Illicit Trafficking of Small Arms in Africa: Increasingly a Home-Grown Problem

Presentation by
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Introduction*

The main objectives of my talk this afternoon are to discuss illicit small arms and light weapons circulation in Africa, as well as to suggest measures to address this problem. Toward these ends I will highlight some instances of success, identify bottlenecks or shortcomings, and recommend appropriate actions or responsibilities that various actors and stakeholders should take. I will highlight one particular initiative that the Small Arms Survey and others feel is especially promising, namely an Ammunition Tracing Project.

Background

The Small Arms Survey (SAS) was established in 1999 to examine all aspects of small arms and armed violence, including, but not limited to, production (factory-manufactured and craft), stockpiles and holdings (both government and civilian), transfers (legal and illicit), measures (national, regional, as well as global), and effects (both direct, in the form of armed conflict, homicides, and suicides; as well as indirect, relating to displacement, development, access to services such as medical care, and the costs of armed violence).

SAS is an independent research institute based at the Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva, Switzerland. The project benefits from working closely with a global network of partners, on some 30 projects per year. About a dozen countries provide financial support to SAS, principally Switzerland, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands. Germany and the United States are the most recent contributors. In addition, SAS works on a project-related basis with United Nations (UN) agencies such as the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

SAS works closely with both civil society organizations as well as with governments. SAS is not part of the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) (although we collaborate closely with many of its members) as our primary focus is the creation and dissemination of impartial information and analysis. Our advocacy efforts are limited to the issue of greater transparency, which we support as an important confidence-building measure and a prerequisite for the formulation of better policy making and programming. Toward this end, we make most of our publications available electronically

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on our web portal www.smallarmssurvey.org, which also contains useful reports from other organizations and several databases. SAS also works closely with various governments. For example, we assisted the Chair of the negotiations for the marking and tracing of arms and ammunition and will support Canada and Switzerland with the Informal Meeting on small arms to be held in Geneva this August.

The Survey has been particularly active in Africa, undertaking field research in some 40 countries from Angola to Zambia, on issues ranging from armed groups to stockpile management. My presentation today on the illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons in Africa is based on the extensive field research the Survey has conducted on the continent, and supported by the findings of other research organizations as well as UN panels investigating arms embargoes.

Historical Overview: Illicit Trafficking of Small Arms

The organizers of today's workshop have requested that we focus on the present and the near future, paying particular attention to "bottlenecks" (areas of little movement or inactivity), "successes", "responsibilities" (what various stakeholders can do to improve the situation), and "next steps" (what action or actions seem particularly promising). A bit of historical background is nevertheless necessary to place the current situation in context.

During the Cold War

It is important to underscore that African states did not fare particularly well during the Cold War. While certain elites may have benefited at certain times—some for longer durations than others—the citizenry suffered. The saying that "So-and-so President is a Bad Guy, but at least he's *our* Bad Guy," may not fully represent all the nuances of certain western countries' policies (and the language used might have been a little more colorful)—but it arguably is not too far off the mark. Of concern is that countries that received some of the largest quantities of weaponry (not limited to small arms and light weapons) later became extremely weak, conflict-ridden, or failed states: Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, formerly Zaire), Liberia and Somalia come to mind.

