



# Cashing in on Guns: Identifying the Nexus between Small Arms, Light Weapons and Terrorist Financing

ICCT Report

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Collaboration, Research & Analysis  
Against the Financing of Terrorism



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ICCT's work focuses on themes at the intersection of countering violent extremism and criminal justice sector responses, as well as human rights-related aspects of counterterrorism. The major project areas concern countering violent extremism, rule of law, foreign fighters, country and regional analysis, rehabilitation, civil society engagement and victims' voices.

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## Cover image

“ONUB: Demobilization of Burundian Military” by United Nations Photo is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

## Frequently Used Acronyms

<b>AML</b>	Anti-Money Laundering
<b>APC</b>	Armoured Personnel Carriers
<b>AQAP</b>	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
<b>AQI</b>	Al-Qaeda in Iraq
<b>AQIM</b>	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
<b>ATT</b>	Arms Trade Treaty
<b>CFSP</b>	Common Foreign and Security Policy
<b>CMA</b>	Coordination of Azawad Movements ( <i>Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad</i> )
<b>CTF</b>	Counter-Terrorism Financing
<b>CVR</b>	Community Violence Reduction
<b>DDR</b>	Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration
<b>ECCAS</b>	Economic Community of Central African States
<b>ECOWAS</b>	The Economic Community of West African States
<b>EFP</b>	Explosively Formed Penetrators
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EUCAP</b>	European Union Capacity Building Mission
<b>EUTM</b>	European Union Training Mission
<b>FATF</b>	Financial Action Task Force
<b>FSU</b>	Former Soviet Union
<b>FTF</b>	Foreign Terrorist Fighters
<b>GPS</b>	Global Positioning System
<b>GSPC</b>	Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat ( <i>Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat</i> )
<b>HCUA</b>	High Council for Unity of Azawad ( <i>Haut Conseil pour l'Unité de l'Azawad</i> )
<b>HTS</b>	Haya't Tahrir al-Sham
<b>IED</b>	Improvised Explosive Device
<b>IRGC</b>	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
<b>IS-Sinai</b>	Islamic State Wilayat Sinai
<b>ISGS</b>	Islamic State in the Greater Sahara
<b>ISIS</b>	Islamic State in Syria and Iraq
<b>ISWAP</b>	Islamic State West Africa Province
<b>ISY</b>	Islamic State in Yemen
<b>ISIS-YP</b>	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria—Yemen Province
<b>JNIM</b>	Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen
<b>KFR</b>	Kidnapping for Ransom
<b>KH</b>	Kata'ib Hezbollah
<b>LAS</b>	League of Arab States
<b>MANPAD</b>	Man-Portable Defence Systems
<b>MENA</b>	Middle East and North Africa
<b>MINUSMA</b>	(United Nations) Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
<b>MINUSCA</b>	(United Nations) Integrated Multidimensional Mission for Stabalization in Central Africa

<b>MNLA</b>	National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad ( <i>Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad</i> )
<b>MONUSCO</b>	United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo ( <i>Mission de l'Organisation des Nations unies en République démocratique du Congo</i> )
<b>MUJAO</b>	Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa ( <i>Mouvement pour l'Unité et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest</i> )
<b>UN PoA</b>	UN Programme of Action on SALW
<b>PKK</b>	Kurdistan Workers Party ( <i>Partiya Karkenên Kurdistan</i> )
<b>RFP</b>	Regional Focal Point
<b>RPG</b>	Rocket-Propelled Grenade
<b>RUF</b>	Revolutionary United Front
<b>SALW</b>	Small Arms and Light Weapons
<b>SSR</b>	Security Sector Reform
<b>(S)VBIED</b>	(Suicide) Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device
<b>UNAMID</b>	United Nations – African Union Mission in Darfur
<b>UNMIL</b>	United Nations Mission in Liberia
<b>UNIDDRS</b>	United Nations Integrated Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Standards
<b>UNSC</b>	United Nations Security Council
<b>UNTOC</b>	United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime
<b>WAM</b>	Weapons and Ammunition Management
<b>WCO</b>	World Customs Organization
<b>Firearms Protocol</b>	UN Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition
<b>Moratorium</b>	Moratorium on the import, export, and manufacture of light weapons
<b>2005 SALW Strategy</b>	Strategy to Combat the Illicit Accumulation and Trafficking of SALW and Their Ammunition

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## Executive Summary

With an estimated one billion in circulation worldwide, of which only 16 percent are in the hands of security and defence forces, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) across the globe is a source of deep concern to local, regional, and global stability. Widespread circulation of SALW has given rise to an increase in global armed violence and caused more impediments to conflict resolution. SALW continues to fuel conflict, crime and terrorism, and in the long-term impacts sustainable peace and security.

While existing research has predominantly focused on the acquisition and direct use of SALW by terrorist groups in preparing and perpetrating attacks, this ICCT report takes a different approach. Exploring how terrorist organisations cash in on guns, it investigates the nexus between SALW and terrorist financing. As such, this report contributes to raising the awareness and understanding of these linkages, and assesses the existing legal and policy frameworks to counter them. In this context, the study aims at enhancing our understanding of the use of SALW as a source of terrorism financing by answering the following series of **research questions**: (1) What are the characteristics of SALW possession and acquisition by terrorist organisations? (2) How do terrorist organisations use SALW to finance their activities? (3) What can be done to combat this phenomenon? In order to answer these questions, this study has selected the cases of the Middle East and West Africa. The research was based on an extensive review of earlier studies, combined with primary data collected through a series of interviews with both local and international experts.

With regard to SALW **possession** by terrorist organisations active in the Middle East and West Africa, the types of weapons seem to be quite similar in both regions, despite the large variety in groups and local contexts. The majority of these weapons consist of assault rifles, in particular AK-pattern weapons, as well as handguns and rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) launchers. A difference between the regions may lie in the ratio between SALW and heavy weaponry, with West African groups having access to a limited set of heavy weapons as compared to some violent extremist groups operating in the Middle East, especially IS in Syria and Iraq.

Terrorist groups' **acquisition** of SALW is found to occur most often through diversion. Terrorist groups have obtained weapons in both regions through battlefield capture, theft, armed raids and attacks of national stockpiles. The types of diversion do however seem to slightly differ between the two regions. While corruption seems to play a role in diverting weapons to terrorist groups in West Africa, many interviewees underlined that it most likely represents a marginal source as compared to arms captured through attacks. Modes of acquisition were different in the Middle East, where state-sponsored diversion is very common. Moreover, conflicts, past or present, are a strong source of SALW flows in both regions.

In response to the second question, this report makes a distinction between the direct and indirect use of SALW as **source of terrorist funding**. Considering SALW as trading commodities, the former entails trading in SALW and facilitating others in SALW trafficking in exchange for money or other commodities. By contrast, the indirect use refers to the instrumental use of SALW as means allowing terrorists to carry out lucrative (criminal) activities to obtain funding. Considering several sources, the report finds that the use of SALW as a source of terrorist funding seems to be predominantly indirect in both the Middle East and West Africa. While some experts and stakeholders interviewed mentioned instances in which terrorist organisations may have directly engaged in SALW trafficking, evidence that would point to a structural involvement of such actors in illicit arms trade is lacking for both regions. However, apart from proceeds derived from the direct sale of SALW, this report identifies a great number of other ways of 'cashing in on guns'. Both in West Africa and the Middle East, SALW provides violent extremist actors with the coercion power required not only to carry out various criminal activities, such as kidnapping for ransom or robberies, but also to establish and maintain their control over territories. This provides them with opportunities to extort local populations and levy taxes on the movements of goods and people within areas under their control. These findings also relate to

the emerging research on the so-called “crime-terror nexus”. This report finds that in both regions, the nexus is prevalent but not necessarily always easy to identify. In some cases, terrorist groups and criminal networks might incidentally cooperate out of opportunism, whereas in other situations the nexus is more structural and can be viewed as a tactical marriage of convenience.

Having created an overview of SALW as a source of financing, this research also addresses the suitability of **DDR processes** to reduce the trafficking and possession of SALW by terrorist groups. It observes that in many countries, DDR programmes have not been focussed on disarmament or the reduction of the flow of weapons, nor have they always achieved this, as these processes have focussed primarily on the reduction of violence, and increasingly also on the demobilisation and reintegration of individuals into society. Another limitation exists in the fact that DDR programmes are open only to the signatories of peace agreements, something which groups often are not if they have been designated as terrorist by the UN Sanctions Committee or the EU. Hence, it is suggested that transitional weapon management can be an effective tool prior to, during, or instead of DDR programmes. Although the aim is not necessarily to reduce the flow of weapons, but to reduce violence, through various temporary measures ranging from documenting and marking the weapons, storing weapons securely, deactivating weapons that are not ‘needed’, it can thus reduce the number of weapons in circulation.

Moreover, the report assesses the **existing legal and policy frameworks** in place at the international and regional levels, including within the EU, but also across the Middle East and West Africa. In the absence of frameworks specifically designed to target the use of SALW as a source of terrorist finance, the report takes an interdisciplinary approach consisting in exploring perspectives from arms control, criminal justice and organized crime, as well as countering terrorist financing (CTF).

Based on its findings on the illicit proliferation of SALW, the report considers the implications for Europe. A prominent **short-term consequence** is the increase in terrorist groups’ capacity to organise and execute attacks on European nationals and interests. These may occur in West Africa and the Middle East, as well as on European soil. A concrete example of this is IS, which used its SALW to control large territories in Iraq and Syria and to finance its activities – including the November 2015 Paris attack and the November 2016 Brussels attack which were coordinated by IS in Syria. In the **long term**, the illicit proliferation of SALW has a conflict-igniting effect, especially in polarised societies. The easy access to these – generally easy to use – weapons contributes to the risk of an outbreak of violence, but also tends to intensify and sustain existing armed conflicts and violence. Furthermore, the continued presence of SALW in post-conflict situations also threatens these fragile environments by increasing the risk of returning to conflict and violence. In addition, there is an increased risk that some of these weapons will eventually be trafficked back into Europe. Law enforcement agencies such as Europol already noted that conflicted countries such as Syria, Libya and Mali have emerged as “major” sources of illegal firearms to the European black market. Those benefitting from it are terrorist groups and organised criminal organisations alike.

In its concluding chapter, the report puts several of its findings in a broader perspective and reflects on overarching themes such as the prominence of different types of intentional and unintentional diversion within terrorist organisations’ arms procurement strategies, the ways in which continued SALW presence contributes to a greater risk of violent relapse in post-conflict societies, the above-mentioned crime-terror nexus, and the grown importance of the digital sphere in arms trafficking. The significance of SALW as means of terrorist financing being underlined throughout this report, this chapter ends by listing ten policy recommendations to the European Union, in order to identify, detect, prevent and address this linkage. The areas covered by the recommendations vary from strengthening European arms export policies to reduce unauthorised retransfers, to capacity building of countries in the Middle East and West Africa to improve the management of national stockpiles, the mitigation of risks posed by IEDs, and the strengthening of capabilities to carry out financial investigations.

## Introduction

With an estimated one billion in circulation worldwide,<sup>1</sup> of which only 16 percent are in the hands of security and defence forces,<sup>2</sup> the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW)<sup>3</sup> across the globe is a source of deep concern to local, regional, and global peace and security. Widespread circulation of SALW has contributed to “the increase in global armed violence, to insecurity due to fear of gun violence, and to delaying conflict resolution.”<sup>4</sup> SALW continue to fuel conflict, terrorism and crime.<sup>5</sup> Such dynamics have been witnessed in, *inter alia*, the Middle East (Syria, Iraq, Yemen),<sup>6</sup> North Africa (Libya),<sup>7</sup> West Africa (the tri-border area between Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, and Lake Chad riparian countries Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, and Chad),<sup>8</sup> the Horn of Africa (Somalia),<sup>9</sup> and South Asia (Afghanistan, Pakistan).<sup>10</sup> Moreover, in the long term, the availability of SALW impedes societal advancement, economic growth, sustainable development, and the protection of human rights, as seen in Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka, and Colombia.<sup>11</sup>

The relation between SALW proliferation and conflict is complex, multi-faceted, and context dependent. States that are embroiled in one or multiple conflicts have lost the monopoly on the use of force, lack of rule of law, ineffective border control combined with weak democratic institutions create a favourable environment for terrorist organisations and organized networks to operate in.<sup>12</sup> In such fragile environments, SALW function as a threat multiplier, enabling terrorist organisations to pursue their violent agenda, and consolidate and expand their power base—both directly as a means to carry out terrorist attacks, and indirectly to exert control over populations and territories (e.g., The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) exerting territorial control in parts of Syria and Iraq; and the expansion of Boko Haram’s territorial control across northeast Nigeria in mid-2014<sup>13</sup>).

1 United Nations Security Council. “Spread of 1 Billion Small Arms, Light Weapons Remains Major Threat Worldwide, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Tells Security Council” Meeting Coverage, UNSC 8713th Meeting, February 5, 2020, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14098.doc.htm>.

2 Mattias Nowak, “Enjeux du trafic d’armes : l’Afrique de l’Ouest dans la tourmente”. *Les Grands Dossiers de Diplomatie*, n° 52, août-septembre 2019, p.52. [www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2019/Grands-Dossiers-Diplomatie-no-52-Enjeux-du-traffic-armes.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2019/Grands-Dossiers-Diplomatie-no-52-Enjeux-du-traffic-armes.pdf).

3 The authors have adopted the EU’s definition of small arms (i.e. revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, sub-machine guns, assault rifles, and light machineguns) and light weapons (i.e. heavy machine-guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers of anti-tank missile and rocket systems, portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems, mortars of calibres of less than 100 mm, ammunition and explosives, cartridges (rounds) for small arms, shells and missiles for light weapons, mobile containers with missiles or shells for single-action anti-aircraft and anti-tank systems, anti-personnel and anti-tank hand grenades, landmines, and explosives). See: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/e-library/glossary/small-arms-and-light-weaponssalw\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/e-library/glossary/small-arms-and-light-weaponssalw_en).

4 Carmen-Christina Cîrlig, “Illicit small arms and light weapons”. Briefing European Parliamentary Research Service. June 2015. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2015/565869/EPRS\\_IDA\(2015\)565869\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2015/565869/EPRS_IDA(2015)565869_EN.pdf).

5 United Nations Security Council. Report of the Secretary General: Small Arms and Light weapons, [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_2019\\_1011.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2019_1011.pdf).

6 Méryl Demuynck, Tanya Mehra and Reinier Bergema. *The Use of SALW by Terrorist Organisations as a Source of Finance in the Middle East and North Africa*. The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague (ICCT). June 2020. <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2020/06/The-Use-of-Small-Arms-Light-Weapons-by-Terrorist-Organisations-as-a-Source-of-Finance-in-the-Middle-East-and-North-Africa.pdf>.

7 Ibid.

8 Méryl Demuynck, Tanya Mehra and Reinier Bergema. *The Use of SALW by Terrorist Organisations as a Source of Finance in the West Africa and the Horn of Africa*. The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague (ICCT). July 2020. <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2020/06/The-Use-of-Small-Arms-Light-Weapons-by-Terrorist-Organisations-as-a-Source-of-Finance-in-West-Africa-and-the-Horn-of-Africa.pdf>.

9 Ibid.

10 Méryl Demuynck, Tanya Mehra and Reinier Bergema. *The Use of SALW by Terrorist Organisations as a Source of Finance in South and Southeast Asia*. The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague (ICCT). June 2020. <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2020/06/The-Use-of-Small-Arms-Light-Weapons-by-Terrorist-Organisations-as-a-Source-of-Finance-in-South-and-Southeast-Asia.pdf>.

11 Colin P. Clarke, *Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) Trafficking, Smuggling, and Use for Criminality by Terrorists and Insurgents: A Brief Historical Overview*. The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague (ICCT). July 2020. <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2020/07/SALW-Historical-Overview-1.pdf>.

12 UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office. *The Link Between ‘ungoverned spaces’ and terrorism. Myth or reality?*, August 2014, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/415544/FINAL\\_Ungoverned\\_spaces.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/415544/FINAL_Ungoverned_spaces.pdf).

13 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). *Nigerian Humanitarian Needs Overview: 2015*.

The use of SALW by terrorist organisations is often associated with terrorist attacks (direct use). In the West, a series of terrorist attacks were carried out with the use of SALW, notably the 2011 Norway attacks (77 killed, 319 injured), the 2014 Brussels Jewish Museum shooting (4 killed), the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attack (12 killed, 12 injured), the November 2015 Paris attacks (137 killed, 413 injured), and the 2016 Orlando Pulse shooting (50 killed, 53 injured).<sup>14</sup> Although statistically the number of terrorist attacks that involved weapons in Western countries between 2002 and 2016 was less than 10 percent, the number of fatalities was 55 percent.<sup>15</sup> Understandably, the focus has thus far been on preventing terrorists from acquiring SALW. However, apart from this direct use, SALW also provide terrorist organisations with the ability to exert control over populations and territories, allowing them to extort, tax or kidnap for ransom. In this sense, SALW facilitate a series of activities that indirectly contribute to advancing a terrorist groups' agenda (indirect use).

Furthermore, a distinction can be drawn between direct and indirect involvement in the trafficking of SALW. SALW can serve as a commodity which terrorist organisations can traffic themselves, thereby not only being end-users, but also suppliers (direct trafficking). Moreover, terrorist organisations can also benefit from the illicit flows of SALW without directly engaging in trafficking, by facilitating trafficking activities carried out by others (indirect trafficking). Terrorist groups can, for example, forcefully control entry points or trafficking routes. In the latter case, SALW enable terrorist organisations to generate income by providing support to actual traffickers of SALW, or other illicit goods, or "riding shotgun," where terrorist organisations provide protection from theft and armed robbery, or provide "muscle" for, international drug shipments.

Third, in addition to the funds and proceeds derived from SALW used as trading commodities, which can either result from cashing in on sales, or taxation and protection fees levied on SALW illicit flows (direct financing), SALW may also be used to facilitate a wide range of other (illegal) income-generating activities such as, inter alia, racketeering, extortion, taxation, or kidnapping for ransom (indirect financing). Consequently, the destabilising impact of illicit trafficking in SALW, in which terrorist groups may get directly or indirectly involved, has serious implications that extend beyond monetary value alone.

Based on the aforementioned dynamics, a set of key functions can thus be identified; (1) the direct and indirect use of SALW; (2) the direct and indirect involvement in SALW trafficking; and (3) the direct and indirect use of SALW for terrorist finance (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Direct and indirect functions of SALW**

	<b>Direct</b>	<b>Indirect</b>
Using SALW	The active use of SALW to carry out terrorist attacks.	The facilitative use of SALW to maintain control over a population and territories.
Trafficking in SALW	Terrorists traffic SALW themselves. In this case, terrorists are not only end-users, but are also actual sellers/suppliers.	Terrorist are facilitating the trafficking for others. This is the case, for example, when terrorists control entry points or trafficking routes and secure transit generally in exchange for payment from the actual traffickers, or when they provide logistical support such as transport to allow arms traffickers to continue their activities.

December 2014. <https://www.unocha.org/sites/dms/ROWCA/Coordination/HNOs/HNO%20Nigeria%20-%2015March2015.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Global Terrorism Database. *National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)* 2010-2018. <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>.

<sup>15</sup> Robert A. Tessler, Stephen Mooney, and Cordelie E. Witt, *Research letter: Use of Firearms in Terrorist Attacks: Differences Between the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand* JAMA Internal Medicine Published online October 6, 2017. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/fullarticle/2657107>.

Financing through SALW	Terrorists obtain funding by actively selling and trading in SALW (direct trafficking in SALW) and by facilitating others in SALW trafficking in exchange for money or other commodities (indirect trafficking in SALW). Direct financing of terrorism through SALW is thus linked to direct and indirect trafficking of SALW.	Terrorists are carrying out lucrative activities to obtain funding through the use of SALW. This can take the form of KFR, taxation, extortion, armed robberies or trafficking in other illegal goods, persons, or contraband. Indirect financing of terrorism through SALW is thus linked to indirect use of SALW.
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Research has predominantly focussed on the acquisition of weapons and how they have been directly or indirectly used by terrorist groups. ICCT has taken a different approach and will focus on the hidden power of weapons and investigate the nexus between trafficking in SALW and terrorist financing. This topic is gaining traction, with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), now under the German Presidency, having also indicated its intention to focus on understanding the links between arms trafficking and terrorism financing over the next two years and strengthening its operational responses. This report contributes to raising the awareness and understanding of these connections and providing policy recommendations to identify, detect, prevent, and address these linkages. In this context, this study aims at enhancing our understanding of the use of SALW as a source of terrorism financing by answering the following series of research questions:

- (1) What are the characteristics of SALW possession and acquisition by terrorist organisations?
- (2) How do terrorist organisations use SALW to finance their activities?
- (3) What can be done to combat this phenomenon?

In light of the research focus of this study, the Middle East and West Africa have been selected by taking into account the availability of evidence-based research as well as ICCT's expertise and contact networks within each region. While exploring how terrorists are cashing in on SALW as a source of financing, this research also addresses the suitability of DDR processes to reduce the trafficking and possession of SALW by terrorist groups and looks at the existing legal and policy framework from an arm control perspective, organized crime perspective and the countering terrorist financing perspective. The report highlights the short- and long-term implications for the EU, as well as the role that the EU can play in combating this phenomenon. Therefore, due attention was also paid to the regional levels of terrorist threats, as well as the degree of exposure to risks and negative spill over effects of the acquisition and use of SALW as a source of finance by terrorist groups active within each region for the EU and its member states.

The Middle East has remained at the centre of global attention since the emergence of the self-proclaimed caliphate by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria in mid-2014, which has durably impacted the global terrorist landscape. Having become "the richest and most powerful terrorist group in contemporary history,"<sup>16</sup> ISIS has become a key subject for research on terrorist finance. Major attacks conducted within EU member states have moreover demonstrated the capability of violent extremist groups based in the Middle East to reach and inflict mass casualties within European countries. Moreover, debates and challenges posed by returning foreign fighters further underscores the importance of the region for EU security.

The proxy wars in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen have fuelled the conflicts with weapons, leading to large-scale transfers to violent-state actors. Although, the Saudi-Iranian rivalry has dominated the region, the United Arab Emirates and Turkey have also supplied SALW to non-state actors. While the Houthis have been equipped with weapons from Iran, both Saudi Arabia and the UAE have

16 Jessica Stern, "The World Is Fighting More Than ISIS." *The New York Times*, October 27, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/27/opinion/isis-al-baghdadi-dead.html>.

also indirectly armed violent extremist groups with weapons.<sup>17</sup> In Syria, both Iran and Saudi Arabia have been providing material support, including SALW, to opposing parties, with Iran backing sitting President Assad, and Saudi Arabia supporting rebel militants. Iran has also been the long-time ally and supporter of Hezbollah. Although the EU has only designated the military wing as a terrorist organisation, several countries within the EU such as the United Kingdom, Netherlands and Germany now consider the entire Hezbollah, including its political wing a terrorist organisation.<sup>18</sup>

West Africa has for its part witnessed increased terrorist violence in recent years, with Nigeria, Burkina Faso, and Mali all being among the four countries worst affected by terrorism deaths in 2019.<sup>19</sup> While terrorist organisations active in the subregion mainly operate locally, and have not conducted major attacks in Europe, the EU as a regional organisation and its Member States are individually engaged to varying degrees in security and development initiatives throughout the region, particularly in the Sahel. In addition to the successive French Operations of Serval and Barkhane, the international community's involvement has also taken the form of support to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the G5 Sahel Joint Forces, and the more recently launched Tabuka task force. The EU has moreover deployed a series of Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions in the region, including the European Union Training Mission (EUTM) Mali, the European Union Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP) Sahel Mali, and EUCAP Sahel Niger.

