore Ilau remembers small arms disposal being ‘driven from the policy division in the Defence Department, then transferred to PNGDF Logistics to implement. We made all the decisions in-house. Only the capability review [the PNGDF/ADF Force Capability Review Committee] was joint.’

Asked if political opposition to surplus weapon disposal came close to derailing the project, Ilau recalls: ‘The point I thought we’d lost it? That was when the new minister disowned the rationalisation plan in 2006.’ Months earlier, when details of the PNGDF move to destroy weapons were leaked to news media, a supportive minister of defence defended weapon disposal while the storm abated. But by October, as nationalists protested the installation of Australian military officers at PNG Defence Headquarters—and just as Commodore Ilau came up for reappointment as defence force commander—a newly installed minister was less supportive. In those final months, says Ilau, ‘it came pretty close to not happening.’

Would the disposal project have gone ahead, either in the absence of the parallel PNGDF rationalisation, or without foreign financial support? ‘Yes,’ ventures the PNGDF commander. ‘Some foreign assistance was required for the weapon systems. It would have taken longer, dependent on budget. Extra years. But we would have made it work.’<sup>101</sup>

## Conclusion

The decision to dispose of surplus military small arms in PNG was spurred by a combination of economic necessity, the risk of weapons and ammunition leaking into illicit possession and consequent criminal violence, military doctrine (interoperability and the need to minimise weapon systems), obligations under international agreements, and regional security concerns shared with close Pacific neighbours.

Small arms disposal was not conducted in isolation, but as an integral component of a simultaneous, and much wider rationalisation of all assets of the PNG Defence Force. No formal definition of surplus small arms was attempted, or arrived at. Two main destruction programmes were

undertaken, the first in 2003 to dispose of 4,000 unserviceable weapons and out-of-date items of ammunition and explosives, and the second in 2006 to remove 3,418 still-serviceable small arms. Of these, only the latter was controversial.

Key players were almost exclusively military, and no role was taken by NGOs. Decision-making benefited from an unusual continuity of leadership. Two key figures in the PNGDF rationalisation programme—the Commander, Defence Force and the officer responsible for day-to-day implementation, now his Chief of Staff—were allowed to proceed, at times hampered, but ultimately undeterred by political interference, for the five-year period of the operation. In PNG, this can be counted as an exceptional occurrence.

Subject to intense controversy and some delay, the PNG small arms and ammunition disposal programme was completed as planned. Despite this, political sensitivity remains high. Neither key party to the rationalisation of the PNG defence force wishes to publicly acknowledge that Australia, Papua New Guinea's former colonial overseer and even now the holder of crucial purse strings, was instrumental in halving the nation's stockpile of military small arms.

### **Acronyms and Abbreviations**

ABCA QSTAGs	ABCA (America, Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand) Armies Quadripartite Standardization Agreements (QSTAGs)
ADF	Australian Defence Force
AUD	Australian dollar
BRF	Bougainville Resistance Forces
DCP	Australia/Papua New Guinea Defence Cooperation Programme
EPG	Commonwealth Eminent Person's Group
PGK	Papua New Guinea kina (currency)
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PNGDF	Papua New Guinea Defence Force
RPNGC	Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary
SLR	Self-loading rifle
USD	United States dollar