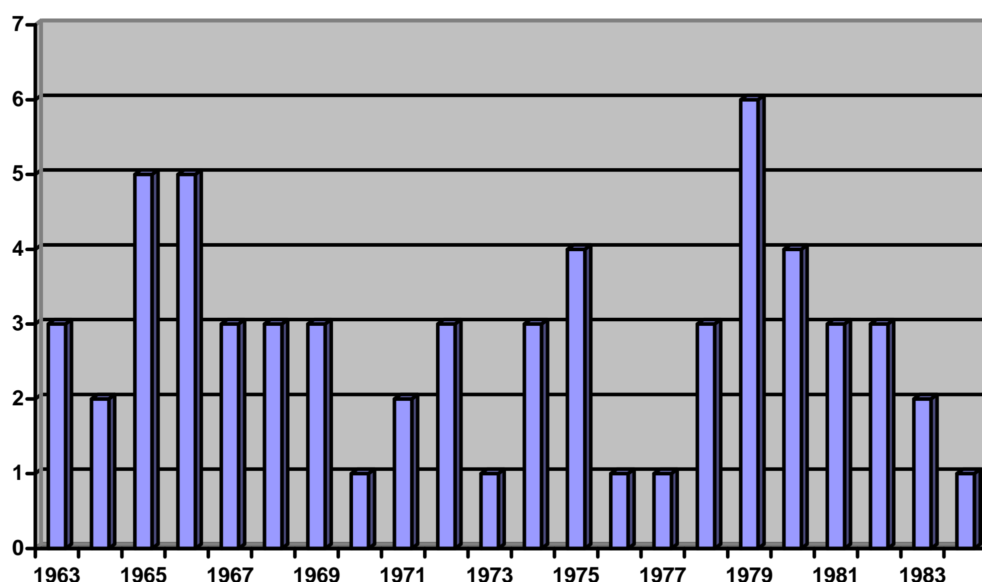
The non-aligned supporters of independence and majority-rule movements provided further external sources of weaponry that contributed to the illicit trafficking of small arms during the 1970s and 1980s. Former rebels and current government officials acknowledge that these sources supplied groups plentifully with small arms and light weapons. Record-

keeping and accountability were largely ignored—a failing that has been the case in state armed forces as well as non-state groups.

The preponderance of civil wars, mutinies, and military coups (attempted or successful) during the years after independence and throughout the 1970s and 1980s also contributed to the problem of the illicit trafficking of small arms. Between 1963 and 1984, there were more than 60 coup d'états (see Table 1) in two-thirds of the countries on the continent. This is less of a problem today, but military coups in recent years in the Central African Republic (CAR), Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, and Togo—not to mention many more reports and allegations of attempted coups elsewhere—underscore that this is still a challenge to African states and societies.

Table 1

SUCCESSFUL COUPS IN AFRICA
(1963-1984)



Source: Foltz and Bienen, 1985

Immediately after the Cold War

Africa faced new challenges in the years immediately following the Cold War. With the downsizing of armed forces, and changes in doctrine and procurement associated with military alignment with the West, many Eastern European countries found themselves with huge stockpiles of Soviet-era small arms and ammunition that were surplus to new requirements. Conflicts in Africa, such as Angola, the Great Lakes Region, and West Africa provided attractive small arms markets for many of these countries to earn much-needed revenues from their surplus materiel (and in some situations also gain valuable hard

currency from new production). Security Council commissions created to investigate violations of UN embargoes shed light on some of this activity, including Victor Bout's transfer of USD 14 million in small arms, light weapons and ammunition from Bulgaria to primarily DRC and Tanzania from 1997 to 1998 (UNSC, 2000, p. 12), and Leonard Minin's sale of 68 tons of munitions from the Ukraine to Liberia and Sierra Leone in March 1999 (UN Panel, 2000). These and similar transfers typified the international flow of illicit arms in the 1990s—from the global north to the African continent. Arms manufactured the north fueled numerous conflicts, killed tens of thousands of casualties, facilitated the displacement of hundreds of thousands of persons, and enabled widespread, gross human rights violations. For the most part, the people who benefited financially from these deals were transport companies, brokers, and banks, mostly from the north.

Today, Eastern European surplus arms are not as plentiful as they once were. Many Northern countries have improved their oversight mechanisms and addressed legal and administrative loopholes. Governments have also destroyed many surplus weapons. But it is correct to say that much more needs to be done. Surplus weapons from the region continue to flow into conflict-torn areas.[1] Where brokering legislation exists, unscrupulous actors continue to exploit loopholes. Adherence to UN embargoes remains inconsistent.