Despite the African Union's efforts to curb violence by "Silencing the Guns" on the continent by the year 2020,<sup>20</sup> including by addressing the issue of illicit arms trafficking and stopping "rebels/insurgents, non-state actors and their financiers and political backers from accessing weapons,"<sup>21</sup> around 50 million SALW are still believed to be in circulation across the continent, of which almost 80 percent are in the hands of civilians.<sup>22</sup> Within this broader context, West Africa seems to occupy a particular place as the subregion "concentrates the largest number (11 million) of—licit and illicit—civilian-held firearms on the continent."<sup>23</sup>

Building further upon ICCT's earlier series of situation reports,<sup>24</sup> complemented with semi-structured interviews with experts on a variety of SALW-related (sub)topics,<sup>25</sup> this research report presents

17 Kenneth Katzman, *Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies*. Congressional Research Service, April 29, 2020 (updated January 11, 2021). <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R44017.pdf>.

18 British Broadcasting Corporation. "Hezbollah: Germany Bans and Raids Islamic Group." *BBC News*, April 30, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52484247>.

19 Institute for Economics & Peace. *Global Terrorism Index 2020: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism*. Sydney. November 2020, p.12. <https://visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/GTI-2020-web-1.pdf>.

20 Wafula Okumu, Andrews Atta-Asamoah, and Roba D. Sharamo. *Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020: Achievements, Opportunities and Challenges*, ISS Monograph 203, August 2020. <https://issafrica.org/research/monographs/silencing-the-guns-in-africa-by-2020-achievements-opportunities-and-challenges>.

21 For more details, see the African Union Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by Year 2020 (Lusaka Master Roadmap 2016), available here: [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/38304-doc-1\\_au\\_roadmap\\_silencing\\_guns\\_2020\\_pdf\\_en.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/38304-doc-1_au_roadmap_silencing_guns_2020_pdf_en.pdf).

22 Small Arms Survey. *Weapons Compass. Mapping Illicit Small Arms Flows in Africa*. January 2019, p.31. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/U-Reports/SAS-AU-Weapons-Compass.pdf>.

23 Ibid.

24 Méryl Demuynck, Tanya Mehra, & Reinier Bergema. *The Use of Small Arms and Light Weapons by Terrorist Organisations as a Source of Finance in the Middle East and North Africa*. The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT). June 2020. <https://icct.nl/publication/icct-situation-report-the-use-of-small-arms-light-weapons-by-terroristorganisations-as-a-source-of-finance-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa/>; Méryl Demuynck, Tanya Mehra, & Reinier Bergema. *The Use of Small Arms and Light Weapons by Terrorist Organisations as a Source of Finance in South and Southeast Asia*. The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT). June 2020. <https://icct.nl/publication/icctsituation-report-the-use-of-small-arms-light-weapons-by-terrorist-organisations-as-a-source-of-finance-in-south-and-southeast-asia/>; Méryl Demuynck, Tanya Mehra, & Reinier Bergema. *The Use of Small Arms and Light Weapons by Terrorist Organisations as a Source of Finance in West Africa and the Horn of Africa*. The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT). July 2020. <https://icct.nl/publication/icct-situation-report-the-use-of-small-arms-light-weapons-by-terrorist-organisations-as-a-source-of-finance-in-west-africa-and-the-horn-of-africa/>; Colin P. Clarke, *Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) Trafficking, Smuggling, and Use for Criminality by Terrorists and Insurgents: A Brief Historical Overview*. The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT). July 2020. <https://icct.nl/publication/small-arms-and-light-weapon-brief-historical-overview/>; Reinier Bergema, Tanya Mehra, and Méryl Demuynck. *The Use of Small Arms and Light Weapons by Terrorist Organisations as a Source of Finance*. The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT). September 2020. <https://icct.nl/publication/the-use-of-salw-by-terrorist-organisations-as-a-source-of-finance/>.

25 Data discussed as part of this report stems from 22 semi-structured interviews conducted from October 2020 to January

the outcome of extensive research conducted on the use of the SALW as a source of financing by terrorist organisations in the Middle East and West Africa. Chapter 2 focuses on the series of research questions in the West African context. Chapter 3 will do the same but then for the Middle Eastern context. Chapter 4 explores how DDR programmes can address the illicit flows of arms and their possession by terrorist organisations who are engaged in an armed conflict. Building upon the findings of the two regional case studies, chapter 5 examines existing international and regional legal and policy frameworks from three different perspectives to prevent the acquisition and use of SALW by terrorist groups. Based on the empirical findings of chapters 2-4, chapter 6 discusses both the short- and long-term implications for the EU. Chapter 7 provides the main conclusions of this study, as well as a set of policy relevant observations.

The acquisition and subsequent direct and indirect use of SALW as a source of finance by terrorist organisations clearly have a devastating effect on peace and security. The findings of this report illustrate how terrorist groups can cash in on SALW, which not only prolongs conflicts but also undermines the long-term efforts to prevent and counter the spread of violent extremism. The EU is committed to promoting peace and stability in the Middle East and West Africa and should take their share of responsibilities in addressing the acquisition and subsequent direct and indirect use of SALW as a source of finance by terrorist organisations.

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2021 with experts coming from a variety of different backgrounds, including, but not limited to, researchers, analysts, government officials, and representatives of intergovernmental organisations. Interviewees were consulted on the basis of their regional (i.e., West Africa or Middle East) or topical expertise (e.g., characteristics of SALW possession and acquisition by terrorist organisations, use of SALW as a source of terrorist finance, implications for the EU, or disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes). To protect the identity of local interviewees, the data stemming from all interviews have been anonymised. This report moreover builds upon inputs provided by Conflict Armament Research (CAR) on the main types and origins of SALW used by terrorist and other non-state armed groups active in both researched regions, as well as the methods employed by these actors to procure SALW. These inputs were drafted by CAR experts based on the organisation's dataset specifically for the purpose of this research and appear as separate boxes throughout the report.

# West Africa

## 2.1. Introduction

From the Mano River wars to the successive Tuareg rebellions, West Africa<sup>26</sup> has been host to multiple conflicts over the past decades.<sup>27</sup> Prone to socio-political instability and post-electoral tensions, weak government structures have been regularly challenged by attempted and successful coups d'état,<sup>28</sup> with the latest example taking place in Mali in August 2020.<sup>29</sup> Economic hardship, unemployment and social inequalities, poor or deficient governance in peripheral regions, and subsequent grievances against central states, among other factors, have allowed for the seeds of further violence to be sown. More recently, particularly since the eruption of the Malian crisis in early 2012, the sub-region has attracted increased global attention due to the emergence of a myriad of non-state armed groups, including various al-Qaeda and Islamic State-affiliated terrorist organisations. From its first emergence in the early 2000s, terrorist violence has both intensified and continued to spread across West Africa, currently stretching from the Sahel to the Lake Chad Basin, while increasingly threatening to expand throughout coastal States of the Gulf of Guinea.<sup>30</sup>

More specifically, the Sahel has been faced with the presence of two main terrorist networks. While all main al-Qaida-affiliated organisations, including al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), al-Mourabitoun, Ansar Dine, and the Katiba Macina, have regrouped in March 2017 under the umbrella of the *Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin* (JNIM) led by the former Tuareg rebel Iyad Ag Ghali, the region has also witnessed the emergence of an IS' affiliate created in 2015 under the name of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). Since then, the Sahel has recorded the most dramatic increase in terrorist violence on the continent, with attacks having multiplied sevenfold between mid-2017 and mid-2020.<sup>31</sup> Once confined in Northern Mali, the terrorist threat has moreover spread to the central regions of the country, as well as neighbouring Niger and Burkina Faso, the latter having suffered from the largest increase (by 590 percent) in terrorist casualties globally between 2018 and 2019.<sup>32</sup>

Further eastward, countries of the Lake Chad region have for their part been confronted with the rise

26 While West Africa refers to ECOWAS member states (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo) and Mauritania, this report will place particular emphasis on the two areas which have been the most affected by terrorism in recent years, namely the Western Sahel (including Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger) and the Lake Chad Basin (Nigeria, Niger as well as Cameroon and Chad).

27 For more information on past conflicts in West Africa, see: Nancy Annan, "Violent Conflicts and Civil Strife in West Africa: Causes, Challenges and Prospects," *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 3(1): 3, 2014, pp. 1-16. <https://www.stabilityjournal.org/articles/10.5334/sta.da/#>; Ilmari Käihkö, "Constructing war in West Africa (and beyond)," *Comparative Strategy*, 37: 5, 2018, pp. 485-501. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/01495933.2018.1526587?needAccess=true>; Olivier Walther, "Wars and conflicts in the Sahara-Sahel", *West African Papers N°10*, OECD Publishing, September 2017. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/8bbc5813-en.pdf?expires=1604923535&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=D7B23D72087E86C3F2009A628E79AD80>.

28 For more detailed data on attempted and successful coups d'état in the region since the early days of the independence, see: Jonathan Powell and Clayton Thyne. 2011. Global Instances of Coups from 1950-Present. *Journal of Peace Research* 48(2):249-259. <https://www.jonathanmpowell.com/coup-detat-dataset.html#>.

29 Notable examples of past coups taking place in the region led to the fall of Burkinabe regime of Blaise Compaoré in 2015 and the Malian regime of Amadou Toumani Touré in Mali in 2012. For more information on the 2020 Mali's coup and its potential implications for the country and the broader region, see: Robert, A-C. "Au Mali, coup d'Etat dans un pays sans Etat," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, October 2020, pp.4-5. <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2020/10/ROBERT/623gadd16>; Danielle Paquette, "Mali coup opens power vacuum as Islamist insurgency expands in West Africa," *The Washington Post*, August 19, 2020. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/mutinuous-soldiers-who-ousted-malis-president-say-new-election-is-coming-soon/2020/08/19/05eb7c10-e213-11ea-ade1-28daf1a5e919\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/mutinuous-soldiers-who-ousted-malis-president-say-new-election-is-coming-soon/2020/08/19/05eb7c10-e213-11ea-ade1-28daf1a5e919_story.html); Bisa Williams and John Goodman, "Mali's Coup Could Destabilize the Sahel: Why a Fraying Peace Deal Is the Country's Best Hope," *Foreign Affairs*, August 27, 2020. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/2020-08-27/malis-coup-could-destabilize-sahel>.

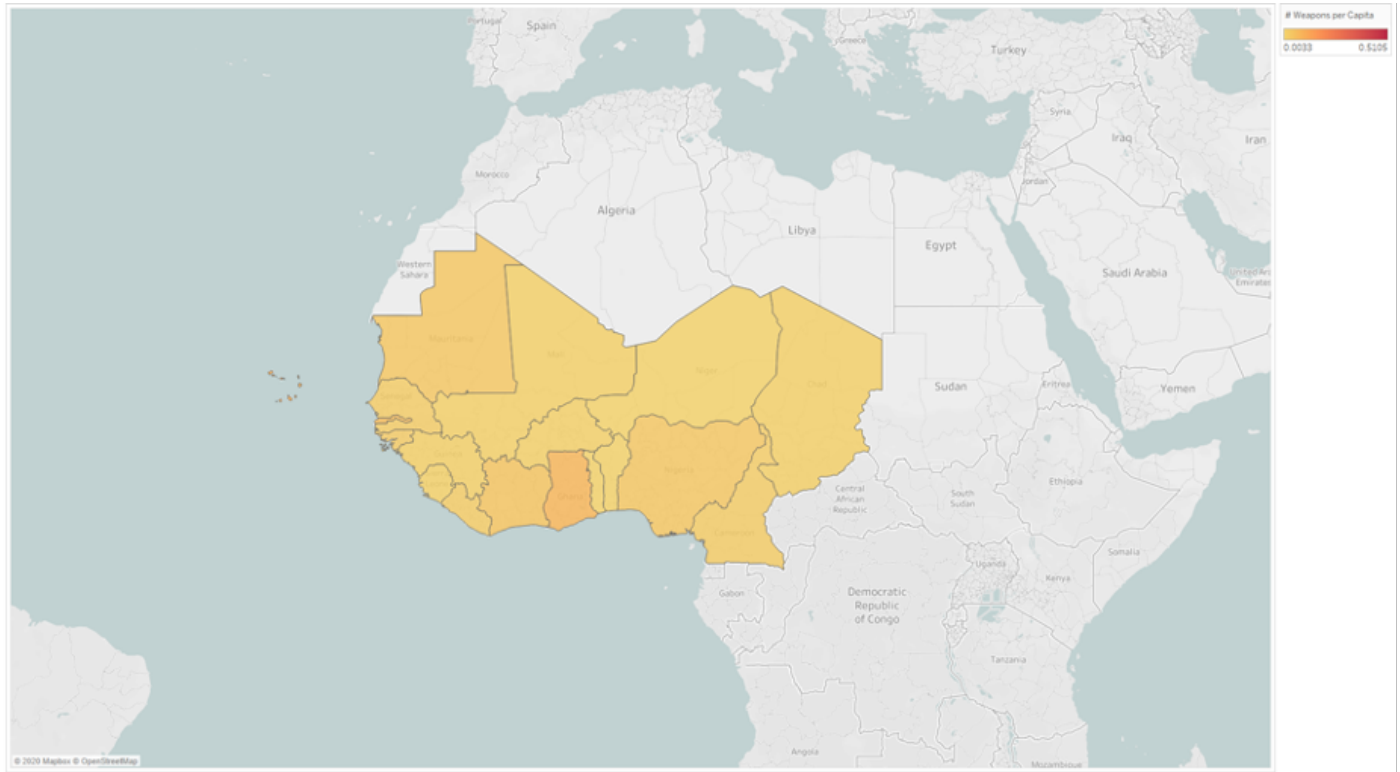
30 International Crisis Group. *The Risk of Jihadist Contagion in West Africa*, Africa Briefing N°149, December 20, 2019. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/c%C3%B4te-divoire/b149-lafrique-de-louest-face-au-risque-de-contagion-jihadiste>.

31 Africa Center for Strategic Studies. "African Militant Islamist Groups Set Record for Violent Activity," *Infographic*, July 21, 2020. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/african-militant-islamist-groups-new-record-violent-activity/>.

32 Institute for Economics & Peace. *Global Terrorism Index 2020: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism*, Sydney, November 2020, p.4. <https://visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/GTI-2020-web-1.pdf>.



of the Nigeria-based *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad*, known as Boko Haram.<sup>33</sup> Rebranding itself the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) following Abubakar Shekau's pledge of allegiance to IS central, the group split into two factions in August 2016—with Abu Musab al-Barnawi becoming the new ISWAP leader, and Shekau founding its own splinter faction.<sup>34</sup> Ranked as the second most lethal terrorist group globally in 2019, casualties and incidents attributed to Boko Haram have both increased by more than 40 percent as compared to 2018.<sup>35</sup> While still conducting most of its attacks in Nigeria, Boko Haram also operates in neighbouring countries such as Cameroon, Niger, and to a lesser extent Chad, which have all recorded an increase in deaths caused by the groups' activities in 2019.<sup>36</sup>



**Figure 1.** Number of SALW per capita in West Africa.<sup>37</sup>

The security landscape has thus significantly transformed over recent years but, “while the causes of conflicts in the continent and the factors driving them have changed, the use of small arms and light weapons (SALW) has remained a common feature of these conflicts.”<sup>38</sup> West Africa seems to occupy a particular place on the continent as the subregion “concentrates the largest number (11 million) of - licit and illicit - civilian-held firearms on the continent,”<sup>39</sup> heterogeneously dispersed, with Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire accounting for approximately 6 million and 1 million respectively of these civilian-held arms.<sup>40</sup> Even more problematic is the fact that many are illicitly acquired,<sup>41</sup> including by individuals,

33 For a more detailed overview of the history, structure and strategies of the organisation, see: Jacob Zenn. (ed.) *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa's Enduring Insurgency*. Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, May 2018. <https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Boko-Haram-Beyond-the-Headlines.pdf>.

34 Shekau's faction adopted the original denomination of Boko Haram, *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad* (JAS), while al-Barnawi's group is still known as ISWAP. The following analysis will however use, for the sake of clarity, the more common appellation “Boko Haram” to refer to both factions.

35 Institute for Economics & Peace. *Global Terrorism Index 2020: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism*, p.14.

36 Ibid., p.16.

37 Small Arms Survey, *Global Firearms Holdings*, June 2018, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/weapons-and-markets/tools/global-firearms-holdings.html>

38 Small Arms Survey. *Weapons Compass. Mapping Illicit Small Arms Flows in Africa*. January 2019, p.18. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/U-Reports/SAS-AU-Weapons-Compass.pdf>.

39 Ibid., 31.

40 Arnaud Jouve, “Sahel : d'où viennent les armes et les munitions ?” *RFI*, April 9, 2020. <http://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20200409-sahel-do%C3%B9-viennent-les-armes-et-les-munitions>.

41 Ibid.

bandits, self-defence militias, criminal gangs, as well as violent extremist actors.

The emergence of diverse terrorist and other non-state armed groups, and the subsequent deterioration of the security environment have initiated a vicious cycle through which mounting violence boosts the demand for and uncontrolled circulation of SALW, which in turn increases the lethality and damages caused by violent conflicts. The increasing threat to regional peace and stability, has led to the deployment of various interventions, including the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the successive French Operations of Serval and Barkhane, the G5 Sahel Joint Forces, and the more recently launched Takuba forces.<sup>42</sup> It has moreover exacerbated and contributed to a “weaponization” of intra and intercommunal tensions, including longstanding tensions between sedentary farmers and (semi-) nomadic herders, while prompting the development of diverse vigilante groups and self-defence militias.

Based on an extensive review of past research, combined with primary data collected through a series of interviews, this chapter will thus explore (2.2) the characteristics of terrorist organisations’ possession and acquisition of SALW in West Africa, as well as (2.3) the role of these SALW in violent extremist group’s financing strategies. In line with the research focus, and while taking into consideration the broader West African regional context, this chapter will place particular emphasis on the two areas most affected by terrorist presence and activity within the subregion—i.e., the Sahel, which notably includes the tri-border area between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, and the Lake Chad Basin.

## 2.2. SALW possession and acquisition by terrorist organisations

As in other places across the globe, SALW seem to have become “the weapons of choice of many terrorist groups [...] as they are cheap and easy to access, transfer, hide and use.”<sup>43</sup> All experts interviewed as part of this research confirmed that the bulk of armament possessed and used by violent extremist groups operating throughout the subregion is composed of SALW. This section will thus explore (2.2.1) the different types of SALW predominantly used by terrorist organisations active in West Africa, as well as (2.2.2) the acquisition modes allowing these groups to build, and continue complementing, their arsenals.

### 2.2.1. Types of SALW possessed by terrorist organisations

Terrorist groups active in West Africa are mainly equipped with varied types of industrially manufactured SALW,<sup>44</sup> predominantly with automatic assault rifles. Other types of SALW described in the following sections either represent secondary sources, such as artisanal weapons which may in some cases represent a ‘second choice’, or avenues for further research as in the case of converted firearms for which no evidence points out yet to their use by terrorist groups.

#### An extensive use of industrial types of SALW

Automatic assault rifles seem to hold a predominant place within West African terrorist groups’ arsenals, with all experts consulted referring specifically to AK-patterns as the most commonly-used equipment—representing up to 95 percent of all automatic assault rifles in circulation in the Sahel.<sup>45</sup> According to information provided by Conflict Armament Research (CAR), violent extremist groups’ arsenals are further complemented with other military-type weapons, ranging from small to medium-

42 Anna Schmauder, Zoe Gorman and Flore Berger, “Takuba: A New Coalition for the Sahel,” *Clingendael Institute*, (June 30, 2020), <https://spectator.clingendael.org/en/publication/takuba-new-coalition-sahel>.

43 Opening Remarks by Mr. Vladimir Voronkov Under-Secretary-General, UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, at the Launching event of the Project on Addressing the terrorism-arms-crime nexus, held at the UN headquarters on February 21, 2020. <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/cct/terrorism-arms-crime-nexus>.

44 Arnaud Jouve, “Sahel : d’où viennent les armes et les munitions ?” *RFI*, April 9, 2020, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20200409-sahel-doù-viennent-les-armes-et-les-munitions>.

45 Ibid.

calibre machineguns to rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) launchers, and related ammunition (see Box 1).<sup>46</sup> In line with general trends observed on the continent, most of these weapons remain “cold war era models and makes,”<sup>47</sup> notably produced in China, Russia and the former Soviet Union.<sup>48</sup> CAR notes however that years of production of AK assault rifles seized in the region range from 1951 to as recently as 2017.<sup>49</sup> While SALW compose the large majority of their equipment, some interviewees however underlined the possession of a limited set of heavy weapons, such as large calibre mortars, “tanks or at least armoured vehicles.”<sup>50</sup>

### **Box 1** Types and origins of SALW used by terrorist groups (Source: CAR dataset)<sup>51</sup>

The weapons used by/seized from West African terrorist and other non-state armed groups correspond to military-type, small and medium calibre infantry weapons, essentially encompassing assault rifles, machineguns, rocket and grenade launchers, and related ammunition. This typology of materiel faithfully mirrors what is used by domestic security and defence forces in the region. Based on CAR’s dataset, the most common types of SALW employed by these groups include:

**AK-pattern assault rifles (7.62 x 39 mm):** This category represents by far the most common weapon employed by terrorist groups operating in West Africa. CAR’s global dataset contains thousands of AK-pattern rifles from various manufacturing states and ranging from production in 1951 to as recently as 2017. In West Africa, the majority of these weapons are of Chinese manufacture (34 percent), followed closely by Russia and the former Soviet Union (29 percent), and then thirdly from a variety of states, including Bulgaria, Egypt, Hungary, Iran, Iraq, Poland, Romania, and Serbia, to name but a few.

**Machine guns:** Small to medium-calibre machineguns represent a significantly smaller proportion compared to AK-pattern weapons but are nonetheless frequently seized from terrorist groups. Machineguns used in West Africa are primarily Soviet-origin weapons and their copies made by other countries such as those listed above. These weapons are most commonly chambered in 7.62 x 39 mm, 7.62 x 54R mm, and 12.7 x 108 mm.

**Rocket-propelled grenade launchers:** As with machine guns, rocket-propelled grenade launchers such as the Soviet-manufactured RPG-7 and its variants made by many of the countries listed above, represent a significantly smaller proportion compared to AK-pattern weapons but are nonetheless frequently seized from terrorist groups.

**Sniper/designated marksman rifles, handguns, and submachine guns:** These types of weapons are seized relatively infrequently from terrorist groups. The majority of designated marksman rifles that CAR has documented in West Africa have been traced back to exports from Eastern European countries to Libya in the late 1970s.

Regarding heavy weapons, while large calibre autocannons such as the ZU-23-2 have historically been employed by terrorist groups, CAR has not documented any in the West Africa region to date. Similarly, terrorist groups in Mali have increasingly employed large calibre mortars, but these weapons (aside from the mortar rounds themselves), do not figure in CAR’s dataset to date. CAR has however documented several 122 mm rockets which are often employed in an improvised manner by terrorist groups operating in northern Mali.