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- <sup>13</sup> Manufactured in Australia under license to Fabrique Nationale (Belgium), the model L1A1 F1, known as the SLR, is a semi-automatic shortened version of the FN-FAL NATO military assault rifle. For quantities, details and serial numbers of SLRs supplied by Australia to PNG, see Alpers, *Gun Violence*, op.cit.
- <sup>14</sup> Although mortars and grenade-launchers were listed among the missing PNGDF small arms, there is no evidence of these being used, either in crime or in tribal fights. Hand-held, police-issue 'teargas' grenade launchers are known to be in illicit possession, though ammunition for these is scarce. Alpers, *Gun Violence and Gun-running*, op.cit.
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- <sup>54</sup> Ilau and Fabila interviews, op.cit.
- <sup>55</sup> *Department of Defence Annual Report 2001–2002*. Canberra: Department of Defence. 25 October 2002.
- <sup>56</sup> Ilau and Fabila interviews, op.cit.
- <sup>57</sup> Sandeka, Benny. ‘Rightsizing Our Defence: PNGDF to Reduce Numbers, Strive for Quality.’ *Post-Courier* (Port Moresby). 31 March 2006.
- <sup>58</sup> ‘“Clever Force” Tag Getting Real.’ *Post-Courier* (Port Moresby). 2 October 2002.
- <sup>59</sup> Ilau, Peter. ‘Vision 2005.’ Port Moresby: Office of the Commander, Papua New Guinea Defence Force, 2005.
- <sup>60</sup> *Department of Defence Annual Report 2002–2003 through 2005-2006*. Canberra: Department of Defence, 2003-2006
- <sup>61</sup> *Department of Defence Annual Report 2002–2003*. Canberra: Department of Defence. 27 October 2003; and *Department of Defence Annual Report 2003–2004*. Canberra: Department of Defence. 18 November 2004.
- <sup>62</sup> Ilau and Fabila interviews, op.cit.
- <sup>63</sup> ‘Retrenched Soldiers Leave.’ *Post-Courier* (Port Moresby). 13 December 2002; Lapou, Jessie. ‘Laid-off Diggers to Get Paid.’ *Post-Courier* (Port Moresby). 16 January 2006.
- <sup>64</sup> ‘Rebuilding Our Defence Force.’ *Post-Courier* (Port Moresby). 12 May 2006.
- <sup>65</sup> In August, 2005 the legislative changes required to formally effect PNGDF restructuring were tabled as an Amendment to the Defence Act (1974). In 2007, these amendments awaited parliamentary debate, passage and enactment. In the interim, decisions of the National Executive Council granted authority to the restructure.
- <sup>66</sup> ‘PNGDF Questions’(b). E-mailed statement to the author for unattributed publication. Canberra: Department of Defence, Public Affairs Operations Centre. 17 April 2007.
- <sup>67</sup> *Foundations of Papua New Guinea Military Doctrine*. Port Moresby: Papua New Guinea Defence Force. 16 June 2005
- <sup>68</sup> Ilau and Fabila interviews, op. cit.
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>70</sup> Peacock-Taylor, Colleen et al. *Achieving Sustainable Human Development through Strengthening Social Capital in Bougainville*. UNDP Bougainville Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Development Project Mission Report. PNG/98/002/07/UNOPS. November 1999; Böge, Volker. *Conflict Potential and Violent Conflicts in the South Pacific: Options for a Civil Peace Service*. Working Paper 1/2001. Hamburg: University of Hamburg, IPW, Research Unit of

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<sup>71</sup> Personal communication from Nicholas Marsh, project leader, Norwegian Initiative on Small Arms Transfers (NISAT), Peace Research Institute (PRIO). Oslo: 9 September 2004.

<sup>72</sup> 'US Small Arms Shipments to Papua New Guinea for 1990–2000.' Federation of American Scientists Web site database. Accessed 11 February 2005.

<sup>73</sup> Dinnen, Sinclair, Ron May and Anthony J. Regan (Eds). *Challenging the State: the Sandline Affair in Papua New Guinea*. State, Society and Governance In Melanesia Pacific Policy Paper No 30. Canberra: Australian National University, National Centre for Development Studies, 1997; Dorney, Sean. *The Sandline Affair: Politics and Mercenaries and the Bougainville Crisis*. Sydney: ABC Books, 1998.

<sup>74</sup> Fabila interview, *op.cit.*, and interviews with Lt. Col. Joe Ben, Director Supply, PNGDF HQ, Murray Barracks. Boroko, NCD: various dates, May 2004 to February 2005.

<sup>75</sup> Niesi, Peter. 'PNG Weapons Destruction Under Fire.' *Post-Courier* (Port Moresby). 12 July 2006 .