Recent years

Nevertheless, it is wrong to say—as many do—that all, or perhaps even most of the problems of illicit trafficking of small arms in Africa are generated by actors outside the continent. The Small Arms Survey, and many other researchers active on the ground, find that many of the continent's problems with respect to illicit trafficking are home-grown. The proliferation of armed groups, poor stockpile management, corruption, and the recirculation of existing stocks on the continent stem from domestic problems that African governments and policy makers have yet to appropriately acknowledge.

The scale of these home-grown challenges becomes apparent from the Survey's two-year study on armed groups[2] in West Africa (for the Human Security Network and

[1] Although the transfers in 2004 and 2005 of hundreds of thousands of small arms and millions of rounds of their ammunition from Bosnia-Herzegovina to Iraq (Amnesty International, 2006) did not involve Africa, this activity underscores the huge surpluses of materiel that remain, and the willingness to export rather than to destroy it.

[2] The Survey's interest in armed groups is not limited to those in opposition to the state, but also pro-government militias and vigilante groups. This is because of the fluid memberships and agendas of these various groups. Indeed, of the groups identified in our study one-third had changed their objectives or had split at one point during the period under review. The Survey uses Pablo Policzer's definition of armed group: any group that has the ability to challenge the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of armed force (SAS,

with the support of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)). SAS examined in some detail nearly three dozen armed groups that had been active at one point or another between 1998 and 2004 in two-thirds of the regional communities' 15 member states.[3] However, these numbers do not adequately represent the severity of the problem. In Rivers State in Nigeria alone, researchers identified more than 100 "cults" or armed groups (Florquin and Berman, 2005, pp. 21-23). African governments, rather than international actors, are often the primary source of arms and ammunition for these and other groups.

While some groups receive support from foreign governments (many on the continent) or from private interests or companies from outside the continent, most it seems obtained their weapons locally. Some procure weapons as a result of official state policy. Many African states arm civilians in recognition that the state's security structures and personnel cannot provide for law and order or its citizen's security. Some governments arm civilians because they want to distance the state from policies and practices that these groups might carry out. And some leaders do not want strong militaries or police, fearing them as much or more than external threats. Sometimes these groups obtain weapons from state security personnel either for personal profit or political gain—often these weapons are rented or loaned.

Transfers to some of these groups might be legal, but arguably most are ill-advised. Oversight and record-keeping is often lax or non-existent. Armed groups split, their allegiances weaken, or their objectives change altogether. History has shown that recipients of weapons given to them willingly by the state have proven unwilling to return those weapons when requested to do so.

The proliferation dynamics revealed by research on armed groups in ECOWAS member states are not limited to West Africa. For example, supporters of renegade Central African Republic General François Bozizé seized weapons from government depots (SAS, 2005, p. 310) before successfully overthrowing President Ange-Félix Patassé a year or so later. Bozizé, now CAR's president, is confronted with challenges posed by men with arms who he previously aided and emboldened. In Uganda, local officials and auxiliary police have reportedly rented out guns to individuals to commit robberies (SAS, 2006, p. 288). In

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2006, p. 248). Even private security companies interest SAS, although there were none in the groups that comprised that particular study.

[3] The ten countries of ECOWAS that had armed groups active in their territories during the period 1998 to 2004 included Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Sierra Leone. The five member states in which armed groups were not known to have been active included Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ghana, and Togo. Mauritania, no longer a member of ECOWAS, was not part of the study.

Kenya, police reservists armed by the state ostensibly to promote law and order have instead engaged in banditry and trafficked weapons (SAS, 2004, p. 233).