Overall, no major difference was observed between the types of SALW possessed by various terrorist organisations active across the subregion, neither between terror groups operating in the same geographical area nor between those present in the Sahel and the Lake Chad basin. The only noticeable difference lies in the origins of the armament, with for instance, one interviewee explaining

46 These inputs were drafted by CAR experts based on the organisation’s dataset specifically for the purpose of this research and appear as separate boxes throughout the report.

47 Small Arms Survey. *Weapons Compass. Mapping Illicit Small Arms Flows in Africa*. January 2019, p.16, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/U-Reports/SAS-AU-Weapons-Compass.pdf>.

48 Interview, international arms expert based in Europe.

49 Inputs provided by CAR for the purpose of this research.

50 Interview, international arms expert based in Europe.

51 CAR’s West Africa dataset consists of several thousand weapons and items of ammunition documented across the region.

The majority of the data pertaining specifically to materiel seized from terrorist groups has been collected in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, which therefore serve as the primary basis for the below observations and analysis. CAR’s dataset includes materiel seized from terrorist groups such as Al-Mourabitoune, the *Front de libération du Macina* (FLM), Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM), Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), and Boko Haram and its offshoot groups. Non-state armed groups such as the *Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad* (MNLA) or *Groupe autodéfense touareg Imghad et alliés* (GATIA), among others, largely use the same type of materiel as terrorist groups and have therefore also been included in some of the analysis.

that, because “the Lake Chad Basin has a different set of influencers, connections, loyalties and networks [...] more Sudanese-sourced ammunition and small arms” are in circulation in this area as compared to the Sahel region.<sup>52</sup> Other minor variations in the models of SALW stem from the differences in the equipment used by national security and defence forces from which these groups capture weaponry. Finally, the size of their arsenals naturally depends on the size of the organisation considered, with smaller cells like Ansarul Islam possessing smaller quantities than larger terrorist networks.<sup>53</sup> According to CAR’s data, no major discrepancy between arms used by terrorist and other non-state armed groups can be observed (see Box 2).

### **Box 2 Differences between groups, evolutions, and trends (Source: CAR dataset)**

Despite the numerous terrorist and non-state armed groups operating in West Africa, CAR’s dataset does not indicate any discernible difference in the typology of SALW employed between different groups (between non-state and terrorist groups, or between terrorist groups themselves). This is largely because both types of groups depend on acquiring SALW from defence and security forces, meaning the materiel available to them is largely homogenous. While terrorist groups often employ different *modi operandi* than other armed groups, the conventional SALW in their possession is largely the same. Similarly, over the last decade, the typology of weapons and ammunition observed remains largely unchanged in the region as a whole. This is likely the result of how defence and security forces in the region have continued to use the same types of weapons over time.

### **A limited use of craft-produced SALW: an ‘entry-level’ or ‘second-best’ option?**

Illicit arm flows in West Africa are also fuelled by craft-produced SALW,<sup>54</sup> which encompass “weapons and ammunition produced largely by hand and in relatively small quantities”<sup>55</sup> often “outside of state control.”<sup>56</sup> The artisanal production of firearms is indeed a widespread practice in the subregion, where blacksmiths are reportedly able to craft “from rudimentary pistols and 12-gauge hunting rifles to more sophisticated weapons like submachine guns”<sup>57</sup> and assault rifles.<sup>58</sup> Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone were often mentioned by interviewees among the sources for these types of weapons.<sup>59</sup>

52 Interview, international arms expert based in Europe.

53 Interview, national stakeholder based in Burkina Faso.

54 Small Arms Survey. *Weapons Compass. Mapping Illicit Small Arms Flows in Africa*. January 2019, p.57, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/U-Reports/SAS-AU-Weapons-Compass.pdf>.

55 Nicolas Florquin, “Les filières multiples du trafic des armes légères,” *Diplomatie*, n° 92, mai-juin 2018, pp.56-57. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2018/Diplomatie-no-92-Les-filieres-multiples-du-traffic-des%20armes-legeres.pdf>.

56 Nicolas Florquin. *Linking P/CVE & Illicit Arms Flows in Africa*, RESOLVE Policy Note, Community-Based Armed Groups Series, November 2019, p.3. [https://resolvenet.org/system/files/2020-06/RSVE\\_PolicyNote\\_Florquin\\_Nov2019.pdf](https://resolvenet.org/system/files/2020-06/RSVE_PolicyNote_Florquin_Nov2019.pdf)

57 Small Arms Survey. *Weapons Compass. Mapping Illicit Small Arms Flows in Africa*. January 2019, p.16, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/U-Reports/SAS-AU-Weapons-Compass.pdf>.

58 Arnaud Jouve, “Sahel : d’où viennent les armes et les munitions ?” *RFI*, April 9, 2020, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20200409-sahel-dou-viennent-les-armes-et-les-munitions>.

59 Roberto Sollazzo and Matthias Nowak. *Tri-border Transit: Trafficking and Smuggling in the Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire-Mali Region*, Small Arms Survey, Briefing Paper, October 2020, p.13. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SAS-SANA-BP-Triborder-Transit.pdf>



**Figure 2.** Craft-produced SALW confiscated by the Nigerian Army in 2016.<sup>60</sup>

Artisanal SALW fuel a large array of non-state actors, such as road bandits, cattle thieves, criminals, and local community-based self-defence militias which proliferate across the region,<sup>61</sup> including traditional Dozo hunters or Koglweogo groups.<sup>62</sup> However, and unlike some organisations which have relied heavily on “the production - sometimes quasi-industrial - of an impressive array of small arms and light weapons to strengthen their arsenals,”<sup>63</sup> such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia or the Irish Republican Army, craft-production does not seem to be a primary source for terrorists operating in West Africa.<sup>64</sup>

Some interviewees nevertheless underlined occasional appearances of such handcrafted weaponry in pictures and video footage of terrorist attacks conducted in the Sahel theatre,<sup>65</sup> but also in the Lake Chad basin,<sup>66</sup> which might point to “a mix in terms of armament of these groups.”<sup>67</sup> This confirms past research highlighting that “craft firearms have also been found in the hands of violent extremist groups such as Boko Haram.”<sup>68</sup> It appears that “not all Boko Haram members have a weapon, some are only armed with old bolt-action rifles or craft weapons, and ammunition is in short supply.”<sup>69</sup> Craft-produced firearms may thus represent a ‘second-best’ option for terrorist organisations.

It should nevertheless be reminded that, given the fluidity of the affiliations and the fact that terrorist groups have often resorted to ‘ad hoc’ fighters to carry out large-scale attacks,<sup>70</sup> artisanal weapons may not be part of the core groups’ arsenal. Because they are relatively easy to procure as compared to more sophisticated weaponry, artisanal SALW may initially help terrorist groups building up their stockpiles, as explained by an interviewee: “because they are in an opportunist mode, they may

60 “Eleven Soldiers killed, one missing” *The Guardian*, August 7, 2016, <https://guardian.ng/news/eleven-soldiers-killed-one-missing/>; Vadana Felbab-Brown and James J.F. Forest, “Political Violence and the Illicit Economies of West Africa,” *Brookings Scholars*, November 15, 2012, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/political-violence-and-the-illicit-economies-of-west-africa/>.

61 Arnaud Jouve, “Sahel : d’où viennent les armes et les munitions ?” *RFI*, April 9, 2020, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20200409-sahel-doù-viennent-les-armes-et-les-munitions>.

62 Roberto Sollazzo and Matthias Nowak. *Tri-border Transit: Trafficking and Smuggling in the Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire-Mali Region*, Small Arms Survey, Briefing Paper, October 2020, p.13. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SAS-SANA-BP-Triborder-Transit.pdf>

63 Nicolas Florquin, “Les filières multiples du trafic des armes légères,” *Diplomatie*, n° 92, mai-juin 2018, pp.56-57. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2018/Diplomatie-no-92-Les-filieres-multiples-du-traffic-des%20armes-legeres.pdf>.

64 Arnaud Jouve, “Sahel : d’où viennent les armes et les munitions ?” *RFI*, April 9, 2020, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20200409-sahel-doù-viennent-les-armes-et-les-munitions>.

65 Interview, local researcher based in Côte d’Ivoire.

66 Interview, international arms expert based in Europe.

67 Interview, local researcher based in Côte d’Ivoire.

68 Nicolas Florquin. *Linking P/CVE & Illicit Arms Flows in Africa*, RESOLVE Policy Note, Community-Based Armed Groups Series, November 2019, p.2. [https://resolvenet.org/system/files/2020-06/RSVE\\_PolicyNote\\_Florquin\\_Nov2019.pdf](https://resolvenet.org/system/files/2020-06/RSVE_PolicyNote_Florquin_Nov2019.pdf).

69 Savannah de Tessières. *At the crossroads of Sahelian conflicts: insecurity, terrorism, and arms trafficking in Niger*. Small Arms Survey Report, January 2018, p.57. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/?highlight=sana-niger.html>.

70 International Centre for Counter-Terrorism. “Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State: Competition or Cooperation in Western Sahel,” *Live Briefing*, March 26, 2020. <https://icct.nl/event/icctlivebriefing-26-march-2020/>.

use one shotgun to get a more powerful weapon and build up their military capacity, but it is not something that they go after and definitely not something that they rely regularly on.”<sup>71</sup> Along the same line, these arms could represent an ‘entry-level’ equipment for individuals who plan to join terrorist groups but do not benefit yet from the right connections, as suggested by another expert:

*“My sense is that it is not a necessary source. It might rather be a source for affiliated cells which are not necessarily yet well-connected with the centralised hierarchy. These will most probably, at the beginning, use these types of weapons that are the easiest available. [...] It seems that the access to more sophisticated weapons, including assault rifles, is a bit more complicated and requires some level of connection with criminal or terrorist organisations and their networks, which is not always easy to create. So I wonder if it is like an ‘entry-level’ first step to get a craft-produced weapon because this is what is available, and it allows to attack a gendarme and steal his rifle, and then move on to the next step.”*

**International arms expert based in Europe**

## The specific case of improvised explosive devices (IEDs)

A noticeable exception to the limited use of handmade weapons relates to terrorist organisations’ use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). Although at a smaller scale than ISIS, violent extremist groups also seem to have increasingly relied on IEDs throughout West Africa. In Nigeria, Boko Haram is believed to have produced home-made explosives in local workshops in Bauchi State, North-eastern Nigeria<sup>72</sup>—a region where, according to UNHCR data, “some 230 people were killed by IEDs and more than 300 injured in 2019.”<sup>73</sup> In the Sahel, the use of such devices is “a rising trend,”<sup>74</sup> with several interviewees describing it as the main evolution in terms of terrorist groups’ equipment in recent years.

*“It has increased as one of the modes of action of the groups labelled as terrorists in Mali, particularly in the centre, and increasingly also in Burkina Faso, in the Eastern and Sahel regions.”*

**Local researcher based in Côte d’Ivoire**

Burkina Faso has, for instance, suffered from around 90 IED incidents since early 2016, with a significant increase recorded over the past two years.<sup>75</sup> In Niger, while they had previously mainly been deployed by Boko Haram in the Eastern Diffa region, research has showed that IED usage has extended to the western regions of Tillabéri and Tahoua where ISGS is currently active (see Figure 3).<sup>76</sup> Interviewees based in Mali and Burkina Faso also underlined the increased use, in addition to victim-operated devices, of more sophisticated remote-controlled IEDs, “which means that there is a more frequent use of these IEDs in the city, and no longer only on the main supply axes.”<sup>77</sup> It should finally be noted that the use of IEDs has also taken the form of suicide vehicle-borne explosive devices (SVBIEDs).<sup>78</sup>

71 Interview, international arms expert based in Europe.

72 Small Arms Survey. “Weapons Compass. Mapping Illicit Small Arms Flows in Africa,” January 2019, p.57; See also: Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa (GABIA). *The Nexus between Small Arms and Light Weapons and Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing in West Africa*. Report, 2013.

73 UNHCR. “Landmines, improvised explosive devices pose deadly risks for displaced in Sahel and Lake Chad,” July 28, 2020. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2020/7/5f1fccbe4/landmines-improvised-explosive-devices-pose-deadly-risks-displaced-sahel.html>.

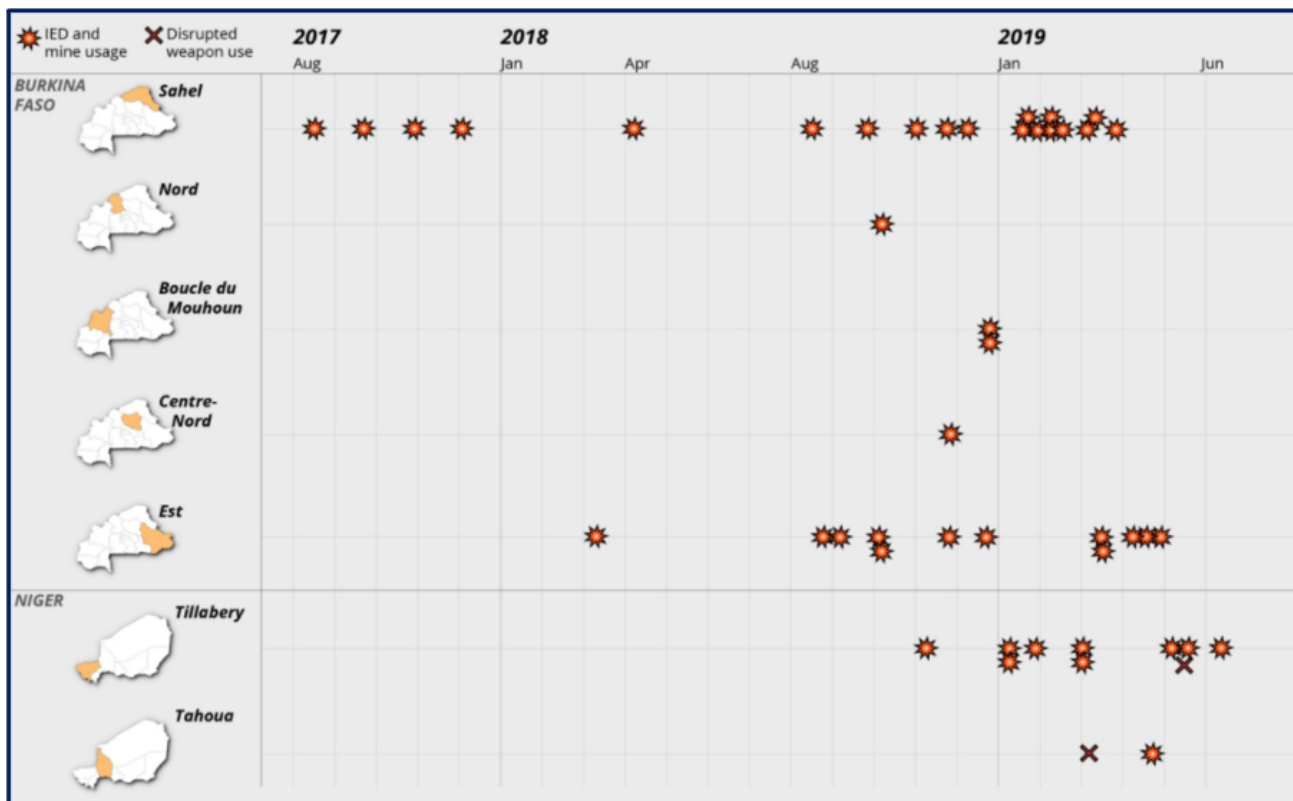
74 Ibid.

75 UNMAS, “Burkina Faso,” January 13, 2020. <https://www.unmas.org/en/programmes/burkina-faso>.

76 ACLED, “Explosive Developments: The Growing Threat of IEDs in Western Niger,” 2019. <https://acleddata.com/2019/06/19/explosive-developments-the-growing-threat-of-ieds-in-western-niger/>.

77 Interview, international stakeholder based in Mali.

78 ACLED, “Explosive Developments: The Growing Threat of IEDs in Western Niger,” June 19, 2019. <https://acleddata.com/2019/06/19/explosive-developments-the-growing-threat-of-ieds-in-western-niger/>.



**Figure 3.** This graph demonstrates the increasing usage of IEDs in Burkina Faso and Western Niger between August 2017 and June 2019.<sup>79</sup>

### Converted SALW: a rising threat?

A significant increase in the use of converted firearms, which refer to “alarm weapons - i.e., designed to fire only blank cartridges - or neutralised weapons that have been illegally modified to allow them to fire live ammunition”<sup>80</sup>, has been witnessed worldwide in recent years, mainly as a result of their use in high-profile attacks in Europe. However, the proliferation of converted weaponry is increasingly noticeable in other parts of the world, including in West Africa.<sup>81</sup> As Turkish-made blank-firing weapons “started flooding the civilian Libyan market after the revolution, [...] this type of materiel has also been smuggled further afield from Libya to illicit markets in Egypt, Niger, and Tunisia.”<sup>82</sup> An arms expert indeed confirmed that “non-negligible volumes” of blank pistols are currently in circulation throughout West Africa, specifying that “the proportion of those that are actually converted is very limited.”<sup>83</sup> It appeared, for instance, that “informal gold diggers in northern Niger resorted to [...] converted imitation handguns smuggled from Libya.”<sup>84</sup> The extent to which terrorist organisations, more particularly, rely on such materiel however remains unknown, but seems rather unlikely for a number of reasons both linked to the wide availability of ‘real’ weapons across their operational areas, and to these groups’ modes of action:

*“Converted weapons are not assault rifles, but rather single-shot or, at times, repeating handguns. They are more useful for targeted assassination or intimidation, rather than for a military operation per se. [...] Generally speaking, when there is easy access to real weaponry,*

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Nicolas Florquin, “Les filières multiples du trafic des armes légères,” *Diplomatie*, n° 92, mai-juin 2018, p 57. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2018/Diplomatie-no-92-Les-filieres-multiples-du-traffic-des%20armes-legeres.pdf>.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Savannah de Tessières. *At the crossroads of Sahelian conflicts: insecurity, terrorism, and arms trafficking in Niger*. Small Arms Survey Report, January 2018, p.46. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/?highlight-sana-niger.html>.

<sup>83</sup> Interview, international arms expert based in Europe.

<sup>84</sup> Nicolas Florquin. *Linking P/CVE & Illicit Arms Flows in Africa*, RESOLVE Policy Note, Community-Based Armed Groups Series, November 2019, p.3. [https://resolvenet.org/system/files/2020-06/RSVE\\_PolicyNote\\_Florquin\\_Nov2019.pdf](https://resolvenet.org/system/files/2020-06/RSVE_PolicyNote_Florquin_Nov2019.pdf)

*this type of thing normally remains rather secondary.”*

International arms expert based in Europe

## 2.2.2. The acquisition of SALW by terrorist organisations

As underlined by an interviewed international arms expert, and confirmed by CAR data (see Box 3), it clearly appears that “most of the weapons that terrorist groups use are either legacy of older conflicts that happened in the region, or the effect of diversion of much more recent and ongoing conflicts.”<sup>85</sup> Alongside rather marginal supply sources, such as the procurement of non-military equipment on local illicit markets, the large majority of the equipment used by violent extremist organisations operating in West Africa, both in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin, have indeed been diverted from state stockpiles through different processes.<sup>86</sup>

### **Box 3** Origin of SALW and methods of diversion (Source: CAR dataset)

Based on CAR’s West Africa dataset, weapons and ammunition used by terrorist and non-state armed groups can be categorised in to four major groups:

**Materiel originating from immediately available State-owned inventories, through diversion from national security and defence forces:** Diversion from armed forces and security entities’ stockpiles correspond to different mechanisms including battlefield capture by the enemy (raids and ambushes), other forms of unintentional losses, or intentional diversion from military personnel. The procurement of such materiel by armed groups is achieved at short-range and conducted in an opportunistic manner. Approximately 15 percent of the weapons and 40 percent of the ammunition in CAR’s dataset related to armed extremist groups in the Lake Chad region, which for instance, can be connected to national stockpiles from countries sharing the Lake’s shores (Nigeria, Niger, Chad). In CAR’s dataset approximately 20 percent of the weapons used to conduct terrorist attacks or seized in counter-terrorist operations in Burkina Faso were generated from the national inventories of Burkina Faso and Mali.

**Materiel resulting from the legacy of previous regional conflicts:** The vast majority, not to say the totality of military type materiel, also originates from the initially State-owned inventories of countries that experienced armed conflicts such as Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia, or Libya. The geographical dissemination of these stocks over time does not, however, necessarily suggest that the weapons were recently diverted, nor the existence of direct flows from the national stockpiles to the extremist armed groups currently operating in West Africa. The procurement of such equipment by armed groups is achieved at a longer-range (when compared to the previous mechanism) and appears to concern smaller volumes of weapons and ammunition. 15 percent of the weapons used to conduct terrorist attacks or seized in counter-terrorist operations in Burkina Faso in CAR’s dataset, for instance, originated from the national stockpiles of Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia, or Libya.

**Commercially available materiel:** This category mainly includes non-military equipment (handguns and shotguns), explosives and related items. The procurement of such materiel by armed groups is achieved at short-range and relies on the presence of immediately available illicit markets, supplied through various diversion mechanisms (from long-range illicit smuggling, as observed in 2017 between Turkey and Nigeria, to illicit local trade or individual thefts/losses). However, these items represent a limited proportion of the materiel used by (or seized from) armed groups operating in West Africa, as armed groups mostly operate with military-type weapons and ammunition.

**Materiel that cannot be traced** (because of obliterated marks, age or lack of cooperation from the manufacturing/exporting countries): When looking at West African armed/terrorist groups, this equipment essentially includes military-type infantry weapons (as discussed above) and related ammunition (most of the time documented without packaging). Although it is nearly impossible to determine from where this materiel was diverted, they almost certainly also originate from State-owned inventories (whether from the immediate region or more distant states). Weapons with obliterated serial numbers only represent a small proportion of those CAR has documented in relation to terrorist groups—less than 3 percent of the Burkina Faso database, for instance.

85 Interview, international arms expert based in Europe.

86 For a more detailed typology of diversion, see: Conflict Armament Research. “Typology of Diversion: A statistical analysis of weapon diversion documented by Conflict Armament Research,” *Diversion Digest, Issue 1*, August 2018. <https://www.conflictarm.com/digests/diversion-digest-issue-1/>.



## From wars to wars: legacy of previous conflicts

One particularity of arms lies in their longevity and their subsequent ability to remain in circulation for a long period of time, with “illicit flows of SALW therefore organis[ing] the movement of weapons from one conflict system to another over time.”<sup>87</sup> While such dynamics have been observed in various regions, notably in Afghanistan, Iraq or Somalia,<sup>88</sup> they seem to have also played a key role in the illicit proliferation of arms across West Africa. Though most of the SALW “were introduced to Africa in the 1970s and 1980s, in the midst of the Cold War, by the major powers in order to support their allies – or proxies – on the continent [...], at the end of the Cold War several factors, including the collapse of many of those states, the outbreak of civil wars and widespread corruption, contributed to the rise of illegal weapons trafficking.”<sup>89</sup> Such a context has facilitated arm transfers, and provided terrorist groups with a first type of supply sources.<sup>90</sup>

*“There are all the weapons that are already there as a result of the various rebellions and civil wars. In Côte d’Ivoire, there has been a proliferation of small arms as a result of the decade of military-political crisis from 2002 to 2010. Some of these weapons have been recovered, but some are still circulating.”*

### Local researcher based in Côte d’Ivoire

Over the past two decades, illicit SALW circulating throughout West Africa have indeed been fuelled by equipment diverted in the aftermaths of diverse conflicts, including weapons left over from previous rebellions in Mali and Niger, as well as civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d’Ivoire.<sup>91</sup> The Ivorian case provides a particularly telling example of the impact that a localised conflict can have on the proliferation of arms across a broader region. Although subject to UN arms embargo at the time,<sup>92</sup> significant flows of SALW originating from neighbouring Burkina Faso found their way into the arsenals of northern Ivorian rebel movements during the conflict.<sup>93</sup> In the aftermath, significant quantities of arms had been accumulated, and important illegal transfers were organised by zone commanders of Ivorian northern regions to Mali and Niger.<sup>94</sup> In spite of the implementation of a DDR programme following the crisis, a large number has continued to circulate throughout the subregion,<sup>95</sup> and were eventually “found in the stocks of Malian and Burkinabe armed groups.”<sup>96</sup>

87 Mattias Nowak, “Enjeux du trafic d’armes : l’Afrique de l’Ouest dans la tourmente”. *Les Grands Dossiers de Diplomatie*, n° 52, août-septembre 2019, p.52. [www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2019/Grands-Dossiers-Diplomatie-no-52-Enjeux-du-traffic-armes.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2019/Grands-Dossiers-Diplomatie-no-52-Enjeux-du-traffic-armes.pdf).