<sup>76</sup> Rheoney, Alex. 'Call to Halt Army Downsizing.' *Post-Courier* (Port Moresby). 3 March 2006.

<sup>77</sup> *Defence Administrative Instruction: Weapons Disposal*. Port Moresby: Papua New Guinea Defence Force Headquarters. 9 May 2006.

<sup>78</sup> Philemon, Oseah. 'Army to Destroy 3,400 Weapons.' *Post-Courier* (Port Moresby). 23 June 2006.

<sup>79</sup> Niesi, Peter. 'Underfire But Firm.' *Post-Courier* (Port Moresby). 13 July 2006.

<sup>80</sup> Ilau and Fabila interviews, *op.cit.*

<sup>81</sup> (Philemon, 'Army to destroy 3,400 weapons,' *op.cit.*

<sup>82</sup> 'Army Officers Decry Arms Destruction.' *Post-Courier* (Port Moresby). 26 June 2006.

<sup>83</sup> *Department of Defence Annual Report 2004–2005 and 2005–2006*. Canberra: Department of Defence. 4 November 2005 and 2006; 'Defence Treaty Signed.' *Post-Courier* (Port Moresby). 16 December 2004.

<sup>84</sup> Fabila and Ben interviews, *op.cit.*

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Oseah Philemon, Editor-in-Chief, *Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*. Port Moresby, NCD: 26 January 2007.

<sup>86</sup> Niesi, Peter. 'PNG Weapons Destruction Under Fire,' *op.cit.*

<sup>87</sup> Nicholson, Brendan. 'We Want You: \$10bn to Raise Army Recruits.' *Age* (Melbourne). 25 August 2006.

<sup>88</sup> Barker, Geoffrey. 'PNG Focus of Concern.' *Australian Financial Review*. 25 August 2006.

<sup>89</sup> 'Singirok: Halt Defence Force Downsizing.' *Post-Courier* (Port Moresby). 28 August 2006; 'Singirok Urges Halt to Army Cut.' *ibid.*, 8 December 2006.

<sup>90</sup> Niesi, Peter. 'PNG Weapons Destruction Under Fire,' *op.cit.*

<sup>91</sup> Asked which international agreements he had in mind, Commodore Ilau cited commitments to the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI), possible UN peacekeeping missions to East Timor and elsewhere, along with the United Nations small arms Programme of Action (Personal interview, Boroko, 2 April 2007).

<sup>92</sup> The July, 2005 PNG Guns Summit in Goroka, Eastern Highlands was the culmination of an extensive nationwide sampling of public views on the domestic 'gun problem,' in which the PNG Guns Control Committee canvassed opinion on illicit firearms and their effects in the hands of civilians. By mid-2007 the committee's hundreds of recommendations (*Guns Committee Background Report: PNG Guns Summit*. Papua New Guinea Guns Control Committee. Goroka: 4–8 July 2005.) had yet to be tabled in parliament.

<sup>93</sup> 'Army Lacks Skilled Men to Maintain Gear.' *National* (Port Moresby). 7 July 2006.

<sup>94</sup> 'Guns Destruction Raises Big Concern.' *Post-Courier* (Port Moresby). 26 June 2006; 'Guns Cull Defended.' *ibid.* 27 June 2006.

<sup>95</sup> 'Role Taken by Australian Defence Personnel.' E-mailed statement to the author for unattributed publication. Canberra: Department of Defence, Public Affairs Operations Centre. 22 February 2007; 'PNGDF Questions' (a). E-mailed statement to the author for unattributed publication. Canberra: Department of Defence, Public Affairs Operations Centre. 30 March 2007.

<sup>96</sup> Fabila interview, *op.cit.*

<sup>97</sup> Ilau and Fabila interviews, *op.cit.*

<sup>98</sup> *Small Arms Survey 2006: Unfinished Business*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006.

<sup>99</sup> Ilau and Fabila interviews, *op.cit.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*