Poor practices concerning the storage of small arms represent another challenge to human security. Since 1997 there have been at least ten explosions at arms depots in Africa resulting in significant casualties and destruction (see Table 2). Governments tend to downplay the severity of such events (if they acknowledge them at all) and the causes of many recorded explosions in Africa (and elsewhere) are not divulged or may not be known. What is known is that most cases could have been averted if proper safeguards had been put in place and proper facilities erected. Destruction of surplus weapons can mitigate the threat that such depots pose, and may even be cost-effective, but is not currently widely practiced.[4]

Table 2

EXPLOSIONS AT ARMS DEPOTS IN AFRICA
(January 1997- September 2005)

Country	Date	Location	Loss of Life	Source
Sudan	17 July 1998	Khartoum	0	BBC, 1998
Congo	14 April 2000	Kinshasa	101	BBC, 2000
Guinea	3 March 2001	Conakry	10	GICHD, 2002
Sierra Leone	5 January 2002	Tongo Field	6	Sierra Leone Web, 2002
Nigeria	27 January 2002	Lagos	1,500+	GICHD, 2002
Mozambique	24 October 2002	Beira	?	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2004
Angola	16 July 2003	Menongue	6	Based on OCHA, 2003
Nigeria	23 February 2005	Kaduna	4	Biafra Nigeria World News & Archives, 2005
Sudan	23 February 2005	Juba	80	IRIN, 2005
Côte d'Ivoire	4 March 2005	Abidjan	2	NATO/MSIAC, n.d.

Source: Based on Wilkinson, 2006, pp. 248-53

[4] For more information, see *Ammunition Stocks: Promoting Safe and Secure Storage and Disposal*, by Owen Greene, Sally Holt, and Adrian Wilkinson.

African Production of SALW and Ammunition

Most small arms and ammunition that are used in, and recovered from, armed conflicts or crime on the continent originate outside of Africa. Indeed, only some three per cent of an estimated 1,200 companies producing components of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition globally are reportedly located in Africa (Omega, 2001).[5]

That said, SAS has also found that a lot of small arms and ammunition are not just locally sourced, but locally manufactured. It is important to acknowledge this under-reported activity and to examine its role in the illicit trafficking of small arms and ammunition on the continent.

As many as one-third of African States factory-produce small arms or small arms ammunition, or have done so in the recent past (see Table 3). Few such states discuss manufacturing openly and publicly-available literature on the subject is often contradictory. Moreover, it is unclear in some cases whether factories are operational or dormant. There is, nevertheless, general agreement that at least 11 countries produced ammunition for small arms and light weapons (from shot-gun shells in the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) to mortar shells in Zimbabwe), 5 countries produced small arms (from pistols in South Africa to assault rifles in Libya), and 2 countries produced light weapons (from rocket-propelled grenade launchers in Nigeria to surface-to-air missiles in Egypt) during the period 1997 to 2006.

[5] For more information, see Chapter of *Small Arms Survey 2002: Counting the Human Cost*.

Table 3

AFRICAN MANUFACTURERS OF SMALL ARMS, LIGHT WEAPONS AND THEIR AMMUNITION

(1997 – 2006)

Country		Production		
		SA	LW	Ammo
01	Algeria	□		
02	Burkina-Faso			■
03	Cameroon			■
04	Congo (Brazz.)			◘
05	Egypt	■	■	■
06	Ethiopia			■
07	Guinea			◘
08	Kenya			■
09	Libya	◘		
10	Morocco	■		
11	Namibia			□
12	Nigeria	■		■
13	South Africa	■	■	■
14	Sudan	□		■
15	Tanzania			■
16	Uganda			■
17	Zimbabwe	■		■

Note: Production may not have been ongoing in 2006

Key:

■ = Confirmed active

□ = Unconfirmed

◘ = Confirmed, status unclear

Sources: Based on Amnesty, 2004; Jones and Cutshaw, 2004; Transparency, 2005; and author interviews

Add craft production (a growing source of weaponry for crime and armed conflict by many accounts) to factory production and the number of producer countries increases considerably. In the case of Ghana, for instance, blacksmiths throughout all ten regions of the country produce small arms of increasing sophistication (reportedly including reverse-engineered Kalashnikovs), and do so at a rate of 50,000 to perhaps 200,000 per year (Aning, 2005, p. 83). Armed groups supply themselves with these craft weapons in Ghana and neighboring states. Alex Vines adds from his field research that blacksmiths are active in other West African countries, citing Benin and Togo as having similar industries to Ghana’s but on smaller scales, as well as Guinea and Senegal, albeit producing comparatively less sophisticated weaponry (2005, p. 352). In addition, SAS’s research suggests that the problem posed by local production in Nigeria, which has been a significant problem in religious clashes in Plateau State, has not been adequately monitored or reported. Much of the literature and research has focused on West Africa, but it is

reasonable to believe that this situation exists elsewhere, although perhaps on a smaller scale.