88 Nicolas Florquin, “Les filières multiples du trafic des armes légères,” *Diplomatie*, n° 92, mai-juin 2018, p.57. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2018/Diplomatie-no-92-Les-filieres-multiples-du-traffic-des%20armes-legeres.pdf>.

89 Djallil Lounnas. *The Links Between Jihadi Organizations and Illegal Trafficking in the Sahel. Middle East and North Africa Regional Architecture (MENARA) Working Papers*, No. 25, November 2018, p.5. [https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/menara\\_wp\\_25.pdf](https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/menara_wp_25.pdf). See also: UNODC. *Transnational Organized Crime in West Africa: A Threat Assessment*, February 2013. [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta/West\\_Africa\\_TOCTA\\_2013\\_EN.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta/West_Africa_TOCTA_2013_EN.pdf).

90 Mattias Nowak, “Enjeux du trafic d’armes : l’Afrique de l’Ouest dans la tourmente”. *Les Grands Dossiers de Diplomatie*, n° 52, août-septembre 2019, p.52. [www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2019/Grands-Dossiers-Diplomatie-no-52-Enjeux-du-traffic-armes.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2019/Grands-Dossiers-Diplomatie-no-52-Enjeux-du-traffic-armes.pdf).

91 William Assanvo, Baba Danoko, Lordi-Anne Thérooux-Bénoni, and Ibrahim Maïga. *Violent extremism, organised crime and local conflicts in Liptako-Gourma*. Institute for Security Studies (ISS), West Africa Report 26, December 2019, p.10. <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/war-26-eng.pdf>.

92 For more details, see: “UN arms embargo on Cote d’Ivoire,” *SIPRI databases*. [https://www.sipri.org/databases/embargoes/un\\_arms\\_embargoes/cote/cote\\_default](https://www.sipri.org/databases/embargoes/un_arms_embargoes/cote/cote_default).

93 Arnaud Jouve, “Sahel : d’où viennent les armes et les munitions ?” *RFI*, April 9, 2020, <http://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20200409-sahel-do%C3%B9-viennent-les-armes-et-les-munitions>. See also: Savannah de Tessières. *Enquête nationale sur les armes légères et de petit calibre en Côte d’Ivoire : Les défis du contrôle des armes et de la lutte contre la violence armée avant la crise post-électorale*, Rapport Spécial, Small Arms Survey, 2012. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/C-Special-reports/SAS-SR14-CoteIvoire.pdf>.

94 Arnaud Jouve, “Sahel : d’où viennent les armes et les munitions ?” *RFI*, April 9, 2020, <http://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20200409-sahel-do%C3%B9-viennent-les-armes-et-les-munitions>.

95 Conflict Armament Research. *Investigating Cross-Border Weapon Transfers in the Sahel*. November 2016, p.7. <https://www.conflictarm.com/reports/investigating-cross-border-weapon-transfers-in-the-sahel/>

96 Mattias Nowak, “Enjeux du trafic d’armes : l’Afrique de l’Ouest dans la tourmente”. *Les Grands Dossiers de Diplomatie*, n° 52, août-septembre 2019, p.52. [www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2019/Grands-Dossiers-Diplomatie-no-52-Enjeux-du-traffic-armes.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2019/Grands-Dossiers-Diplomatie-no-52-Enjeux-du-traffic-armes.pdf).

## Diversions from national stockpiles: the collapse of state control over arsenals

While SALW possessed by different belligerents may thus remain in circulation following the end of hostilities, in other cases, crises have directly “caused the collapse of state institutions and led to the widespread looting of large parts of national stockpiles.”<sup>97</sup> Terrorist groups have notably benefited from the proliferation of weapons originating from post-Gaddafi’s Libya. Following the fall of the Libyan regime in 2011, the country became an “open-air arsenal, [and] the hub for arms trafficking in the region.”<sup>98</sup> Arms looted from national stockpiles “spilled into neighbouring countries at an alarming rate following the revolution, fuelling conflict across the region and bolstering the operational capacity of criminals all the way from Mali to southern Sudan – and beyond,”<sup>99</sup> possibly reaching as much as twelve countries (see Figure 4).<sup>100</sup> Many were brought in Northern Mali by Tuareg fighters, who had joined the ranks of Gaddafi’s Islamic Legion, and subsequently used to conduct the 2012 rebellion led by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), temporarily allied with terrorist elements of AQIM, Ansar Dine and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). The presence of arms “originally sold to the Qaddafi regime by Poland in the 1970s”<sup>101</sup> among weapons caches discovered in Tessalit, Kidal, and Gao, is one example of cases that confirmed the occurrence of such outflows from Libya to the Sahel. According to interviewees, “it is clear that the breakdown of the Libyan regime has fuelled a number of actors in the region, including terrorist organisations.”<sup>102</sup>

Libya is not the only recent illustration of such dynamics. Significant amount of equipment was also diverted from Malian state stocks following the breakout of the Tuareg insurrection in early 2012.<sup>103</sup> In the face of the rebel offensive, led by Tuareg separatists backed for a time by terrorist organisations, Malian armed forces withdrew from military bases located in the country’s Northern regions, leaving behind their arsenals available for looting. This partly explains why the vast majority—up to 80 percent or more, according to some estimates<sup>104</sup>—of Mali-based terrorist groups’ equipment originate from the country’s national stockpiles.

*“The sources of weaponry shift depending on geopolitical events, such as the breakdown of the Libyan regime and the outflow of weapons, and then the civil war in Libya with actually some flows being reversed and weapons flowing back into the country.”*

**Expert on arms trafficking based in Europe**

As rightly pointed out by an interviewed expert, arm flows however transform according to changing security developments, constantly adapting to the law of supply and demand, as illustrated by arm flows from Libya having been “redirected, more recently, to their countries of origin.”<sup>105</sup> As a result of both law enforcement efforts and “renewed fighting in Libya from 2014 onwards, which created

52-Enjeux-du-traffic-armes.pdf.

97 Nicolas Florquin, “Les filières multiples du trafic des armes légères,” *Diplomatie*, n° 92, mai-juin 2018, p.56. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2018/Diplomatie-no-92-Les-filieres-multiples-du-traffic-des%20armes-legeres.pdf>.

98 Ibid., p.55.

99 Mark Micalef, Raouf Farrah, Alexander Bish, and Victor Tanner. *After the Storm: Organized crime across the Sahel Sahara following upheaval in Libya and Mali*. Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2019, p.vii. <https://globalinitiative.net/after-the-storm/>.

100 Nicolas Florquin, “Les filières multiples du trafic des armes légères,” *Diplomatie*, n° 92, mai-juin 2018, p.55. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2018/Diplomatie-no-92-Les-filieres-multiples-du-traffic-des%20armes-legeres.pdf>.

101 Djallil Lounnas. *The Links Between Jihadi Organizations and Illegal Trafficking in the Sahel. Middle East and North Africa Regional Architecture (MENARA) Working Papers*, No. 25, November 2018, p.6. [https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/menara\\_wp\\_25.pdf](https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/menara_wp_25.pdf).

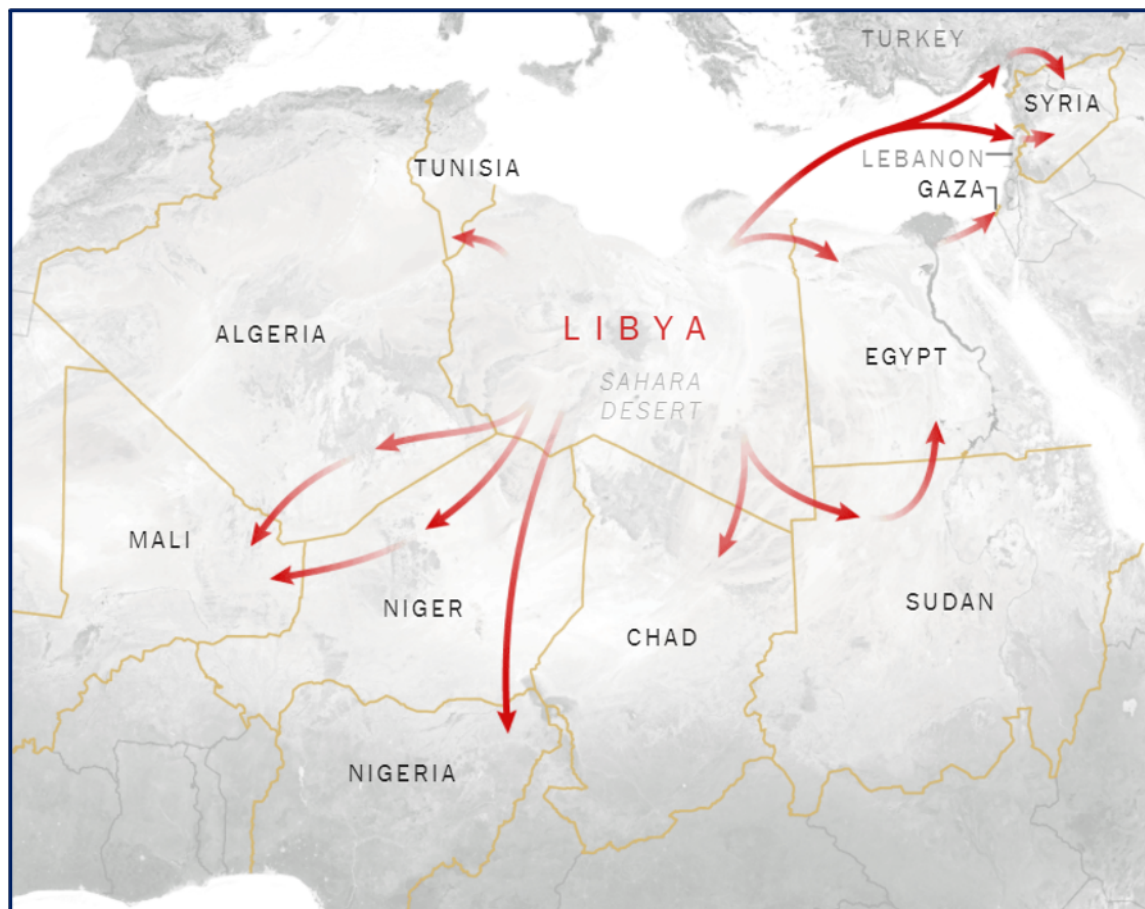
102 Interview, expert on arms trafficking based in Europe.

103 Nicolas Florquin, “Les filières multiples du trafic des armes légères,” *Diplomatie*, n° 92, mai-juin 2018, p.56. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2018/Diplomatie-no-92-Les-filieres-multiples-du-traffic-des%20armes-legeres.pdf>.

104 Interview, international expert based in Mali.

105 Mattias Nowak, “Enjeux du trafic d’armes : l’Afrique de l’Ouest dans la tourmente”. *Les Grands Dossiers de Diplomatie*, n° 52, août-septembre 2019, p.53. [www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2019/Grands-Dossiers-Diplomatie-no-52-Enjeux-du-traffic-armes.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2019/Grands-Dossiers-Diplomatie-no-52-Enjeux-du-traffic-armes.pdf).

internal demand for arms and ammunition,” flows have progressively decreased, and to some extent even reversed.<sup>106</sup> In this new context, terrorist groups have proved resilient and able to adapt their procurement strategies. As “the proliferation from Libyan arms stockpiles has contracted,”<sup>107</sup> terrorist groups are indeed believed to “have diversified their supply chains,”<sup>108</sup> increasingly relying on battlefield capture.



**Figure 4.** Arms flows out of Libya following the fall of the Gaddafi regime in 2011.<sup>109</sup>

### Diversion from national stockpiles: battlefield capture

Terrorist groups’ arsenals have over time been further complemented by large amounts of materiel looted during attacks on security and defence positions.<sup>110</sup> In addition to SALW seized in early 2012, Sahel-based extremist groups have continued to obtain arms and ammunition in attacks on Malian military bases and convoys—sometimes “within less than a year of distribution within the defence and security forces.”<sup>111</sup> Far from being confined to Mali, similar incidents have been reported in Burkina Faso<sup>112</sup> and Niger. Seizures from regular armed forces also represent an important source of weaponry for Boko Haram and its offshoot groups. Under Shekau’s leadership, starting in 2009, the group

<sup>106</sup> Mark Micaleff, Raouf Farrah, Alexander Bish, and Victor Tanner. *After the Storm: Organized crime across the Sahel Sahara following upheaval in Libya and Mali*. Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2019, p.vii. <https://globalinitiative.net/after-the-storm/>.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Jaimie Dettmer, “Jihadists, Insurgents Plundering State Arsenals Across Sahel.” VoA, November 20, 2016. <https://www.voanews.com/africa/jihadists-insurgents-plundering-state-arsenals-across-sahel>.

<sup>109</sup> Scott Shane and Jo Becker, “A New Libya, With ‘Very Little Time Left’” *The New York Times*, February 27, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/28/us/politics/libya-isis-hillary-clinton.html>

<sup>110</sup> Hassane Koné, “Comment les groupes terroristes qui opèrent dans le Sahel s’arment-ils ?” *ISS Today*, February 12, 2020. <https://issafrica.org/fr/iss-today/comment-les-groupes-terroristes-qui-operent-dans-le-sahel-sarment-ils>.

<sup>111</sup> Interview, International expert based in Mali.

<sup>112</sup> Hermann Boko, “Au Burkina Faso, les jihadistes attaquent l’armée pour se ravitailler en armes et munitions.” *France 24*, August 20, 2019. <https://www.france24.com/fr/20190820-burkina-faso-groupes-jihadistes-armes-munitions-G5-sahel-militaires>.

“began to pillage arms from Nigerian military barracks and other police stations that they raided.”<sup>113</sup> In recent years, arms have reportedly been obtained from Nigerian, Nigerien, Cameroonian, and Chadian state forces during clashes and attacks.<sup>114</sup> While capturing materiel through targeted raids on military patrols or convoys, they have also carried out larger attacks allowing them to overpower entire bases, and to seize important caches, as in Jilli in July 2018.<sup>115</sup> Such methods are believed to have provided the group with “millions of rounds of ammunition, thousands of assault rifles and assorted firearms, and hundreds of military vehicles, including armoured tanks and self-propelled artillery.”<sup>116</sup>

SALW can also be diverted from international troops deployed within peacekeeping operations, with such methods having notably been employed by Charles Taylor during Liberia’s civil war.<sup>117</sup> Several interviewees affirmed that, despite some attacks carried out against the MINUSMA, no significant amount of material has been looted from its stockpiles. While terrorist groups have been able to “attack, and occasionally get inside the camps, they do not usually capture material,”<sup>118</sup> as these assaults remain ‘hit-and-run’ types of attacks.<sup>119</sup>

While many consider battlefield captures as being “mainly based on opportunism,”<sup>120</sup> some interviewees indicated that some deliberate attacks have been carried out against armed forces with the specific aim to capture equipment, notably in Southern Niger and in Mali. Capturing material is thus considered by some as ‘a key motivation.’<sup>121</sup> According to an interviewee, terrorist groups’ reliance on battlefield captures has moreover been a progressive process:

*“Initially, terrorist started by attacking light patrols, including motorbike teams. After gathering some weapons, they tried to attack smaller army positions such as police stations or brigades. So they tried step-by-step to gather as much weaponry as possible and now are attacking large army positions.”*

#### National stakeholder based in Burkina Faso

In addition to the immediate security concerns that arise from terrorist organisations’ increased firepower, these diversions pose serious challenges. Such seizures have been used as part of terrorist groups’ propaganda, with various videos and pictures showing off terrorist groups’ spoils of war (see Figure 5). Boko Haram has, for instance, started as early as 2013 to release videos of “specific Boko Haram attacks and seized weaponry, or *ghanima* (“spoils”) from barracks to demonstrate the group’s victories over government forces.”<sup>122</sup>

113 Omar Mahmoud, “Local, Global, or in Between? Boko Haram’s Messaging, Strategy, Membership, and Support Networks,” in Jacob Zenn. (ed.) *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa’s Enduring Insurgency*. Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, May 2018, pp.99-100. <https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Boko-Haram-Beyond-the-Headlines.pdf>.

114 The attack conducted in Bouma on 23 March 2020 provides a recent example of such attacks. See: “Le Tchad endeuillé par la mort de 98 soldats dans une attaque de Boko Haram,” *RFI*, March 25, 2020. <http://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20200325-le-tchad-endeuill%C3%A9-la-mort-98-soldats-une-attaque-boko-haram>.

115 James Reinl, “How stolen weapons keep groups like Boko Haram in Business.” *GlobalPost*, PRI, April 19, 2019, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2019-04-19/how-stolen-weapons-keep-groups-boko-haram-business>.

116 John Campbell, “Boko Haram Arms Stockpiling Indicates Long-Term Threat.” *Council on Foreign Relations*, September 21, 2020. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/boko-haram-arms-stockpiling-indicates-long-term-threat>.

117 James Reinl, “How stolen weapons keep groups like Boko Haram in Business.” *GlobalPost*, PRI, April 19, 2019, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2019-04-19/how-stolen-weapons-keep-groups-boko-haram-business>.

118 Interview, international arms expert based in Europe.

119 Interview, international stakeholder based in Mali.

120 Written inputs, international stakeholder based in Mali.

121 Interview, international arms expert based in Europe.

122 Omar Mahmoud, “Local, Global, or in Between? Boko Haram’s Messaging, Strategy, Membership, and Support Networks,” in Jacob Zenn. (ed.) *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa’s Enduring Insurgency*. Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, May 2018, p.103. <https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Boko-Haram-Beyond-the-Headlines.pdf>.



Figure 5. SALW and other equipment that had been looted by various terrorist groups operating in West Africa.<sup>123</sup>

As pointed out by an interviewee, terrorist groups' capacities to loot great quantities of weaponry from national armies also "questions the security of transferring new weapons to the security and defence forces, as they could very rapidly fall in the wrong hands – which would have political implications back in exporting countries."<sup>124</sup> The very fact that terrorist groups possess similar equipment as those used by regular armed forces also has important implications. An arms expert underlined the impact on these groups' access to ammunition supplies: "if terrorist organisations have the same weapons as the security and defence forces, with the same calibres—meaning also using the same ammunition—, it is very easy to get their hands on the ammunition that is already lying around in the country or to attack again the security and defence forces and use their ammunition."<sup>125</sup> It moreover poses significant risks at the operational level, as "people having the uniform, appearance and same weapons as state national security and defence forces, and then conducting operations like this can cause confusion. Either they attack civilian places and it is misinterpreted as an attack from the security and defence forces, or it enables them to move around without being detected."<sup>126</sup>

By contrast, this may also raise issues in terms of liability and collection of evidence in cases of human rights abuses, in a region where security and defence forces have repeatedly been accused of exactions and serious human rights violations against civilian populations.<sup>127</sup> In this context, it is also worth highlighting the potential risks associated with some governments' decisions to create vigilante groups, providing arms and equipment to civilians, to counter the spread of terrorist organisations.

123 Chris Tomson, "Al-Qaeda insurgents capture loads of weapons from Nigerian Army," *AMN News*, August 7, 2017, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/pictures-al-qaeda-insurgents-capture-loads-weapons-nigerian-army/>; Anifowoshe Jamiu, *Unifomoshe Blog*, November 12, 2016, <https://hanifowoshe.blogspot.com/2016/11/militant-group-displays-weapons-and.html>.

124 Interview, international arms expert based in Europe.

125 Interview, international arms expert based in Europe.

126 Interview, international arms expert based in Europe.

127 See: Amnesty International. *Stars on their shoulders. Blood on their hands. War crimes committed by the Nigerian military*, 2015. <https://www.amnestyusa.org/files/report.compressed.pdf>; Amnesty International. *Human rights under fire: Attacks and violations in Cameroon's struggle with Boko Haram*, 2015, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AFR1719912015ENGLISH.pdf>; Amnesty International. *They executed some and brought the rest with them: human rights violations by security forces in the Sahel*, 2020. <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AFR3723182020ENGLISH.pdf>.

While many observers rightly warn against the risk that these initiatives “inflamm tensions further and could drive more communities into the hands of the jihadists,”<sup>128</sup> it may also provide extremist groups with further opportunities to divert SALW.

## Rampant corruption and SALW intentional diversion

Alongside battlefield captures and losses of equipment, there also appears to be intentional diversion of arms and weapons initially detained legally entering the illicit sphere “through the actions of corrupt elements who engage in the illegal trade for personal profit.”<sup>129</sup> While security and defence personnel represent primary targets for terrorist groups eager to acquire more equipment, security officials “can also be part of the problem.”<sup>130</sup>

National armed forces of some Sahelian countries, including within Malian and Nigerien security forces, have reportedly “lost or sold their arms to armed groups, criminals and jihadists.”<sup>131</sup> Several examples illustrate such behaviours, such as the arrest of six Malian soldiers in 2016 in relation to a case of arms theft from an armoury.<sup>132</sup> These practices are not limited to the Sahel. Important “voluntary or involuntary diversion from governmental arsenals” have also taken place in countries of the Lake Chad Basin, where “underpaid soldiers from morale-sapped units have been known to make cash trading guns on the side”<sup>133</sup>—a practice that seems to have benefitted Boko Haram.<sup>134</sup>

*“There are credible indications that some governments in the subregion continue old-established practices of arming allied militias and of turning a blind eye to corruption.”*

**International stakeholder based in Mali**

Although considered by most interviewees as a marginal supply source, such practices ought to be carefully considered in the event of any effort made at curbing a terrorist groups’ access to weaponry. They first underscore the fact that “morale is a key factor,”<sup>135</sup> and as a consequence, “paying soldiers more and boosting morale could go a long way to stopping light hands in weapons depots.”<sup>136</sup> However, some observers also underline the context of rampant corruption that allows for these practices to take place,<sup>137</sup> and point out to the broader responsibility of national governments in combatting such abuses. While acknowledging that “preventing unexpected battle losses is almost impossible,” many argue that more effort should be done “to ensure that arms and ammunition are not diverted or lost through other means, such as abandonment, illicit transfers, corruption and poor management of recovered material.”<sup>138</sup>

128 Will Brown. “The Sahel squeeze,” *The Africa Report*, June 4, 2020. <https://www.theafricareport.com/25128/the-sahel-squeeze/>; International Crisis Group. *Burkina Faso: Stopping the Spiral of Violence*, Africa Report N°287, February 24, 2020. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/287-burkina-faso-sortir-de-la-spirale-des-violences>.

129 Nicolas Florquin. *Linking P/CVE & Illicit Arms Flows in Africa*, RESOLVE Policy Note, Community-Based Armed Groups Series, November 2019, p.2. [https://resolvenet.org/system/files/2020-06/RSVE\\_PolicyNote\\_Florquin\\_Nov2019.pdf](https://resolvenet.org/system/files/2020-06/RSVE_PolicyNote_Florquin_Nov2019.pdf).

130 Ibid.

131 Arnaud Jouve, “Sahel : d’où viennent les armes et les munitions ?” *RFI*, April 9, 2020, <http://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20200409-sahel-do%C3%B9-viennent-les-armes-et-les-munitions>.

132 “Plusieurs militaires accusés de vol d’armes au Mali,” *RFI*, April 28, 2016. <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20160428-mali-armee-reguliere-vol-stock-defense-militaire>.

133 James Reinl, “How stolen weapons keep groups like Boko Haram in Business.” *GlobalPost*, PRI, April 19, 2019.

134 “Nigerian Military: Some Officers Selling Arms to Boko Haram,” *VoA News*, September 04, 2016. <https://www.voanews.com/africa/nigerian-military-some-officers-selling-arms-boko-haram>.

135 James Reinl, “How stolen weapons keep groups like Boko Haram in Business.” *GlobalPost*, PRI, April 19, 2019.; AFP. “Nigerian soldiers lash out in video after bloody Boko Haram attack,” *France 24*, November 24, 2018. <https://www.france24.com/en/20181124-nigerian-soldiers-lash-out-video-after-bloody-boko-haram-attack>.

136 James Reinl, “How stolen weapons keep groups like Boko Haram in Business.” *GlobalPost*, PRI, April 19, 2019.

137 John Sunday Ojo, Kazee, Oyedele Lamidi, Ayotunde David Odewale, Bolanle Shiyanbade, & Godwin Ihemeje. “Enemy within the State: The Pathology of Boko Haram Insurgency, Military Corruption, and Fallacy of Arms Procurement in Nigeria,” *International Journal of Public Administration*, 43(12), 2020, pp.1068-1082.

138 Paul Williams cited in: James Reinl, “How stolen weapons keep groups like Boko Haram in Business.” *GlobalPost*, PRI, April 19, 2019.

## 2.3 The use of SALW as a source of finance

Terrorist organisations need funds to conduct their operations and expand their activities, which notably includes attracting and recruiting members, procuring subsistence and operational means, as well as building and maintaining their legitimacy.<sup>139</sup> While SALW are primarily used to carry out attacks across borders,<sup>140</sup> they may also represent strategic assets, which allow violent extremist groups to generate income. After exploring the nature of the crime-terror nexus in respect to SALW in West Africa (2.3.1), this section will thus examine the role that SALW play within terrorist organisations' financial strategies, either (2.3.2) indirectly facilitating the conduction of various activities aimed at generating income, or (2.3.3) more directly providing these groups with proceeds from their involvement in SALW trafficking.

### 2.3.1. SALW and the prevalence of the crime-terror nexus

All aforementioned dynamics contribute to the “pool of materiel being smuggled across national borders,” which have been recognised as the main current issue faced by African states.<sup>141</sup> While transcontinental arm transfers seem to have significantly decreased, as compared to the period of the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone,<sup>142</sup> smuggling across land borders still flourishes across the subregion. While providing an overview of the main characteristics of SALW trafficking in West Africa, this section will explore the nature of the relationships between criminal and terrorist actors in respect to this specific activity.

#### SALW trafficking in West Africa: between large-scale trafficking and ‘ant trade’

While “few, if any, areas in West Africa are considered safe from the threat of arms trafficking [...], some areas are more vulnerable than others.”<sup>143</sup> For instance, Nigeria’s “long history of armed conflict, combined with the country’s notoriously porous borders, has made it a regional hub for arms trafficking.”<sup>144</sup> Moreover, the scale and the types of actors involved seem to vary significantly across the sub-region. Previous research conducted by the Small Arms Survey has shown that, to the North of the Niger river, across the Sahel-Sahara regions, arms are usually subject to larger-scale trafficking.<sup>145</sup> Along centuries-old Trans-Saharan trade routes, trafficking is managed by “highly-organised groups operating across the Sahara, or on a West-East axis, and characterised by what is called ‘poly-traffics’ because they combine arms with other products, such as drugs.”<sup>146</sup>

*“There are trans-Saharan/Sahelian networks which are complex, very organised, sophisticated, and have the infrastructure capacity to make the difficult journey through the old-established Saharan routes. They are groups of smugglers, or merchants, who have the capacity, connections, knowledge to transport anything along these routes, including armament, and have developed these networks to serve certain groups.”*

139 Kangdim Dingji Maza, Umut Koldaş, and Sait Aksit, “Challenges of Combating Terrorist Financing in the Lake Chad Region: A Case of Boko Haram,” *SAGE Open*, April-June 10(2), p.3. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2158244020934494>.

140 Bate Felix, “Blood-soaked truck symbolizes Boko Haram’s war without borders,” *Reuters*, February 18, 2015. <https://ca.reuters.com/article/nigeria-violence-cameroon/blood-soaked-truck-symbolises-boko-harams-war-without-borders-idINKBN0LM0KD20150218>.

141 Einas Mohammed, Emilia Dungal, and Nicolas Florquin, “Navigational Tools: What We Learned from Mapping Illicit Small Arms Flows in Africa,” *Medium*, June 26, 2019. <https://medium.com/@SmallArmsSurvey/navigational-tools-what-we-learned-from-mapping-illicit-small-arms-flows-in-africa-efc160a9ff8e>

142 Arnaud Jouve, “Sahel : d’où viennent les armes et les munitions ?” *RFI*, April 9, 2020, <http://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20200409-sahel-do%C3%B9-viennent-les-armes-et-les-munitions>.

143 OECD. *Illicit Financial Flows: The Economy of Illicit Trade in West Africa*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2018, p.83. [https://www.giaba.org/media/f/1048\\_IFF-THE%20ECONOMY%20OF%20ILLCIT%20TRADE%20IN%20WEST%20AFRICA.pdf](https://www.giaba.org/media/f/1048_IFF-THE%20ECONOMY%20OF%20ILLCIT%20TRADE%20IN%20WEST%20AFRICA.pdf).

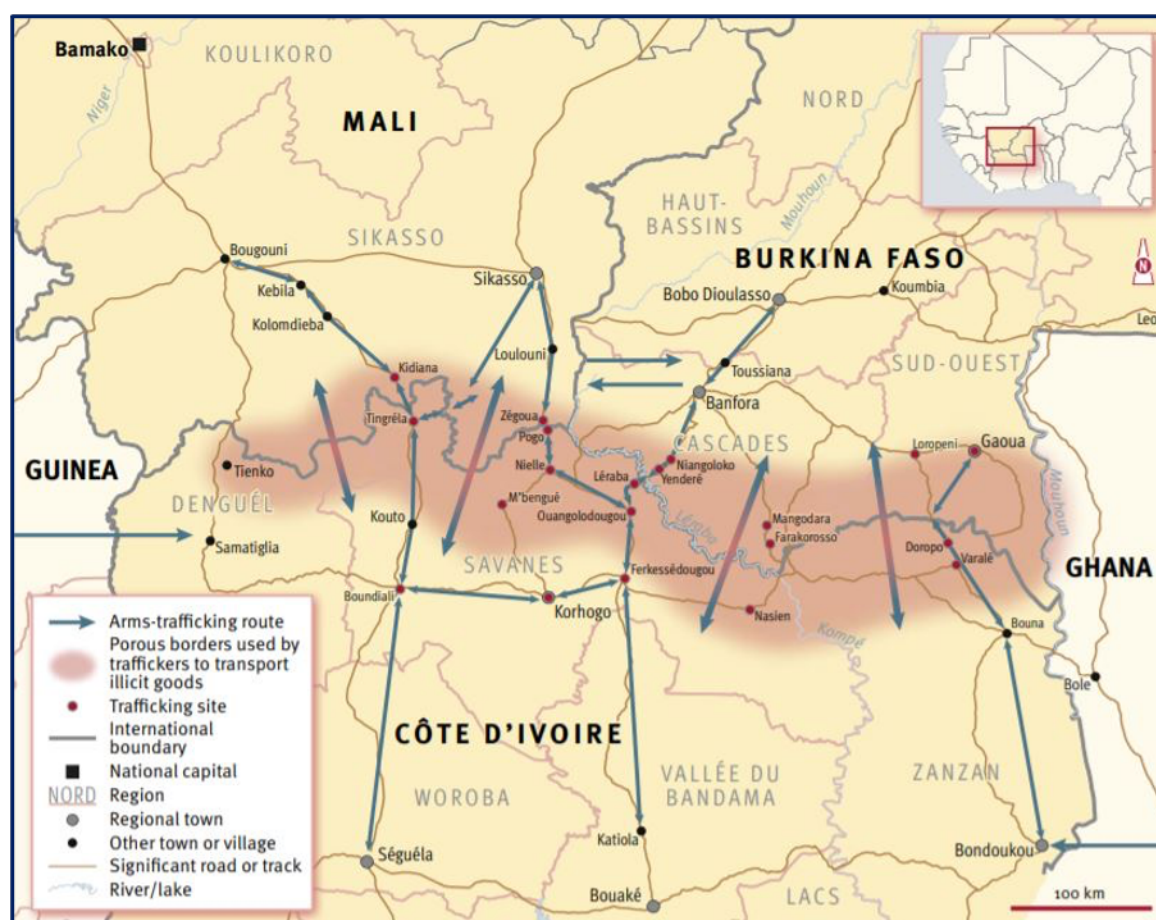
144 Ibid.

145 Fiona Mangan and Nowak, M. *The West Africa-Sahel Connection: Mapping Cross-border Arms Trafficking*, Small Arms Survey, Briefing Paper December 2019, p.3. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SAS-BP-West-Africa-Sahel-Connection.pdf>.

146 Arnaud Jouve, “Sahel : d’où viennent les armes et les munitions ?” *RFI*, April 9, 2020, <http://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20200409-sahel-do%C3%B9-viennent-les-armes-et-les-munitions>.

## International arms expert based in Europe

Illicit arms flows occurring to the South of the Niger river seem to take on different features, with SALW being rather “the subject of a less-known ‘ant traffic.’”<sup>147</sup> This smaller-scale trafficking, which reportedly represents “one of the main modes of transport, from one country to another, of weapons diverted from national stockpiles,”<sup>148</sup> is particularly visible in border areas. Bordering regions between Cote d’Ivoire, Mali, and Burkina Faso, for example, constitute “a key geographical area for the transport of goods” and one of the centres of such types of arms trafficking throughout the region (see Figure 6).<sup>149</sup> This area occupies a strategic position as a conduit between the Gulf of Guinea coastal countries and the remote Northern Sahel-Sahara regions, with Cote d’Ivoire, more particularly, representing “an entry point for goods destined for its landlocked northern neighbours, Mali and Burkina Faso.”<sup>150</sup>



**Figure 6.** Illicit arms-trafficking routes in the Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, and Mali border areas<sup>151</sup>

In contrast with highly organised trafficking networks active in the Sahel-Sahara region, illicit smuggling activities in this region are rather structured around “bosses” (*patrons*)—individuals often part of trading elites and based in regional capitals—, and “transporters”—using their knowledge of local routes and interpersonal links with bordering communities “to move unhindered.”<sup>152</sup> Although

147 Mattias Nowak, “Enjeux du trafic d’armes : l’Afrique de l’Ouest dans la tourmente”. *Les Grands Dossiers de Diplomatie*, n° 52, août-septembre 2019, p.52. [www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2019/Grands-Dossiers-Diplomatie-no-52-Enjeux-du-traffic-armes.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2019/Grands-Dossiers-Diplomatie-no-52-Enjeux-du-traffic-armes.pdf).

148 Ibid., p.55.

149 Arnaud Jouve, “Sahel : d’où viennent les armes et les munitions ?” *RFI*, April 9, 2020, <http://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20200409-sahel-do%C3%B9-viennent-les-armes-et-les-munitions>.

150 Mattias Nowak, “Enjeux du trafic d’armes : l’Afrique de l’Ouest dans la tourmente”. *Les Grands Dossiers de Diplomatie*, n° 52, août-septembre 2019, p.53. [www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2019/Grands-Dossiers-Diplomatie-no-52-Enjeux-du-traffic-armes.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2019/Grands-Dossiers-Diplomatie-no-52-Enjeux-du-traffic-armes.pdf).

151 Fiona Mangan and Matthias Nowak, *The West Africa-Sahel Connection: Mapping Cross-border Arms Trafficking*, Small Arms Survey, Briefing Paper, December 2019, p.8. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SAS-BP-West-Africa-Sahel-Connection.pdf>.

152 Mattias Nowak, “Enjeux du trafic d’armes : l’Afrique de l’Ouest dans la tourmente”. *Les Grands Dossiers de Diplomatie*, n° 52,



these networks smuggle various commodities, with different goods being transported together, there seems to be a division of labour “not at the level of the transporters but at the level of their bosses, who change according to the types of goods.”<sup>153</sup> While these types of flows may appear as minor, compared to large-scale operations occurring in the north, it should not be underestimated as “in the course of a single operation, up to 100 smugglers can be in action simultaneously.”<sup>154</sup>

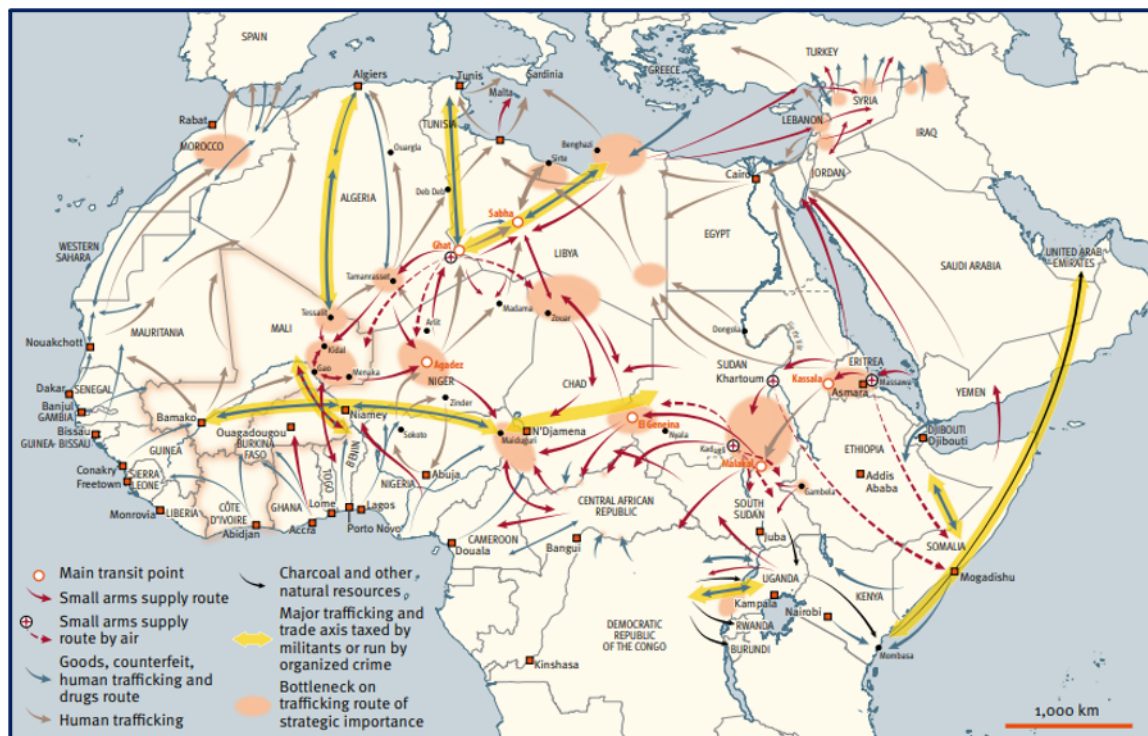


Figure 7. Map showing main trafficking routes and flows across West Africa.<sup>155</sup>

## Terrorist and criminal networks’ ‘client-supplier’ relationships

According to some interviewees, linkages between arms traffickers and violent extremist organisations primarily take the form of ‘client-supplier relationships.’<sup>156</sup> A recent field research conducted by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in the tri-border area between Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, argues that “participating, even indirectly, in trafficking or maintaining links with traffickers allows violent extremist groups to procure means of subsistence (such as food and medicine), operational means (arms, ammunition, motorbikes, spare parts, fuel and means of communication such as phones, top-up cards or phone credit) and generate financial resources (namely through selling stolen livestock).”<sup>157</sup>

More specifically, terrorist groups have reportedly forged “vital links with weapons traffickers,”<sup>158</sup> with observers arguing that “terrorist organisations in the region, including those linked with al-Qaeda, such as AQIM, established contacts with traffickers in order to obtain the weapons and ammunition

août-septembre 2019, p.55. [www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2019/Grands-Dossiers-Diplomatie-no-52-Enjeux-du-traffic-armes.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2019/Grands-Dossiers-Diplomatie-no-52-Enjeux-du-traffic-armes.pdf).

153 Interview, international arms expert based in Europe.

154 Mattias Nowak, “Enjeux du trafic d’armes : l’Afrique de l’Ouest dans la tourmente”. *Les Grands Dossiers de Diplomatie*, n° 52, août-septembre 2019, p.55. [www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2019/Grands-Dossiers-Diplomatie-no-52-Enjeux-du-traffic-armes.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2019/Grands-Dossiers-Diplomatie-no-52-Enjeux-du-traffic-armes.pdf).

155 Roberto Sollazzo and Matthias Nowak. *Tri-border Transit: Trafficking and Smuggling in the Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire-Mali Region*, Small Arms Survey, Briefing Paper, October 2020, p.13. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SAS-SANA-BP-Triborder-Transit.pdf>

156 Interview, local researcher based in Côte d’Ivoire.

157 William Assanay, Baba Danoko, Lori-Anne Théroux-Bénoni, and Ibrahim Maïga. *Violent extremism, organised crime and local conflicts in Liptako-Gourma*, p.9. <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/war-26-eng.pdf>.

158 Djallil Lounnas. *The Links Between Jihadi Organizations and Illegal Trafficking in the Sahel*, Menara, Working paper 25, November 2018, p.6. [https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/menara\\_wp\\_25.pdf](https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/menara_wp_25.pdf).

needed for their activities.”<sup>159</sup> As part of primary data gathered by ISS, former members Ansar Dine and the MUJAO confirmed the existence of “commercial links” between terrorists and arms traffickers.<sup>160</sup> Similarly, illicit trafficking has allegedly represented an important source of weaponry for terrorist networks active in the Lake Chad region, with research underlying that “the regional arms pipeline proved important as Boko Haram weapons were reported to have originated from locations such as Chad, Mali, Libya, and as far as Darfur.”<sup>161</sup> A number of experts interviewed however underlined that, given the significant quantities of SALW regularly captured from national forces by terrorist groups, material obtained from trafficking may not represent a large share of their arsenals. Most agree that “these groups actually do not need to take the risk nor to carry the burden of finding supply lines far away, moving logistics capacities, generating legal risks and so on, simply because the local and immediate availability is already there,”<sup>162</sup> with most dynamics taking place at the regional level.

According to information gathered within this research, the degree of cooperation between criminal actors involved in arms trafficking and terrorist groups may, moreover, differ according to the location under scrutiny. In northern regions of the Sahel, experts suggest that terrorists may benefit from greater support, with one interviewee explaining that “in a place like Timbuktu for example, they [terrorist groups] have sympathisers and spies, who might not be perceived as being terrorists, but deliver material to them in remote locations. Anything that is available on the market, including surplus material from other armed groups, will make its way through middlemen to terrorist groups.”<sup>163</sup> Many experts moreover indicated that among the actors engaged in “the sale of arms to the population and to other groups in the area, including terrorist groups”<sup>164</sup> were certainly some elements from northern Mali so-called signatory armed groups.<sup>165</sup> Describing opportunistic transactions, one interviewee explained that “signatory groups might, for example, acquire weapons in anticipation of conducting a convoy escort of a drug shipment, and once the convoy makes its way through, there is a surplus of weapons.”<sup>166</sup>

*“In the case of small-scale trafficking observed along Cote d’Ivoire-Mali-Burkina Faso borders, traffickers are not directly affiliated, according to our information, with terrorist activity or groups. In some cases, we were told of the importance of trust and the danger of working with these groups. Some of the traffickers or small team leaders said that, for them, it is dangerous to associate with these types of organisations because, if there is any doubt about something being wrong, the lives of people from the whole group, including their families, may be at stake.”*

**International arms expert based in Europe**

By contrast, small-scale ‘ant trade’ occurring in the southern parts of the subregion seems, for its part, less directly connected to terrorist organisations. This type of small-scale trafficking seems to be mainly fuelling other types of non-state armed groups, including self-defence militias.

However, it is not entirely excluded that terrorist groups indirectly benefit from this type of ant trafficking, through the looting of material possessed by self-defence groups. An expert interviewed as part of this research argued that, in a context where local self-defence groups are “building up

159 Ibid., p.5.

160 William Assanvo, Baba Danoko, Lori-Anne Théroux-Bénoni, and Ibrahim Maïga. “Violent extremism, organised crime and local conflicts in Liptako-Gourma,” Institute for Security Studies, p.10. <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/war-26-eng.pdf>.

161 Omar Mahmoud, “Local, Global, or in Between? Boko Haram’s Messaging, Strategy, Membership, and Support Networks,” in Jacob Zenn. (ed.) *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa’s Enduring Insurgency*. Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, May 2018, p.100. <https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Boko-Haram-Beyond-the-Headlines.pdf>.

162 Interview, local researcher based in Côte d’Ivoire.

163 Interview, international arms expert based in Europe.

164 Interview, local researcher based in Côte d’Ivoire.

165 Signatories of the 2015 Algiers Accords and part of the ongoing Malian peace process, ‘signatory armed groups’ regroup pro-government groups of the Platform and armed groups allied within the Coordination of Azawad Movement (CMA). In addition, various splits occurred since 2015 leading to the creation of splinter groups, such as the Mouvement de Salut de l’Azawad (MSA), which are not officially ‘signatories’. For an overview of armed groups present across the country, see: Andrew Lebovich, “Mapping Armed Groups in Mali and the Sahel,” *European Council on Foreign Relations*, May 2019. [https://ecfr.eu/special/sahel\\_mapping/](https://ecfr.eu/special/sahel_mapping/).