Successes

Though the following examples have been labeled "successes", on further analysis, many reveal bottlenecks or areas of little progress. Nothing is black and white or cut-and-dried, whether in Africa or anywhere else in the world.

That said, one case of what might be called an "unqualified success," the decade-plus-long "Operation Rachel", illustrates the potential for effective measures to counter illicit trade across Africa. A joint initiative between Mozambique and South Africa, the recovery exercises of weapons and ammunition from caches of materiel in the wake of the completed disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) efforts in Mozambique, have netted over 45,000 handguns, sub-machine guns, rifles, machine guns, and mortars (the majority of them being assault rifles) (see Table 4). The program has also recovered around 25 million rounds of ammunition. The published accounts of weapons collected are not 100 per cent consistent, but there appears to be consensus on one important issue: *all* the weapons and ammunition recovered are destroyed. In addition, a civil-society initiative of tools for weapons has recovered more than 7,000 weapons and almost 500,000 rounds of ammunition (see Table 5).

Table 4

OPERATION RACHEL COLLECTION RESULTS
(1995-2006)

Year	Handguns	Submachine Guns	Rifles	Light/Heavy Machine Guns	Mortars	Ammunition
1995	8	91	981	47	15	23,153
1996	13	68	355	52	44	136,639
1997	79	980	4,345	279	35	3,000,000
1998	353	735	3,138	467	21	155,314
1999	453	1,874	8,864	845	115	3,315,106
2000	18	126	2,205	66	70	83,276
2001	372	467	2,943	148	32	486,000
2002	375	562	3,768	225	17	11,004,018
2003	43	231	1,334	29	0	2,200,001
2004	426	223	1,661	143	12	2,100,038
2005	256	159	2,748	26	11	1,666,808
2006	159	49	2,933	29	0	300,000
Total	**2,549**	**5,565**	**35,311**	**2,356**	**372**	**24,470,353**

Source: SaferAfrica, 2007

Table 5

TAE PROJECT COLLECTION RESULTS
(20 October 1995-14 October 2003)

Weapons and Ammunition	By Year for all Provinces except Cabo Delgado and Zambezia									Cabo D'gado	Zam-bezia	Totals
	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003			
Weapon Type												
▪ Assault Rifles	76	279	120	718	193	604	102	355	639	3	1582	4671
▪ Pistols (various)	36	55	27	28	20	29	194	33	91	2	239	754
▪ Machine Guns	3	16	4	24	6	8	1	80	29	0	56	227
▪ Rocket Launchers	17	14	5	53	12	3	0	0	31	0	15	150
▪ Mortars (various)	2	7	0	3	6	87	0	10	0	0	1	116
▪ Rifles	19	35	77	10	12	24	234	23	56	1	498	989
▪ Semi-automatics	19	10	145	13	13	5	19	1	4	0	34	263
▪ Grenade Launchers	18	32	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50
▪ Recoilless Rifles	0	0	0	0	0	0	32	0	0	0	0	32
▪ Various	82	80	85	17	84	13	8	69	120	1	7	566
All Weapons	**272**	**528**	**463**	**866**	**346**	**773**	**590**	**571**	**970**	**7**	**2432**	**7818**
Ammunition	**10,489**	**9,943**	**2,881**	**33,307**	**10,226**	**19,227**	**40,059**	**22,669**	**200,507**	**3,494**	**102,907**	**455,709**

Note: These figures are based on data provided by TAE. They weapons categories were defined by TAE. The two TAE 'satellite' offices in Cabo Delgado and Zambezia operated semi-independently from the headquarters in Maputo and their figures are provided separately.

Source: Based on BICC, 2004.

Of course, this shows how much of a missed opportunity the DDR program as part of ONUMOZ (the UN peacekeeping operation in Mozambique during 1992-94) was, but that is another story.[6] Together with Institute for Security Studies (ISS), Viva Rio and Austral, SAS is in the middle of a country-wide survey of small arms availability, demand, and effects in Mozambique to learn how effective Operation Rachel has been in terms of recovering weapons and adding to people's sense of security. In a related case, while the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) experienced tremendous shortcomings in its DDR program, the destruction of all 27,000 weapons and 7 million rounds of ammunition collected represents a positive step forward in countering illicit trade in the country and the region (Nichols, 2005, p. 116).

As for Sierra Leone, the Community Arms Collection and Destruction (CACD) programs, followed by the Arms for Development (AfD) program highlighted the utility of collective benefit schemes. Previously, weapons collection efforts had focused on the individual, with all the financial and moral implications inherent in such enterprises. Sierra Leoneans responded energetically to the CACD and AfD initiatives. More than 9,000 weapons and 30,000 rounds of ammunition were collected (Bah, 2004, p. 8; Lochhead and Greene, 2004). In short order, village-after-village on the basis of chiefdoms, were officially declared weapons-free.

[6] The DDR exercise in Mozambique between 1992 and 1994 recovered 189,827 weapons, all of which were transferred to the government (UNSG, 1994, p. 3).

Though important initiatives such as the ECOWAS Convention and the Nairobi Protocol represent major strides in arms control measures in Africa, they cannot be categorized as flat-out successes as of yet. More time is needed to evaluate whether these initiatives will function as envisaged.

Bottlenecks

At the outset, it is important to acknowledge that DDR initiatives are not designed to recover every weapon or to provide a job for every participant. Rather, they are a means to create sufficient time and space to neutralize potential spoilers to peace agreements.[7] That said, a lot is left to be desired. Weapons collected are too often of poor quality—more dangerous to the user than the intended target. The information on the type of weapon being turned in is frequently incomplete or not pursued energetically. Benefits are regularly overly generous, are not pegged to other regional initiatives, and have at times created demand. The selection and screening of aspiring beneficiaries is sub-par. And so on.

DDR and weapons collection efforts in the Central African Republic exemplify all of these problems and more. A general weapons recovery initiative in 1997 and 1998 was targeted at the President's adversaries. The individuals and groups concerned have henceforth been wary of participating in several follow-on programs (SAS, 2007, p. 4). The President also used weapons collected during these initiatives to arm self-appointed, pro-government militias. Record-keeping was extremely poor for the National Programme for Disarmament and Reintegration (NPDR), and skills-training for participants involved in this initiative was essentially conducted as an after-thought. Although the government designed the program to target ex-combatants for training, in reality trainees were those who surrendered weapons in good condition that met a minimum level of reimbursement (USD 14) (SAS, 2005, pp. 325-327).

Another shortcoming concerns a lack of transparency regarding the production and transfer of small arms. South Africa is the only country on the continent to have provided a national arms export report in recent years. That said, although South Africa reported for the period 2000 to 2002, it has reported nothing since 2003 (South Africa, 2003). Moreover, relatively few countries on the continent report imports and exports of small arms and ammunition to the UN Commercial Trade Statistics Database (Comtrade)—an international customs database that records everything from guns to butter (NISAT, 2007).

[7] For further information, see chapter 10 of *Small Arms Survey 2005*.

Figures for 2004, the most recent year for which comprehensive data is available, indicates that more than half of African countries failed to report either their exports or imports of small arms to Comtrade.

In addition to inadequate reporting of small arms trade, many African nations little progress on the Programme of Action (PoA). According to Elli Kytömäki and Valerie Yankey-Wayne, by September 2005 (three months after the second biennial meeting of states) 10 of 53 African UN Member States had neither appointed a National Point of Contact (NPA) (frequently referred to as a National Focal Point), nor had they established a National Coordinating Agency (NCA)—two provisions called for in the PoA. Only 26 of 53 African UN Member States had established both a NPC and a NCA. Fully 13 of the 53 countries had never reported in the first four years after the PoA was established in July 2001 and 22 of the 53 countries had reported but once (Kytömäki and Yankey-Wayne, 2006, Annex 2).