166 Interview, international arms expert based in Europe.

their arsenal slowly, starting out with craft weapons and hunting weapons, and then acquiring assault rifles, [...] it is possible that terrorists are also acquiring weapons from these groups, not commercially, but by capturing them.”<sup>167</sup>

## And beyond...

Links between criminal and terrorist networks active in the Sahel have been subject to much debate in recent years. While some claim that “all the argumentation, either thematic or specific (as in the Sahel), appears to be based on anecdotal evidence and not the clear observation of clinical symptoms,” making it complicated “to definitively determine if such cases merely provide an isolated example or are reflective of an emerging trend or demonstrate a widespread problem,”<sup>168</sup> others point to “clear linkages among arms traffickers, organized criminal entities, jihadist groups, and insurgent armed groups.”<sup>169</sup> Whilst others alternatively suggest that criminal and terrorist networks’ relationships may rather depend on the nature of the criminal and trafficking activities in question, affirming that “jihadi organisations have established more regular interactions with illegal networks that provide ‘required goods for pursuit of their fight,’ such as gas traffickers, food traffickers and arms traffickers.”<sup>170</sup>

*“There are of course links or bridges between criminal groups and terrorist groups but they are limited in time and scope, and just happen when both groups have a mutual interest in doing it.*

**International arms expert based in Europe**

Overall, most interviewees agreed on the fact that links between criminal and terrorist groups are primarily based on pragmatism.<sup>171</sup> While taking different forms, they are intended “to grow and sustain each organization, bolstering each group’s capabilities, strengthening their individual infrastructures and contributing to their financial well-being.”<sup>172</sup> Even in instances where both types of actors simply ‘coexist’—meaning that they operate in the same geographical area without cooperation necessarily taking place between them—, it “does not necessarily mean that the activities of each don’t benefit the other.”<sup>173</sup>

According to an interviewee, a number of (criminal) actors have certain acquaintances with terrorist organisations, with whom their share ‘give-and-take’ types of relationships, with for instance terrorist groups not disturbing traffickers in the conduction of their activities in exchange for their help in procuring or transporting necessary means.<sup>174</sup> Among other examples illustrating links between terrorist and criminal organisations, interviewees notably mentioned instances where attacks against national armed forces might have served to target camps and outposts blocking the main smuggling routes,<sup>175</sup> or cases where traffickers may have “opportunistically declared themselves affiliated to al-Qaeda” in order to “be able to work well.”<sup>176</sup>

167 Interview, international arms expert based in Europe.

168 Erik Alda and Joseph L. Sala, “Links Between Terrorism, Organized Crime and Crime: The Case of the Sahel Region,” *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, 3(1): 27, 2014, p.3. <https://www.stabilityjournal.org/articles/10.5334/sta.ea/>.

169 Fiona Mangan and Matthias Nowak, *The West Africa-Sahel Connection: Mapping Cross-border Arms Trafficking*, Small Arms Survey, Briefing Paper, December 2019, p.21. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SAS-BP-West-Africa-Sahel-Connection.pdf>.

170 Djallil Lounnas. *The Links Between Jihadi Organizations and Illegal Trafficking in the Sahel. Middle East and North Africa Regional Architecture (MENARA) Working Papers*, No. 25, November 2018, p.2. [https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/menara\\_wp\\_25.pdf](https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/menara_wp_25.pdf).

171 Guillaume Soto-Mayor. “Trafics et trafiquants : éléments structurants des sociétés sahéniennes,” *Recherches internationales*, n°117, janvier-mars 2020, p.118. [www.recherches-internationales.fr/RI117/RI117\\_Soto\\_Mayor.pdf](http://www.recherches-internationales.fr/RI117/RI117_Soto_Mayor.pdf).

172 Erik Alda and Joseph L. Sala, “Links Between Terrorism, Organized Crime and Crime: The Case of the Sahel Region,” *Stability International Journal of Security and Development* 3(1): 27-1, p.4.

173 Ibid., p.4.

174 Interview, national stakeholder based in Burkina Faso.

175 Interview, local independent consultant based in Mali.

176 Interview, international arms expert based in Europe.

### 2.3.2 Scope and dynamics of the indirect use of SALW as a source of terrorist finance

Besides their direct use to conduct attacks, SALW also confer coercion powers on their holders, allowing them to engage in various types of criminal activities, and to establish their control over lands and people, and in turn providing them with various local sources of income. This section will thus examine the instrumental use of SALW, reviewing the main income-generating activities carried out by violent extremist groups requiring—or being facilitated by—the possession of SALW.

#### SALW as key components of the “lucrative kidnapping industry”<sup>177</sup>

Extremist groups’ possession of SALW plays an essential role in their ability to carry out “their everyday activities, including in the presumed main source of income: kidnapping of ‘westerners’ for ransom.”<sup>178</sup> Kidnappings for ransom (KFR) have been extensively used by al-Qaeda affiliated groups in the Sahel-Sahara region in the past two decades, leading to the emergence of what is sometimes labelled as a “lucrative kidnapping industry.”<sup>179</sup>

From the kidnapping of 32 Europeans hostages in Northern Mali in April 2003 by its predecessor, the GSPC, AQIM seems to have continued earning considerable amounts from KFR.<sup>180</sup> While Western governments have—for obvious reasons—systematically denied the occurrence of such transactions, evidence indicates that ransom payments could amount to several million dollars for a single hostage,<sup>181</sup> thus representing “one of the main sources of funding for terrorist groups in the Sahel-Sahara region.”<sup>182</sup> Some estimates indicate that “that at the peak of the business (2005 to 2010), abduction revenues made up more than 90 per cent of terrorists’ financing in the [Sahel] region.”<sup>183</sup> Although the number of KFR of foreigners seems to have declined, it is certainly more linked to “the limited numbers of potential targets in the region,” rather than a voluntary shift in terrorist groups’ financing strategies.<sup>184</sup> This decline moreover seems to have been compensated by a “steady rise in the kidnapping of locals,”<sup>185</sup>—as well as a displacement of the threat southward, including in Burkina Faso which is “new to this kind of activity.”<sup>186</sup> The abduction of two French tourists in Pendjari Park, northern Benin, in May 2019, has provided a particularly telling example of this expansion of the threat.<sup>187</sup>

177 Catherine Van Offelen, “Le vrai visage du terrorisme Sahélien : le grand banditisme et la criminalité ordinaire.” *Revue Conflits*, July 28, 2020. [https://www.revueconflits.com/le-vrai-visage-du-terrorisme-sahelien-le-grand-banditisme-et-la-criminalite-ordinaire/#\\_ftnref2](https://www.revueconflits.com/le-vrai-visage-du-terrorisme-sahelien-le-grand-banditisme-et-la-criminalite-ordinaire/#_ftnref2).

178 Interview, international expert based in Mali.

179 Catherine Van Offelen, “Le vrai visage du terrorisme Sahélien : le grand banditisme et la criminalité ordinaire.” *Revue Conflits*, July 28, 2020. [https://www.revueconflits.com/le-vrai-visage-du-terrorisme-sahelien-le-grand-banditisme-et-la-criminalite-ordinaire/#\\_ftnref2](https://www.revueconflits.com/le-vrai-visage-du-terrorisme-sahelien-le-grand-banditisme-et-la-criminalite-ordinaire/#_ftnref2).

180 AQIM is believed to have earned at least US\$91.5 million in ransom payments between 2008-2013. See: Rukmini Callimachi, “Paying Ransoms, Europe Bankrolls Qaeda Terror,” *The New York Times*, July 29, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/30/world/africa/ransoming-citizens-europe-becomes-al-qaedas-patron.html>; See also, Samuel L. Aronson, “AQIM’s Threat to Western Interests in the Sahel,” *CTC Sentinel*, Vol.7, Issue 4, April 2014, p.8. <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/aqims-threat-to-western-interests-in-the-sahel/>.

181 Rukmini Callimachi, “Paying Ransoms, Europe Bankrolls Qaeda Terror,” *The New York Times*, July 29, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/30/world/africa/ransoming-citizens-europe-becomes-al-qaedas-patron.html>.

182 For instance, France is suspected to have paid around 17 million dollars in exchange for the liberation of four hostages abducted in the Areva uranium mine in Arlit, northern Niger, in 2010. See: Catherine Van Offelen, “Le vrai visage du terrorisme Sahélien : le grand banditisme et la criminalité ordinaire.” *Revue Conflits*, July 28, 2020.

183 Mark Micallef, Raouf Farrah, Alexander Bish, and Victor Tanner. *After the Storm: Organized crime across the Sahel Sahara following upheaval in Libya and Mali*. Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2019, p. 21. <https://globalinitiative.net/after-the-storm/>.

184 Ibid., pp.xiii-xiv.

185 Ibid., p.xiii.

186 Ibid., pp.xiii-xiv.

187 Sarah Maslin Nir, “Benin Awakens to the Threat of Terrorism After Safari Ends in a Nightmare.” *The New York Times*, August 20, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/20/world/africa/safari-kidnapping-benin-terrorism.html>.

Not only has KFR brought Boko Haram to global attention—through the international campaign ‘Bring Back Our Girls’ following the 2014 abduction of 276 schoolgirls in Chibok—but this activity has also represented “a prime source of funding” for the group.<sup>188</sup> It has reportedly earned millions in ransoms from the abduction of foreigners, with for instance “four incidents in northern Cameroon netting Boko Haram several millions of dollars in ransoms in 2013 and 2014.”<sup>189</sup> It should however be noted that “while the abduction of foreigners attracts much attention, the great majority of kidnapping victims are Nigerian nationals.”<sup>190</sup> The group is indeed suspected to have “abducted several hundred people over the past five years in attacks on villages in north-east Nigeria, and in neighbouring countries such as Niger and Cameroon.”<sup>191</sup>

All experts interviewed as part of this research confirmed that SALW played a prominent role in enabling terrorists to conduct such operations. It is however worth underlying the links that seems to have been established between terrorist and criminal networks, whereby “a Western hostage captured by criminals - who are mobile and have local contacts - will be sold for a large sum to a terrorist group like AQIM, which will use its international propaganda networks to put pressure on the West and obtain payment of a ransom.”<sup>192</sup> While shedding light on an interesting aspect of the crime-terror nexus in the region, such dynamics question the extent to which SALW possessed by terrorist organisations play a central role in the conduction of KFR. An interviewee however mentioned that smaller terrorist cells, such as Ansarul Islam, may also play this intermediary role, explaining that “especially in the case of foreigners, Ansarul Islam seems to be just a ‘buffer’ group. They may lead the kidnapping, but it is to hand the hostage over to a larger group that will be responsible for conducting the negotiations.”<sup>193</sup>

## SALW as enablers to conduct miscellaneous criminal activities

Terrorist organisations active in West Africa also appear to have generated important revenue from the conduction of miscellaneous other criminal activities, including theft and robberies, for which the possession of SALW appears as equally critical. Boko Haram militants have allegedly attacked and “robbed hundreds of banks in their home province of Borno and two other northern regions of Nigeria, and nabbed convoys and successful businesses,”<sup>194</sup> reportedly earning around 6 million dollars as proceeds from bank robberies from 2010 and 2013.<sup>195</sup> While bank robberies have decreased in recent years, the group has also been “accused of stealing cattle and selling it throughout the region.”<sup>196</sup> Cases of cattle abduction have not only been reported in northern Nigeria,<sup>197</sup> but also in southern

188 Kangdim Dingji Maza, Umut Koldaş, and Sait Aksit, “Challenges of Combating Terrorist Financing in the Lake Chad Region: A Case of Boko Haram,” *SAGE Open*, April-June 10(2), p.5. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2158244020934494>.

189 These kidnappings included the abduction of a French priest in November 2013, followed by the abduction of two Italian priests and a Canadian nun in April 2014. (Mahmoud, O. “Local, Global, or in Between? Boko Haram’s Messaging, Strategy, Membership, and Support Networks,” p.111).

190 William Assanvo and Don Okereke, “Nigeria’s kidnapping crisis,” *ENACT*, February 01, 2019. <https://enactafrica.org/enact-observer/nigerias-kidnapping-crisis>

191 Ibid.

192 Catherine Van Offelen, “Le vrai visage du terrorisme Sahélien : le grand banditisme et la criminalité ordinaire.” *Revue Conflits*, July 28, 2020. [https://www.revueconflits.com/le-vrai-visage-du-terrorisme-sahelien-le-grand-banditisme-et-la-criminalite-ordinaire/#\\_ftnref2](https://www.revueconflits.com/le-vrai-visage-du-terrorisme-sahelien-le-grand-banditisme-et-la-criminalite-ordinaire/#_ftnref2)

193 Interview, National Stakeholder based in Burkina Faso.

194 Peter Weber, “Who is financing Boko Haram?” *The Week*, May 12, 2014. <https://theweek.com/articles/447032/whos-financing-boko-haram>.

195 Kangdim Dingji Maza, Umut Koldaş, and Sait Aksit, “Challenges of Combating Terrorist Financing in the Lake Chad Region: A Case of Boko Haram,” *SAGE Open*, April-June 10(2), p.5. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2158244020934494>; Omar Mahmoud, “Local, Global, or in Between? Boko Haram’s Messaging, Strategy, Membership, and Support Networks,” in Jacob Zenn. (ed.) *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa’s Enduring Insurgency*. Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, May 2018, p.99. <https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Boko-Haram-Beyond-the-Headlines.pdf>.

196 Omar Mahmoud, “Local, Global, or in Between? Boko Haram’s Messaging, Strategy, Membership, and Support Networks,” in Jacob Zenn. (ed.) *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa’s Enduring Insurgency*. Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, May 2018, p.111. <https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Boko-Haram-Beyond-the-Headlines.pdf>.

197 See: Ibrahim Sawab, “Herders Lose 1,637 Members, 200,773 Livestock to Boko Haram,” *Daily Trust*, January 28, 2016.

Chad<sup>198</sup> and northern Cameroon.<sup>199</sup> Cattle theft was also mentioned as a source of income for Sahel-based groups.<sup>200</sup> However, the degree of involvement of violent extremist groups in such activities is still a matter of debate. While some argue that cattle abductions are carried out by “ordinary bandits, with no connection to extremist groups, [who] are taking advantage of the insecurity and confusion that prevails,”<sup>201</sup> others either report a form of cooperation between criminals and terrorists with “the former carrying out abductions on behalf of and with the authorisation of the latter,”<sup>202</sup> or point to a more direct involvement of terrorist groups for which “cattle rustling has become both a source of financing and livelihood.”<sup>203</sup> While securing terrorist fighters access to food, it would also provide them with commodities to resell or exchange.

Terrorist groups have also allegedly been involved in different types of trafficking activities proliferating across the region (see Figure 8).<sup>204</sup> Research indicates that “trafficking of persons, narcotics, arms, contraband products, stolen cattle [...] represent another flourishing avenue through which Boko Haram finances its operations.”<sup>205</sup> Similarly, Sahelian terror groups have reportedly generated revenue from their involvement in the trafficking of, among others, contraband cigarettes, drugs, and migrant smuggling.<sup>206</sup> One interviewee moreover mentioned the potential involvement of terrorist groups in poaching and the subsequent trafficking in protected species, “from which groups present in eastern Burkina Faso could possibly generate income.”<sup>207</sup>

198 See: “Tchad: Boko Haram Accusé De Vol De Bétail,” *RFI*, September 9, 2014.

199 Amnesty International, “Human Rights Under Fire: Attacks And Violations In Cameroon’s Struggle With Boko Haram,” 2015, p. 23.; Crisis Group, “Cameroon: Confronting Boko Haram,” *African Report* 241, November 16, 2016, p. 17.

200 Along with cattle theft, one interviewee also mentioned the theft and resale of vehicles. Interview, local independent consultant based in Mali.

201 William Assanvo, Baba Danoko, Lori-Anne Thérout-Bénoni, and Ibrahim Maïga. “Violent extremism, organised crime and local conflicts in Liptako-Gourma,” Institute for Security Studies, p.15. <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/war-26-eng.pdf>.

202 Ibid., p.15.

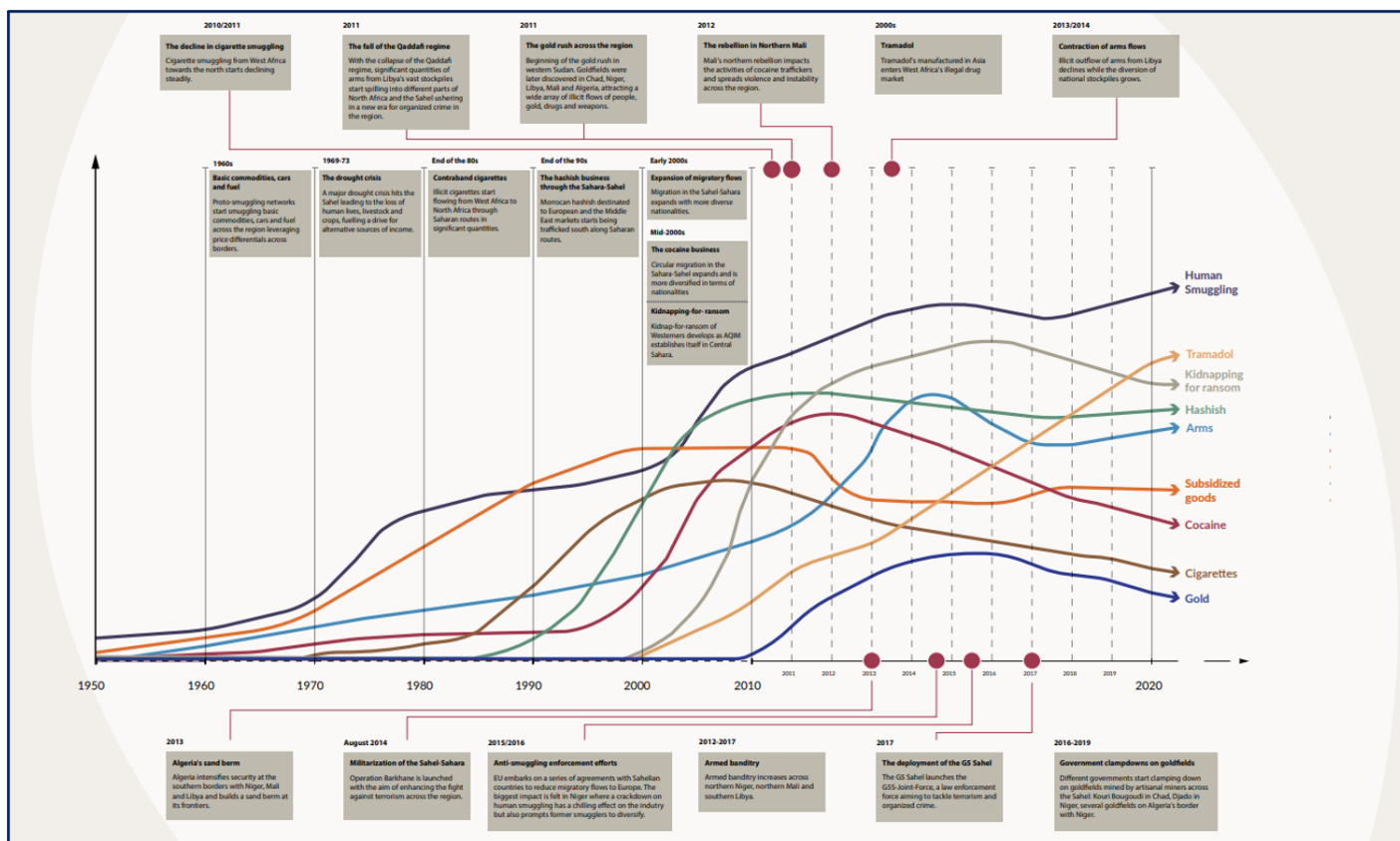
203 Ibid.

204 Mark Micallef, Raouf Farrah, Alexander Bish, and Victor Tanner. *After the Storm: Organized crime across the Sahel Sahara following upheaval in Libya and Mali*. Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2019, p.xi. <https://globalinitiative.net/after-the-storm/>.

205 Kangdim Dingji, Maza, Umüt Koldaş, and Sait Aksit, “Challenges of Combating Terrorist Financing in the Lake Chad Region: A Case of Boko Haram,” *SAGE Open*, April-June 10(2), p.6. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2158244020934494>.

206 Christian Nellesmann, et al. (Eds). *World atlas of illicit flows*. A RHIPTO-INTERPOL-GI Assessment, 2018, p.92. <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Atlas-Illicit-Flows-Second-Edition-EN-WEB.pdf>

207 Interview, Local Researcher based in Côte d’Ivoire.



**Figure 8.** Timeline showing the evolution of black economies and criminal markets in the Sahel-Sahara.<sup>208</sup>

However, it seems that “their involvement generally appears indirect, in that they are not the holders of the trafficked products.”<sup>209</sup> Groups can “without being involved in certain activities, profit from them in several ways: by collecting taxes on convoys of goods transiting through an area under their control, by providing escort, protection or transportation services.”<sup>210</sup> Reports indicate that groups like AQIM, al-Mourabitoun and Ansar Dine “are now increasingly changing how they finance themselves, shifting their attention away from kidnapping for ransom and cigarette smuggling to protection-taxing the trafficking of drugs [...] an activity that pays much higher dividends,”<sup>211</sup> a trend confirmed by some interviewees:

*“While there is long-standing speculation about extremist involvement in the trafficking of drugs and other contraband, there is no evidence for this. Still, extremist groups may provide “protection services” for convoys travelling through their areas of operation in northern Mali, for which groups will also carry arms and ammunition.”*

**International stakeholder based in Mali**

Research moreover underlines that West African terrorist organisations have “been significantly bolstered by having access to a steady supply of arms from Libya since 2011, which has strengthened their position to offer ‘protection’,”<sup>212</sup> further underscoring the importance of SALW possession in the conduction of these activities. Such forms of indirect involvement in illicit trafficking are only possible because of the control some violent extremist organisations are able to exert over portions

208 Mark Micallef, Raouf Farrah, Alexander Bish, and Victor Tanner. *After the Storm: Organized crime across the Sahel-Sahara following upheaval in Libya and Mali*. Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2019, pp.x-xi. <https://globalinitiative.net/after-the-storm/>.

209 William Assanvo, Baba Danoko, Lori-Anne Thérone-Bénoni, and Ibrahim Maïga. “Violent extremism, organised crime and local conflicts in Liptako-Gourma,” Institute for Security Studies, p.9. <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/war-26-eng.pdf>.

210 Ibid.

211 Christian Nellemann, et al. (Eds). *World atlas of illicit flows*, A RHIPTO-INTERPOL-GI Assessment, 2018, p.79. <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Atlas-Illicit-Flows-Second-Edition-EN-WEB.pdf>.

212 Ibid.

of territories, with more opportunities to levy funds being derived from the taxation and extortion of local populations.

Many interviewees indeed referred to the taxation of populations living in the areas controlled by terrorist groups as a non-negligible source of funding. In the Sahel, terrorist groups have, for instance, relied on the imposition of a 'religious' tax (called '*zakat*') collected from local populations, a form of racketeering in disguise. Importantly, "incursions into villages to demand such payments are backed by extremist possession of small arms and related ammunition."<sup>213</sup> Such a practice, "while unlikely to be a significant source of income in a broader sense, [is] important for local-level income,"<sup>214</sup> and further illustrates the instrumental use of SALW as a source of terrorism financing. Similar practices have been used in the Lake Chad basin, where Boko Haram has "set up instruments for collecting taxes (*haraji*)"<sup>215</sup> in areas under its control.

## SALW and the exploitation of the artisanal gold mining sector

Growing concerns also surrounds the exploitation of the artisanal gold mining sector as a new avenue for terrorist finance in the Sahel.<sup>216</sup> A recent investigation by Reuters underlines that "for the Islamists, the mines are both a hideout and a treasure trove: of funds with which to recruit new members and buy arms, and of explosives and detonators to stage the attacks that extend their power."<sup>217</sup> Regarding this latter point, several experts interviewed indeed mention the "diversion of explosives from artisanal mining sites, which is a real problem and risk."<sup>218</sup> In a context marked by a rise in IED attacks, gold mines are believed to "provide a supply route for the manufacture of IEDs, particularly in central Mali and parts of Burkina Faso."<sup>219</sup> Some concerns were also expressed with the risk of seeing these sites becoming "training grounds, notably with regard to the manipulation of explosives."<sup>220</sup> These sites are described as attracting poles for illicit arms more generally, due to a dynamic whereby "miners seek to protect themselves from those who would prey on their success, the people nearby are also increasingly turning to armed members of their communities to protect them and to prevent insecurity and instability from taking hold [which], in turn, drives demand from criminals for even greater firepower to subdue those ranged against them."<sup>221</sup>

213 Written inputs, international stakeholder based in Mali.

214 Written inputs, international stakeholder based in Mali.

215 Dingji Maza, K., Koldaş, U., & Aksit, S. "Challenges of Combating Terrorist Financing in the Lake Chad Region: A Case of Boko Haram," p.6. See also: Archbishop of Kaduna Catholic Diocese cited in: "Boko Haram Still Collecting Taxes, Providing Services in Borno – Archbishop of Kaduna." *Sahara Reporters*, June 19, 2019, <http://saharareporters.com/2019/06/19/boko-haram-still-collecting-taxes-providing-services-borno-%E2%80%93-archbishop-kaduna>.

216 See for instance: GIABA. *Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing linked to the Extractive Industry / Mining Sector in West Africa*, Typology Report, October 2019. [https://www.giaba.org/media/f/1104\\_pkbat\\_41745%20ENG-ML%20-%20TF%20IN%20EXTRACTIVE.pdf](https://www.giaba.org/media/f/1104_pkbat_41745%20ENG-ML%20-%20TF%20IN%20EXTRACTIVE.pdf); Sophie Douce, "Au Burkina Faso, les mines d'or sous la menace djihadiste," *Le Monde*, November 21, 2019. [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/11/21/au-burkina-faso-les-mines-d-or-sous-la-menace-djihadiste\\_6020049\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/11/21/au-burkina-faso-les-mines-d-or-sous-la-menace-djihadiste_6020049_3212.html); Fages, C. "Or: le Burkina Faso et son industrie minière face au défi du terrorisme," *RFI*, November 10, 2019. <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/emission/20191111-burkina-faso-terrorisme-industrie-mini-ere-or>.

217 David Lewis and Ryan McNeill, "How jihadists struck gold in Africa's Sahel," *Reuters Special Report*, November 22, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/gold-africa-islamists/>.

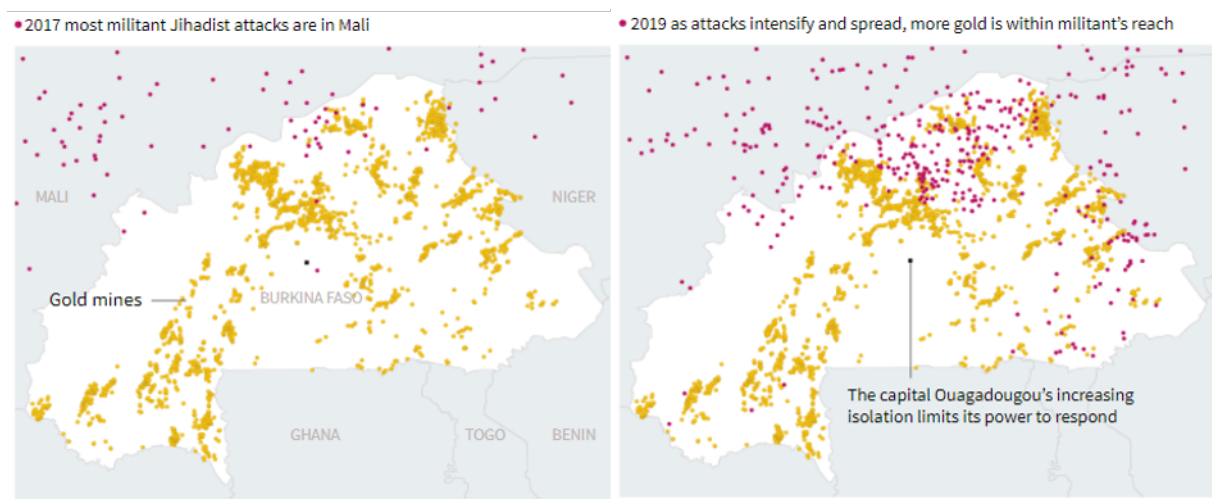
218 Interview, international arms expert based in Europe.

219 International Crisis Group. *Getting a Grip on Central Sahel's Gold Rush*, Africa Report N°282, November 13, 2019, p.8. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/afrika/sahel/burkina-faso/282-reprendre-en-main-la-ru-ee-vers-lor-au-sahel-central%20/>.

220 Ibid.

221 Roberto Sollazzo and Matthias Nowak. *Tri-border Transit: Trafficking and Smuggling in the Burkina Faso-Côte d'Ivoire-Mali Region*, Small Arms Survey, Briefing Paper, October 2020, p.7. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SAS-SANA-BP-Triborder-Transit.pdf>





**Figure 9.** Terrorist activity around artisanal gold mines in Burkina Faso between 2017-2019.<sup>222</sup>

In addition, “high-value commodities such as gold and diamonds serve as alternative currencies in money-laundering schemes, while also financing terrorist organizations in West Africa.”<sup>223</sup> Gold extracted from artisanal mines in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, are estimated to represent “a total monetary value of between \$1.9 and \$4.5 billion per year.”<sup>224</sup> Gold mining sites and convoys have thus become strategic targets for terrorist attacks (see Figure 9), as illustrated by the ambush against a convoy of the Canadian mining company Semafo in eastern Burkina Faso in November 2019.<sup>225</sup> But these types of operations are not the only way extremist actors can make use of this flourishing sector. Often located in regions where the state presence is either weak or contested, “scores of the small-scale excavations are in areas controlled by jihadis.”<sup>226</sup> According to research conducted by the International Crisis Group, it seems that “the main jihadist groups in the Sahel benefit financially from gold extraction [...] in ways that vary from region to region.”<sup>227</sup> While groups like Ansar Dine in northern Mali, as well as ISGS and JNIM in eastern Burkina Faso, do “not have an armed presence to secure the site, but levies the zakat (religious tax) upon miners and the rest of the population,” groups operating in the Burkinabe Soum province may moreover earn money from securing mining sites.<sup>228</sup> Extremist groups’ *modus operandi* was further described by an interviewee as follows:

*“Typically, when they arrive in an artisanal gold mining area, they do everything they can to take control of the gold mining site. So if there was a security mechanism there, they get rid of it. If it was the defence and security forces, they get rid of them. If it was other security actors, such as the Koglweogo in Burkina or others, they get rid of them. They provide security for the site themselves, or they join forces with other actors who provide security for the site, and in exchange for this service, they get paid.”*

**Local researcher based in Côte d’Ivoire**

After having chased out security guards from the sites, “extremist groups then fill the void they

222 David Lewis and Ryan McNeill, “How jihadists struck gold in Africa’s Sahel,” *Reuters Special Report*, November 22, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/gold-africa-islamists/>.

223 Ibid.

224 International Crisis Group. *Getting a Grip on Central Sahel’s Gold Rush*, Africa Report N°282, November 13, 2019, p.1. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/282-reprendre-en-main-la-rupee-vers-lor-au-sahel-central%20/>.

225 Sophie Douce, “Burkina Faso : au moins 38 personnes tuées dans une attaque « planifiée » contre un convoi minier,” *Le Monde*, November 07, 2019. [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/11/07/au-moins-37-morts-dans-l-attaque-d-un-convoi-minier-dans-l-est-du-burkina-faso\\_6018310\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/11/07/au-moins-37-morts-dans-l-attaque-d-un-convoi-minier-dans-l-est-du-burkina-faso_6018310_3212.html).

226 Will Brown. “The Sahel squeeze,” *The Africa Report*, June 4, 2020. <https://www.theafricareport.com/25128/the-sahel-squeeze/>.

227 International Crisis Group. *Getting a Grip on Central Sahel’s Gold Rush*, Africa Report N°282, November 13, 2019, p.7. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/282-reprendre-en-main-la-rupee-vers-lor-au-sahel-central%20/>.

228 Ibid.

have created and emerge as the guardians of security for the mines,”<sup>229</sup> and get remunerated for their protection. Some also argue that, in Burkina Faso, “Islamists had taken control of some mines, especially in protected areas, where they encouraged camps of miners to dig in violation of government bans.”<sup>230</sup> Finally, recent reports indicate that gold produced within sites under terrorist groups’ control in the eastern regions of the country have been “purchased by buyers from Benin and Togo.”<sup>231</sup>

### 2.3.3. Scope and dynamics of the direct use of SALW as a source of terrorist finance

In light of the previous section, SALW appear as critical assets allowing terrorist groups to carry out a diverse set of income-generating activities. In parallel to this instrumental use, arms and ammunition also represent valuable trafficking commodities as such. Researching the use of SALW as a source of terrorist finance thus requires an exploration of the level of involvement of terrorist organisations in SALW trafficking, either as suppliers directly generating income from the sale of arms and ammunition, or as intermediaries benefitting from arms trafficking through taxation, the provision of transport and protection services.

#### Terrorist organisations’ direct involvement in SALW trafficking

Arms trafficking has regularly been listed among “the potential sources of funding for terrorist groups in West and Central Africa.”<sup>232</sup> Many reports claim that violent extremist organisations have obtained profit from arms trafficking, arguing for instance that Boko Haram has partly financed its operations through “black-market operations such as [...] arms sale.”<sup>233</sup> However, there does not appear to be any concrete evidence pointing to a structural involvement of terrorist organisations in arms trafficking as suppliers. Even if this involvement was to be established, it remains unclear “whether terrorist groups engage in arms trafficking as a means of remaining self-sufficient or as a way to finance their activities.”<sup>234</sup>

While data gathered through this research mostly confirmed these trends, some interviewees underlined that, as opportunistic actors, terrorist groups could occasionally resort to this activity if perceived as beneficial under certain circumstances, thereby rather pointing to a potential ad-hoc involvement. For instance, it was argued that “if they have weapons that are surplus to their needs or they have an alliance, they would happily sell material to other groups as long as they are aligned, even on a short term basis.”<sup>235</sup> Along this line, one interviewee referred to instances where violent extremist groups may have acted as arms providers, indicating that: “We know that, at one point in time, certain actors within the jihadist movement took up causes for certain communities [...] We know that these groups have provided training in the handling of weapons. It is therefore reasonable to assume that arms transfers also took place to accompany this support.”<sup>236</sup> Most of the experts consulted regard these types of transactions as a way of ‘buying loyalties’, rather than a ‘trading

229 William Assanvo, Baba Danoko, Lori-Anne Thérout-Bénoni, and Ibrahim Maïga. “Violent extremism, organised crime and local conflicts in Liptako-Gourma,” Institute for Security Studies, p.16. <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/war-26-eng.pdf>.

230 David Lewis and Ryan McNeill, “How jihadists struck gold in Africa’s Sahel,” *Reuters Special Report*, November 22, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/gold-africa-islamists/>.

231 Sampson Kwarkye, “Breaking terrorism supply chains in West Africa.” *ISS Today*, June 8, 2020. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/breaking-terrorism-supply-chains-in-west-africa>.

232 See for instance: FATF-GIABA-GABAC. *Terrorist Financing in West and Central Africa*. FATF, Paris, October 2016, p.19. [www.fatf-gafi.org/publications/methodsandtrends/documents/terrorist-financing-west-central-africa.html](http://www.fatf-gafi.org/publications/methodsandtrends/documents/terrorist-financing-west-central-africa.html).

233 Kangdim Dingji Maza, Umut Koldaş, and Sait Aksit, “Challenges of Combating Terrorist Financing in the Lake Chad Region: A Case of Boko Haram,” *SAGE Open*, April-June 10(2), p.3, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2158244020934494>.

234 FATF-GIABA-GABAC. *Terrorist Financing in West and Central Africa*. FATF, Paris, October 2016, p.22. [www.fatf-gafi.org/publications/methodsandtrends/documents/terrorist-financing-west-central-africa.html](http://www.fatf-gafi.org/publications/methodsandtrends/documents/terrorist-financing-west-central-africa.html).

235 Interview, international arms expert based in Europe.

236 Interview, Local Researcher based in Côte d’Ivoire. See also: William Assanvo, Baba Danoko, Lori-Anne Thérout-Bénoni, and Ibrahim Maïga. “Violent extremism, organised crime and local conflicts in Liptako-Gourma,” Institute for Security Studies, p.21, <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/war-26-eng.pdf>.

operation' allowing terrorist organisations to generate income.<sup>237</sup>

Overall, international, and local researchers and stakeholders interviewed agreed on the fact that terrorist groups generally do not “use weapons as a commodity to sell and make profit off.”<sup>238</sup> While acknowledging the strategic importance of possessing SALW to carry out activities aimed at generating revenue, some underlined the small incentive for terrorist groups to get directly involved in arms trafficking:

*“I have the impression that they would rather outsource the trafficking and transport of arms than internalise it, with all the logistics and cost that it entails. For terrorist groups, it is probably easier to pay someone to do it, to have someone they can trust who can be more or less freely connected to the organisation, rather than dedicating the organisation’s effort to this kind of trafficking, especially to generate income. [...] I am not sure that this traffic is very important to create income. However, owning weapons is an absolutely strategic asset to generate any kind of income, so that is different.”*

#### International arms expert based in Europe

Several arguments were put forward by different interviewees to support the idea of a limited direct involvement of terrorist groups in arms trafficking. As SALW represent critical operational and financing tools, terrorist groups are certainly more inclined to remain on the demand rather than the supply side. Even in the case of potential surplus, this material may well rather be used to grow their ranks, or to strengthen their network. SALW trafficking is moreover an activity requiring certain logistics and human resources, generating costs as well as a certain level of risk, while not representing the most lucrative criminal activity. Several other interviewees moreover noted that one of the main challenges consists in distinguishing members of different armed groups,<sup>239</sup> notably due to their rapidly changing—and sometimes cumulative—affiliations, making it even more complex to assess on behalf of which group an individual engaged in arms trafficking may operate.

### Terrorist organisations’ indirect involvement in SALW trafficking

Another avenue for terrorist groups to levy funds from arms may be to position themselves as “services providers and ‘regulators’ of illegal activities.”<sup>240</sup> In line with dynamics previously described, most interviewed experts suggested that terrorist groups benefit from the growing insecurity along traditional trading routes and the taxation of illicit flows crossing West Africa. Overall, most interviewees agreed that terrorists’ indirect implication in trafficking activities, irrespective of the nature of the commodities smuggled, is rather “context-specific”<sup>241</sup> and linked to the control of territories, and thus certainly also applies to SALW trafficking. For many, the exact role played by terrorist organisations however remains difficult to assess with precision since “it comes down to the age-old question of who is a terrorist.”<sup>242</sup> While acknowledging that violent extremist groups certainly gain some money from protection-taxation, it thus remains difficult to “point the finger as to where, when and how often” it happens.<sup>243</sup> In addition, the configuration of SALW trafficking would not allow terrorist groups to generate much income by taxing arm convoys, which are believed to transport rather small quantities:

*“In this [Sahelian] region, groups that control a territory are probably generating revenue and*

237 Interview, international arms expert based in Europe.

238 Interview, international arms expert based in Europe.

239 Aurélien Tobie, and Boukary Sangaré. *The Impact of Armed Groups in the Populations of Central and Northern Mali: Necessary Adaptations of the Strategies for Re-establishing Peace*. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), October 2019. [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/1910\\_sipri\\_report\\_the\\_impact\\_of\\_armed\\_groups\\_on\\_the\\_populations\\_of\\_central\\_and\\_northern\\_mali\\_en\\_0.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/1910_sipri_report_the_impact_of_armed_groups_on_the_populations_of_central_and_northern_mali_en_0.pdf).

240 William Assanvo, Baba Danoko, Lori-Anne Thérone-Bénoni, and Ibrahim Maïga. “Violent extremism, organised crime and local conflicts in Liptako-Gourma,” Institute for Security Studies, p.9, <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/war-26-eng.pdf>.

241 Interview, international stakeholder based in Mali.

242 Interview, international arms Expert based in North America.

243 Interview, international arms Expert based in North America.

taxing all forms of activity, which is legal trade, illicit trade, trafficking, and whatever basically creates an opportunity, so it is not impossible that it applies to weapons as well in some circumstances. [...] But I am not sure that big volumes of weapons are actually making the bulk of trafficking. There have been big long-range convoys moving out weapons from Libya for instance, driving all the way to Northern Mali, Southern Algeria, driving across Niger, and going West or South to the Lake Chad basin, but it is not something that happens that regularly.”

International arms expert based in Europe

## Arms transfers among terrorist networks

An interesting dynamic highlighted by previous research, and confirmed by some interviewees, regards the existence of arms transfers among terrorist networks operating throughout the region. Assault rifles of the same model, with sequential serial numbers and markings erased in similar ways, were used in attacks carried out by different al-Qaeda affiliates, including against the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako, the Cappuccino restaurant and Splendid Hotel in Ouagadougou, and the resorts in Grand Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire, between 2015 and 2016 (see Figure 10).<sup>244</sup> This well-known case demonstrated the ability of “these groups to move equipment across borders and to carry out attacks in different locations across western Africa,”<sup>245</sup> in the pace of just one year.



**Figure 10.** This map shows the locations of the three terrorists attacks carried out by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb on western targets.<sup>246</sup>

Some reports also point out to “arms transfers between ‘jihadists’ operating on either side of the border in central Mali and in the Burkina regions of the Sahel and the north,”<sup>247</sup> notably between the Burkinabe group Ansarul Islam and the Katiba Macina based in central Mali. A locally-based expert interviewed described instances where “a main group such as JNIM or one of its components is an arms supplier either to a katiba or to a much smaller group, but always from the same movement.”<sup>248</sup>

244 Holger Anders. *Monitoring Illicit Arms Flows. The Role of UN Peacekeeping Operations*, Small Arms Survey, Briefing Paper, June 2018, p.5. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SANA-BP-Monitoring-Illicit-Arms-Flows-PKOs.pdf>.

245 Small Arms Survey. *Weapons Compass. Mapping Illicit Small Arms Flows in Africa*. January 2019, p.41, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/U-Reports/SAS-AU-Weapons-Compass.pdf>.

246 Loucoumane Coulibaly and Dionne Searcey, “16 killed in Terrorist Attack on Resort in Ivory Coast,” *New York Times*, March 13, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/14/world/africa/gunmen-carry-out-fatal-attacks-at-resorts-in-ivory-coast.html>.

247 William Assanvo, Baba Danoko, Lori-Anne Théroux-Bénoni, and Ibrahim Maïga. “Violent extremism, organised crime and local conflicts in Liptako-Gourma,” Institute for Security Studies, p.11. <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/war-26-eng.pdf>.

248 Interview, Local Researcher based in Côte d'Ivoire.

There is however no evidence to support that such ‘internal’ transfers are remunerated which, according to the same expert, seems rather unlikely:

*“There was no information indicating a remuneration for these arms transfers. [...] But when you see the way these groups operate, when you see the relations that some small groups maintain with their “parent organisation” which is in another area, this is probably just logistical support, without any remuneration being provided.”*

**Local researcher based in Côte d’Ivoire**

Another source of great concern relates to links between terrorist groups operating in different conflict zones across the region, and in its neighbourhoods, as it may have played a role in some groups’ “expanding capabilities.”<sup>249</sup> For instance, it is believed that some Boko Haram militants received training in Somalia, including “instruction in IEDs”<sup>250</sup>, and in northern Mali in 2012, where AQIM had then managed to conquer territories.<sup>251</sup> This latter experience has reportedly “resulted in the boost in Boko Haram’s desert warfare capabilities, including the appearance of technical [vehicles with a mounted gun] and the use of RPGs for the first time in Nigeria in early 2013, along with ‘shaped charge’ IEDs for suicide attacks.”<sup>252</sup> However, these ties have “likely declined after 2013, especially after the French intervention severed networks between Boko Haram and AQIM.”<sup>253</sup> While there have also been suspicions of arms transfers between IS networks active in Libya and in the Lake Chad, there has been very little concrete evidence of it, with “only a few almost anecdotal reports of a couple of traders being caught on their way from southern Libya to Nigeria.”<sup>254</sup> More recently, new concerns have been raised by the apparent rapprochement between IS-affiliates operating in the Sahel and the Lake Chad, with ISIS central claiming attacks carried out by ISGS under the name of ISWAP. Most interviewees however indicated that, although requiring close monitoring, it remained uncertain whether this last development has translated into any materiel support being provided by one cell to another.

## 2.4. Conclusion

Despite the African Union’s efforts to curb violence by “Silencing the Guns” on the continent by the year 2020,<sup>255</sup> including by addressing the issue of illicit arms trafficking and stopping “rebels/insurgents, non-state actors and their financiers and political backers from accessing weapons,”<sup>256</sup> around 50 million SALW are still believed to be in circulation across the African continent, among

249 Omar Mahmoud, “Local, Global, or in Between? Boko Haram’s Messaging, Strategy, Membership, and Support Networks,” in Jacob Zenn. (ed.) *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa’s Enduring Insurgency*. Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, May 2018, p.98. <https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Boko-Haram-Beyond-the-Headlines.pdf>.

250 Barkindo, A. “Abubakr Shekau: Boko Haram’s Underestimated Corporatist-Strategic Leader” in Zenn, J. (ed.) *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa’s Enduring Insurgency*. Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, May 2018, p.61. <https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Boko-Haram-Beyond-the-Headlines.pdf>

251 Omar Mahmoud, “Local, Global, or in Between? Boko Haram’s Messaging, Strategy, Membership, and Support Networks,” in Jacob Zenn. (ed.) *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa’s Enduring Insurgency*. Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, May 2018, pp.98-99. <https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Boko-Haram-Beyond-the-Headlines.pdf>. See also: Schemm, P. “France Says Nigerian Militants Trained in Mali,” *Associated Press*, November 14, 2013. <https://apnews.com/article/045270e9d410419394c903b3dda1e50d>.

252 Omar Mahmoud, “Local, Global, or in Between? Boko Haram’s Messaging, Strategy, Membership, and Support Networks,” in Jacob Zenn. (ed.) *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa’s Enduring Insurgency*. Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, May 2018, p.99. <https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Boko-Haram-Beyond-the-Headlines.pdf>.

253 Ibid., p.111.

254 Interview, international arms expert based in Europe. See: Cooper, H. “Boko Haram and ISIS are Collaborating More, U.S. Military Says,” *New York Times*, April 20, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/21/world/africa/boko-haram-and-isis-are-collaborating-more-us-military-says.html>

255 Okumu, W., Atta-Asamoah, a., & Sharamo, R. D. *Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020: Achievements, Opportunities and Challenges*, ISS Monograph 203, August 2020. <https://issafrica.org/research/monographs/silencing-the-guns-in-africa-by-2020-achievements-opportunities-and-challenges>.

256 For more details, see the African Union Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by Year 2020 (Lusaka Master Roadmap 2016), available here: [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/38304-doc-1\\_au\\_roadmap\\_silencing\\_guns\\_2020\\_pdf\\_en.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/38304-doc-1_au_roadmap_silencing_guns_2020_pdf_en.pdf).

which almost 80 percent are in the hands of civilians.<sup>257</sup> West Africa in particular has been faced with a complex web of security challenges in recent years. In a context marked by chronic political instability and mounting violence, armed groups have proliferated and increased the demand for and the illicit circulation of SALW, the main type of equipment used by terrorist groups. Despite the presence of a wide range of armed actors across the subregion, including various al-Qaeda and Islamic State-affiliated organisations, little difference can be observed in terms of their armament. Most of these groups, whether located in the Sahel or the Lake Chad Basin, seem to rely on what some experts labelled as “a homogeneous pool of material from the immediate region”<sup>258</sup> which is mainly comprised of automatic assault rifles, machineguns, and rocket-propelled grenade launchers, supplemented with very limited set of heavy weapons.