These figures may have changed in light of the January 2006 Small Arms Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) meeting and the UN Small Arms Review Conference (RevCon) in June and July 2006. It is also worth noting that some countries can—and do—issue many reports and yet reveal little substance, while in other cases the degree of transparency in a single report that is thorough and well thought out can be extremely significant.

Failure to provide the UN with information regarding progress may be a case of "reporting fatigue." Many countries in Africa are active in supporting regional initiatives, but may put comparatively less emphasis on the PoA. Suffice it to say, however, there remains room for considerable progress in this area.

Responsibilities

States have a range of national and international responsibilities to stem the illict proliferation of small arms and light weapons. While this presentation does not list them in any particular order or priority, the following examples illustrate the vast range of possible responses to the threat of illicit arms trade.

Fundamentally, governments need to make good on their PoA commitments, notably the creation of functional—rather than nominal—NCAs and NFPs, under presidential authority.

Governments also need to re-think common policies of arming of militias and other local security arrangements, and place greater emphasis on reforming and professionalizing their security structures. Possible reforms include adequate compensation in the form of livable wages (to dissuade, for example, the diversion of small arms and ammunition at all levels of the armed forces) and promotion based on merit.

African states must also encourage greater participation and integration of various tribes, regions, and ethnicities in their police and security forces. Improving community trust in security forces is a key means to combat illicit proliferation. Legitimate security forces provide protection to people who might otherwise arm themselves in response to threats.

In terms of African regional organizations, secretariat staffing must improve both quantitatively and qualitatively. Hiring ample employees with the requisite skills is a priority. Information-sharing and decision-making often leave a lot to be desired.

Whether foreign countries provide small arms or funds to African nations, certain responsibilities exist which, when adhered to, increase the likelihood of remedying problems on the continent. Among them, continued progress on brokering regulations, codes of conduct (e.g. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the European Union), and initiatives (e.g. Transfer Control Initiative and the Arms Trade Treaty) must be made. In addition, foreign countries need to be more selective in funding partners. Too many countries go through the motions of being serious about combating the illicit trafficking of small arms, signing up to one initiative after another, without acting in good-faith by making substantive attempts to attain certain goals or pursue established best practices.

Co-commitment of funds is an important aspect, as is engaging and making room for civil society partnerships and dialogue. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) should lend their expertise to and cooperate with governments. They should also be appropriately critical of governments when this is called for (e.g. the Biting the Bullet initiative). Donors can help create the space for CSOs to interact with governments and regional organizations, as is being done successfully in many instances, such as the West African Action Network on Small Arms (WAANSA).

There is so much that the UN can do better with regard to countering the illicit trafficking of small arms that it is unclear where to begin. For example, the Lomé Center remains inadequately resourced. The status quo has been untenable for far too long. Either it should be made viable or it should be closed. Too many recommendations made in the

much-lauded Brahimi Report have not been implemented, such as ensuring that reintegration efforts of ex-combatants in DDR processes are sufficiently funded. Synergies—an over-used term to be sure, but one that is appropriate in this instance—between the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and the UN system's DDR and arms reduction activities have yet to be fully explored and acted on. Initial experiences of integrated UN peacekeeping missions in Haiti and Sudan suggest that the recently unveiled and much ballyhooed UN Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS) will face an uphill battle to win converts and make for better, more coherent, policy.

What else? Certainly, the UN can do a better job staffing the sanctions committees. Some people on the committees are not the appropriate candidates. Some positions go unfilled, which is a shame. Short mandates complicate the picture and politics plays a role. The UN should ensure that ammunition is part of all weapons turned in as part of DDR, which is not always the case. Registering all weapons in peacekeeping operations and contingents' ammunition is also something that should be done with greater rigor, and when called for, with greater transparency in cases like Sierra Leone.

Next Steps: The Ammunition Tracing Project

Overview

The Small Arms Survey has begun to pilot a set of methods for tracing illicit ammunition proliferation. After further trials in 2007, the Survey will standardize these methods in a collection of ammunition tracing protocols, which will guide its future work on ammunition and those of other interested parties.

Rationale

The dynamics of illicit ammunition proliferation are relatively unknown due to the 'anonymity' of individual rounds of ammunition. In contrast to small arms, such as assault rifles, cartridge-based small arms ammunition is never marked with a unique, identifying serial number. Instead, cartridges produced in a single production run tend to be marked with a standard stamp (called a headstamp). Given that production runs may entail the manufacture of many thousands of rounds in a single run, the result is a plethora of identically marked rounds originating from any one factory in a given space of time.

Although a very small number of manufacturers have recently begun to lot-mark ammunition with a code that signifies the recipient, in most cases it is impossible to determine the 'user' of a round of ammunition from the markings on the case alone.

However, the Small Arms Survey has made use of the fact that there are many different manufacturers of ammunition and consequently many different headstamps (differently-marked) rounds in circulation—particularly among non-state armed groups and societies in protracted conflict. Using a large sample size and the laws of probability, it is possible to record the variations in different origins and ages of ammunition stocked by a given group, and then compare this group 'profile' with that of another group. Groups that display similar profiles are more likely to trade, capture or exchange ammunition amongst themselves. Those that display very different profiles are likely to source their stocks from divergent origins.

Application

For research purposes, the specific combination—or profile—of ammunition types, ages and origins stocked by a given group acts much like a strand of DNA. Groups that display similar concentrations of multiple types of ammunition are likely to have similar sources. While individual rounds cannot be traced with this method, together with findings from background field research, groups' ammunition sources can be determined with previously unattainable confidence.

In the case of Ugandan factions, the ammunition profiles for each group are relatively similar from 2000 to 2004, as they procured Chinese and Ugandan ammunition during that period. Regarding these groups, SAS's extensive qualitative field research indicates that the groups procured this ammunition through trade.

As a secondary example, by examining Kenyan ammunition it becomes apparent that it has found its way into the hands of armed groups near the Ethiopian border in Kenya, throughout much of the interior of Kenya, and also in Sudan, primarily in 2003. Interestingly, this ammunition is absent from the stocks of all the Ugandan groups previously discussed. This indicates that armed groups in Uganda do not obtain ammunition from Kenya. However, Lokiriama, very near to the Ugandan border, has a profile very similar to the Ugandan locations if the Kenyan ammunition procured in 2003 is removed. Research confirms that these groups trade, thus confirming the profile method as a good indicator of trade.

In general, this project can establish patterns of trade, capture or exchange between groups. With additional field research, ammunition trade routes can be identified quite specifically. As a result, the ammunition project will enable targeted responses to stop the illicit flow of ammunition. Most important is the fact that ammunition that domestic companies produced for the country's security forces has found its way into the hands of non-state actors in protracted conflicts, such as in Karamoja. Put simply, this means that Kenyan ammunition is killing Kenyans and Ugandan ammunition is killing Ugandans. The problems are not a result of an influx of materials from Sudan or Ethiopia, but rather they are domestic issues stemming from poor stockpile security.

Before, many people believed ammunition was untraceable; once it was 'out there' it was gone. However, not only is ammunition traceable, but it is possible to trace it better than guns. The reasoning behind this is that ammunition is relatively new and a consumable good which circulates for a statistically shorter time. Tracing ammunition brings the sources of illicit trade much closer than simple marking and tracing of weapons. From the data compiled and analyzed thus far, SAS has observed that tracing trading patterns is not overly complicated, that trade is rather localized, and that ammunition does in fact have a relatively short chain of supply. In the context of Kenya and Uganda, the security forces in each country seem to be the main source of ammunition for armed groups. Lastly, these tracing practices can be applied anywhere with ample sample sizes.

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