Terrorist organisations active in West Africa nonetheless appear to have had access to a relatively steady supply of SALW, mainly originating from different national stockpiles. In addition to arms recirculating following various conflicts, civil wars, and rebellions, a large share of these groups’ equipment continues to be diverted from security and defence forces following attacks on posts and convoys, and to lesser extent, as a result of the practices of corrupt officials. Their ability to adapt their arms procurement following the decrease in arm flows originating from Libya, with terrorist networks starting to rely more heavily on battlefield captures, moreover underscores the fact that “there are many different types of small arms trafficking channels, which can also change over time [and] are constantly adapting to new regulations, changing security conditions and the requirements of those who demand and use these weapons.”<sup>259</sup> It underlines the necessity of acting on numerous fronts—from enhanced stockpile management to border surveillance, intelligence-sharing, anti-corruption measures, etc.—in order to curb illicit arms trafficking.

Such efforts would certainly also help “breaking the funding and logistics supply chains”<sup>260</sup> of violent extremist cells active in West Africa. In addition to representing critical operational means enabling terrorist actors to conduct their violent activities, this research has indeed shown that SALW also appear as strategic assets allowing them to generate funds. Even if representing valuable trafficking commodities, most experts interviewed seem to agree that proceeds from either a direct or indirect involvement in SALW trafficking is rather small, especially as compared to funds derived from other activities requiring the possession of arms. SALW possessed by terrorist organisations mainly facilitate, or even enable, the conduction of other income-generating activities ranging from KFR, robberies, thefts, as well as taxation on goods, activities, and people within the areas under their control. Apart from funds derived from potential donations, or legitimate businesses, SALW seem to play a critical role in most of the financing sources terrorist organisations currently rely on.

*“I would not say that weapons are actually generating revenue for terrorist groups, neither directly nor indirectly in terms of weapons as a commodity. Then, of course, weapons are what makes everything else possible for them. That is what creates their authority, their capacity to threaten and therefore to collect and generate revenues.”*

**International arms expert based in North America**

Concerning the evolution of current trends, it seems that “as the demand for arms is influenced by insecurity, it is reasonable to assume that it will not diminish in the near future.”<sup>261</sup> Serious efforts will

257 Small Arms Survey. *Weapons Compass. Mapping Illicit Small Arms Flows in Africa*. January 2019, p.31, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/U-Reports/SAS-AU-Weapons-Compass.pdf>.

258 Interview, international arms expert based in North America.

259 Nicolas Florquin, “Les filières multiples du trafic des armes légères,” *Diplomatie*, n° 92, mai-juin 2018, p.57. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2018/Diplomatie-no-92-Les-filieres-multiples-du-traffic-des%20armes-legeres.pdf>.

260 Sampson Kwarkye, “Breaking terrorism supply chains in West Africa.” *ISS Today*, June 8, 2020. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/breaking-terrorism-supply-chains-in-west-africa>.

261 Mattias Nowak, “Enjeux du trafic d’armes : l’Afrique de l’Ouest dans la tourmente”. *Les Grands Dossiers de Diplomatie*, n° 52, août-septembre 2019, p.55. [www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2019/Grands-Dossiers-Diplomatie-no-52-Enjeux-du-traffic-armes.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/L-External-publications/2019/Grands-Dossiers-Diplomatie-no-52-Enjeux-du-traffic-armes.pdf).

thus be required to address the acquisition of SALW by terrorist organisations. However, due account should be paid to the risks associated with disrupting these groups' supply chain, which could not only prompt attacks aimed to "protect hideouts, secure supply routes, or attack border posts that extremists believe are impediments to their supply of materials,"<sup>262</sup> but also impact "the livelihoods of individuals and communities who rely on cross-border trade."<sup>263</sup>

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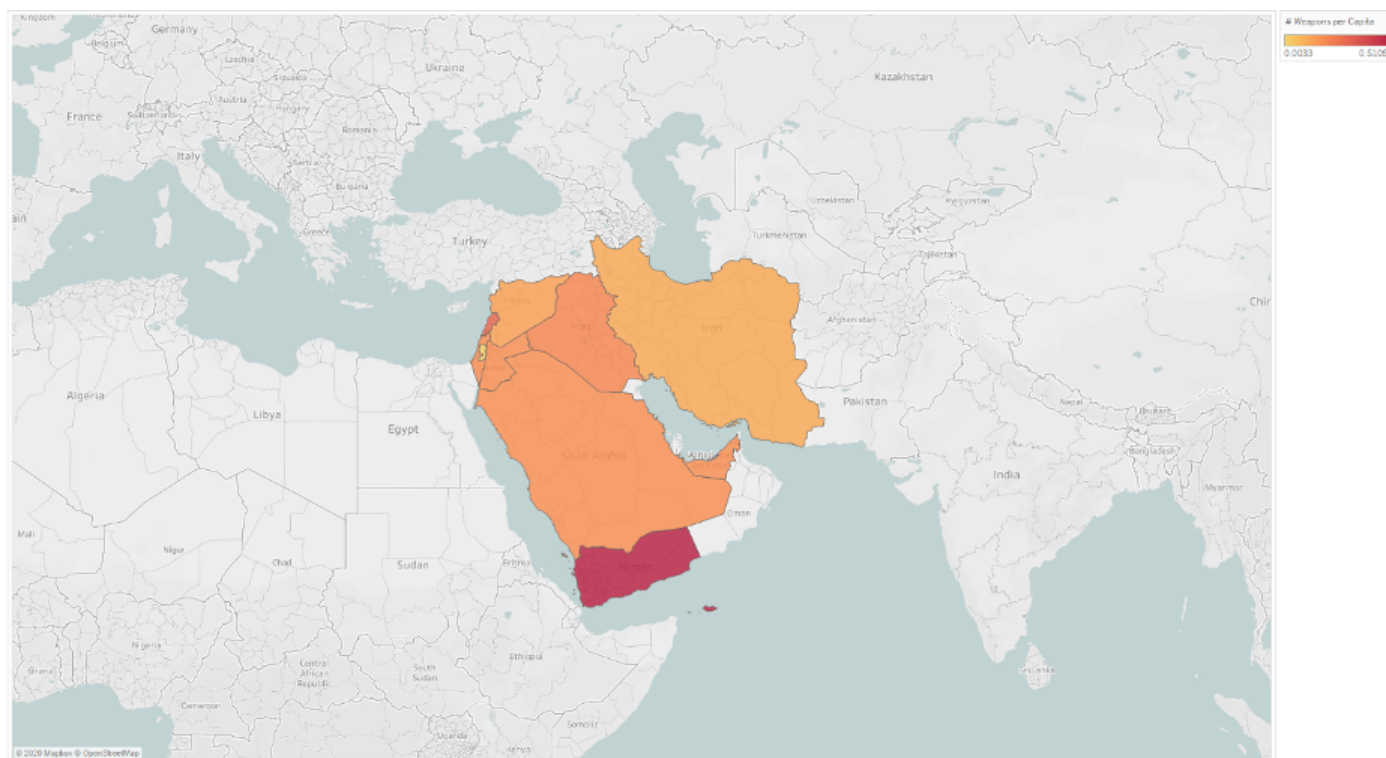
262 Sampson Kwarkye, "Breaking terrorism supply chains in West Africa." *ISS Today*, June 8, 2020. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/breaking-terrorism-supply-chains-in-west-africa>.

263 Ibid.

## Middle East

### 3.1. Introduction

There are numerous avenues for terrorists and other non-state actors to acquire SALW in the Middle East.<sup>264</sup> At the core of the supply and demand for weaponry and ammunition is conflict—both inter- and intra-state. Wars have plagued the region for decades, including the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War, Israel’s numerous skirmishes with Hezbollah and Hamas, the 1991 Persian Gulf War, and the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, to name just a few. Civil war, insurgency, and state failure have characterised the Middle East, both prior to and following the Arab Spring in 2011. Today, a regional battle for supremacy between Gulf Arab countries like Saudi Arabia on the one hand, and the Islamic Republic of Iran on the other, has fuelled sectarianism and proxy conflict, including ongoing hostilities in Iraq, the 2006 conflict in Lebanon between Hezbollah and Israel, the 2011 Syrian Civil War, and the 2014 Yemeni Civil War.



**Figure 11.** The number of SALW per capita in the Middle East.<sup>265</sup>

In the past decade, Middle Eastern countries such as Iraq, Syria and Yemen have moreover structurally been ranked among the countries most impacted by terrorism worldwide and they account for a large part of the nearly 70,000 terrorist fatalities that the Middle East and North Africa have collectively suffered during this timeframe.<sup>266</sup> Moreover, the terrorism landscape was “changed globally”<sup>267</sup> with the emergence of ISIS’ self-proclaimed “Caliphate” in 2014. Located in Iraq and Syria, the group formed “a first in the history of modern terrorism: a proto-state able to seize and control territory,

264 For the purpose of this Report, the Middle East refers to Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, the Palestinian territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. This chapter will specifically focus on the ongoing conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.

265 Small Arms Survey, *Global Firearms Holdings*, June 2018, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/weapons-and-markets/tools/global-firearms-holdings.html>.

266 Institute for Economics & Peace. *Global Terrorism Index 2020: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism*. Sydney. November 2020, p. 52. <https://visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/GTI-2020-web-1.pdf>.

267 Mohammed Sinan Siyech, “A Comparative Analysis of ‘Islamic State’ & Al Qaeda in Yemen.” *Counter Terrorism Trends and Analysis* volume 8, Issue 8, August 2016: 12.



amass possibly billions of dollars and organize a major military force”.<sup>268</sup> Although international military operations caused ISIS to largely lose its control over the so-called caliphate’s territories, its remaining forces and followers continue to pose a serious regional and international threat.<sup>269</sup>

Terrorist organisations operating in the Middle East have demonstrated a consistent ability to overcome organisational setbacks, as well as changing social and political circumstances of the unstable environments they operate in. More importantly, groups such as al-Qaeda, ISIS, and others remain determined to reconstitute their operational capabilities to project influence, secure social control in contested and ungoverned territory, and establish forward operating positions to carry out terrorist attacks, recruit new members, and finance their organisations. While some experts believe the epicentre of jihadi terrorism may shift away from the region,<sup>270</sup> the Middle East continues to hold a major position in the terrorism landscape. A prominent reason for that is the size and sophistication of the arsenals that various regional terrorist and other non-state actors have. These arsenals, as well as the central role they play in the continuing functionality and threat of those groups, merit closer study.

The focus of this chapter will be a range of conflict and violent non-state actors in the Middle East, (3.2) the SALW they possess and acquire, as well as (3.3) the direct and indirect use these weapons have to finance their activities. While not all groups or organisations analysed are listed/designated as terrorist groups by the European Union, all are violent non-state actors and engage in acts of terrorism.<sup>271</sup> Because this chapter addresses illicit criminal activities, smuggling and trafficking, the analysis also covers criminal actors and networks operating throughout the region. These criminal networks though not identified by name as a formal organisation or group (e.g., Ndrangheta), play an important role related to their interaction with terrorist groups. The chapter’s findings were based on a combination of extensive study of earlier work, and interviews with both local and international experts.

### 3.2. SALW possession and acquisition by terrorist organisations

In a region that has experienced intense levels of conflict for the better part of the past several decades, the Middle East is awash in weaponry, especially SALW. The proxy conflicts of Iraq, Syria, and Yemen lead the respective states to flood conflict zones with weapons, with massive transfers of SALW to violent non-state actors.<sup>272</sup> Weapons are then captured and traded on and off the battlefield, with external state sponsors ultimately unable to control which groups end up possessing the arms they originally supplied. When states collapse, it also leads to stockpiles being raided, another significant source of SALW in the Middle East. The Small Arms Survey has assessed that the 2003 Iraq war led directly to the transfer of at least 4.2 million SALW from the military to violent non-state actors or the broader civilian population, resulting from either the government’s arming of militia forces prior to an invasion, or the looting of stockpiles following external intervention.<sup>273</sup> This section will analyse (3.2.1)

268 Jessica Stern, “The World Is Fighting More Than ISIS,” *The New York Times*, October 27, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/27/opinion/isis-al-baghdadi-dead.html>.

269 Experts consider ISIS to have shifted to a guerrilla strategy, as described in Rukmini Callimachi, “Described as Defeated, Islamic State Punches Back with Guerrilla Tactics,” *The New York Times*, January 21, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/21/world/middleeast/isis-syria-attackiraq.html>.

270 With the exception of Yemen, the 2020 Global Terrorism Index of 2020 held that all Middle Eastern countries saw a decrease in annual fatalities in 2019, as well as a broader, substantial, decrease of the impact of terrorism. It was the fourth year in a row that the region had “improved”. P. 47.

271 As of 5 February 2021, Middle Eastern movements that have been listed include: al-Qaeda, ISIS, Hezbollah’s Military Wing and Hamas. It does not include the Yemenite Houthi rebels. Official Journal of the European Union, *Council Decision (CFSP) 2021/142 of 5 February 2021 updating the list of persons, groups and entities subject to Articles 2, 3 and 4 of Common Position 2001/931/CFSP on the application of specific measures to combat terrorism, and repealing Decision (CFSP) 2020/1132*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L:2021:043:FULL&from=en>. Al-Qaeda and ISIS are separately addressed in *Council Decision (CFSP) 2020/1126 of 30 July 2020 amending Decision (CFSP) 2016/1693 concerning restrictive measures against ISIL (Da’esh) and al-Qaeda and persons, groups, undertakings and entities associated with them*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020D1126&from=en>.

272 Marc Lynch, *The New Arab Wars: Uprising and Anarchy in the Middle East* (PublicAffairs; Reprint edition, 2017).

273 Small Arms Survey, ‘From chaos to coherence? Global firearms stockpiles’, Small Arms Survey, 2004: Rights at Risk (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2004), pp. 47–49, [www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/A-Yearbook/2004/en/Small-Arms-Survey-2004-](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/A-Yearbook/2004/en/Small-Arms-Survey-2004-)

the various types of SALW possessed by terrorist groups, but more importantly, (3.2.2) it will seek to examine why this region remains at the forefront of SALW proliferation. By understanding what fuels conflict between states and non-state actors, it will help elucidate specific trends and map out how these trends might evolve in the future.

### 3.2.1 Types of SALW possessed by terrorist organisations<sup>274</sup>

The Middle East is home to some of the most well-armed non-state actors in the world. Lebanese Hezbollah, ISIS, Hamas, the Houthi rebels in Yemen, and Iraqi Shia militias are just a few examples. Small arms are more common than light weapons, with assault rifles accounting for two-thirds of the sample size analysed by Conflict Armament Research (CAR), the average age of which are at least thirty years old (See Box 4).<sup>275</sup> Only a small number of AK-pattern assault rifles have been manufactured post-2010, which could explain in part one of the reasons why terrorist organisations in the Middle East rely so little on direct financing of SALW (see Section 3.3)—the weapons available could be unattractive to violent non-state actors seeking to arm their fighters, although they can still be used for many of the coercive aspects related to the indirect financing of these same groups. Handguns were almost “non-existent,” in the region, while in Yemen, security forces seized large-calibre rocket launchers from the Houthis, AQAP, and the Islamic State Yemen.<sup>276</sup> 65 percent of the weapons in CAR’s sample for Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Lebanon came from just three sources: China, Romania, and “factories based in modern-day Russia.”<sup>277</sup> In the Gulf, defined by CAR as Yemen, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia, CAR found “widespread evidence” that components from AK-pattern rifles (seventeen separate models were identified in the Middle East) were interchanged between weapons, which could suggest that component-swapping is used to extend the life and value of an individual weapon.<sup>278</sup>

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Chapter-02-summary-EN.pdf.

274 While not all groups or organisations analysed in this research paper are listed/designated as terrorist groups by the European Union, all of the groups are violent non-state actors and engage in acts of terrorism.

275 Inputs provided by CAR for the purpose of this study.

276 Ibid.

277 Ibid.

278 Ibid.

## Box 4 Types and origins of SALW used by terrorist groups (Source: CAR dataset)<sup>279</sup>

### Middle East (Documentations in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Lebanon)

**Assault rifles:** By far the most common weapon type deployed by terrorists and armed groups in the Middle East are AK-pattern assault rifles. Assault rifles in general make up 66 percent of CAR's weapon sample in the Middle East. Almost all of these were 7.62 x 39 mm calibre, consistent with AK-pattern rifles. CAR has identified 14 countries of origin for rifles in this calibre documented in the Middle East. The largest manufacturing country was China (40 percent), followed by Romania (14 percent) and factories based in modern-day Russia (11 percent). Where CAR is able to determine the age of these rifles (in a little under half of the sample), the most common decades for production are 1980-89 (20 percent) and 1970-79 (11 percent). Only a handful of rifles in the region have been identified as manufactured post-2010. In sum, the weapon of choice for armed groups fighting in high intensity conflicts in the Middle East are – based on CAR's data sample in the region – AK-pattern assault rifles that are at least thirty years old. CAR's dataset does not show any great trajectory of change in the degree of significance of these weapon types to terrorist groups in the region. Each year that CAR has documented more than 100 weapons in the Middle East, AK-pattern assault rifles represent between 54 and 75 percent of the weapons that were seized from terrorist and armed groups.

**Handguns:** Handguns (pistols and revolvers) are almost non-existent in CAR's Middle East data. CAR has only documented 11 such weapons that were recovered from ISIS forces in the Middle East, out of a sample of more than 2,000 weapons. CAR has conducted documentations in arms markets in Iraq that reveal a fundamentally different dynamic in the nature of available weapons compared to those that were seized from ISIS forces. For example, there is a much larger proportion of handguns in the market sample (making up 29 percent of weapons) compared to the national baseline in Iraq (0.5 percent). Handguns are not typically regarded as 'weapons of war' that would be associated with groups actively engaged in armed conflicts, this dynamic reinforces expectations of the types of weapons that may be documented in a commercial market. The chain of custody for these weapons may not include terrorist groups at any stage: CAR traced several weapons in this market sample that had been exported legally to a government entity or other authorised individual end-users in Iraq.

**Ratio of small arms v light weapons:** Almost all the materiel that CAR has encountered in the Middle East is made up of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and their related ammunition. These items are particularly susceptible to diversion. The vast majority of weapons, some 91 percent, that CAR has documented in the Middle East fall into the category of small arms (primarily assault rifles and machine guns). However, ISIS forces, and other terrorist and armed groups in the Middle East region, have had well-documented access to light weapons such as mortars, heavy machine guns and shoulder-fired rocket launchers. ISIS also established a sophisticated and standardised weapon production process to manufacture supplies, including light weapon ammunition: in a six-day period in Mosul in 2016 alone CAR documented more than 5,000 rockets and mortar rounds in various states of production. However, this materiel makes up just nine percent of CAR's weapon sample documented in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Libya.

<sup>279</sup> The CAR dataset consists of thousands of weapons and more than 300,000 units of (mostly small calibre) ammunition primarily collected in Iraq and Syria between 2014 and 2017. The dataset includes materiel seized from groups such as Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (variously known as IS, ISIS, or Da'esh), Islamic State in Yemen, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and Ansar Allah (commonly referred to as 'Houthis'). While approximately 90 per cent of the sample analysed comes from the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, the dataset also includes other high intensity armed conflicts in the MENA region such as those fought in Libya and Yemen.

## Gulf (Documentations in Yemen, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia)

**Assault rifles:** CAR has to date documented a far smaller sample of weapons recovered from terrorist groups in the Gulf region. These encompass some extremely common model types, that CAR has observed both in the Middle East and in the Gulf: CAR has documented 17 models of AK-pattern rifles in the Gulf, 15 of which were also observed in CAR's Middle East operations. CAR has also documented rifles and handguns in Somalia that are believed to be linked to arms dealers and markets in Yemen. CAR observes, not only in this region but generally, widespread evidence of components for these rifles being interchanged between weapons. This may not necessarily be suggestive of any trade in components or weapons themselves, and there could be a number of reasons why this interchange occurs on such a widespread basis. However, this practice may speak in part to the intrinsic value of these weapons to armed groups, in that they are highly versatile and durable, and that this type of component-swapping may extend the life and value of a single weapon.

**Rocket launchers:** Security forces in Yemen have seized large-calibre rocket launchers from all three major armed groups active in the country: AQAP, ISY and the Houthis. Several models of rockets were documented both in areas held by Houthi armed forces and by AQAP, in different parts of Yemen. This may suggest a common source of diversion, most likely from the state's own stockpiles.

The most well-equipped terrorist organisations in the Middle East seem to be ISIS and Hezbollah. ISIS acquired its weaponry in a variety of ways, while Hezbollah primarily relied on Iranian largesse to acquire its vast arsenal, which it has compiled over decades. Hezbollah's arsenal is particularly impressive, owing in large part to Iranian sponsorship that provides them access to sophisticated weapons systems. An analysis of Hezbollah's July 2006 battle with Israel demonstrated the possession of small arms (AK-47s, M-16s, and M-4 carbine rifles), short range to mid-range surface-to-surface rockets, shore-to-ship missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles, and anti-tank missiles.<sup>280</sup> Most of these weapons were made in Russia, Syria, and China. Besides small arms proficiency, Hezbollah is highly proficient with explosives—both smaller, improvised explosive devices or large truck bombs. In southern Lebanon, insurgents would detonate homemade claymore mines containing nails and anti-personnel ball bearings to great effect, a tactic that was adopted by Shia insurgents in Iraq.<sup>281</sup>

ISIS was not the prototypical insurgent group – it was equipped more like a conventional military. Armoured vehicles were purchased on the black market or scavenged from the Iraqi security forces who had retreated from the battlefield.<sup>282</sup> The use of “technicals,” which are pick-up trucks modified with machine guns or anti-aircraft weaponry, provides the militants freedom of movement and much-needed mobility. ISIS fighters have used artillery and RPGs in Syria while also making use of Humvees and T-55 tanks captured from the Iraqi security forces.<sup>283</sup> While these vehicles and equipment were not SALW, they enabled the ISIS war machine and helped the group to diversify its weaponry. Other types of weapons include M79 anti-tank rockets made in the Balkans, American-made M16 and M14 rifles, as well as assorted small arms and ammunition.<sup>284</sup> Many of the weapons and equipment that ISIS militants fought with were initially distributed to the Iraqi Army to provide it with both a qualitative and quantitative edge over its adversaries.<sup>285</sup> The group even managed to wrangle sophisticated anti-

280 Andrew Exum, “Hezbollah at War,” *Washington Institute for Near East Policy* 63, (December 2006): 6. From Figure 1, “Weaponry Used by Hezbollah During the July War.” December 2006, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/hizballah-at-war-a-military-assessment>.

281 Brian A. Jackson, John C. Baker, Peter Chalk, Kim Cragin John V. Parachini and Horacio R. Trujillo, “Aptitude for Destruction, Volume 2: Case Studies of Organizational Learning in Five Terrorist Groups,” *Rand Corporation* (2005), p. 49, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG332.html#download>.

282 Many of the Iraqi soldiers who refused to fight blamed their failure to stand their ground on officers, saying they were deliberately denied the resupply of basic necessities such as food and water: C. J. Chivers, “After Retreat, Iraqi Soldiers Fault Officers,” *New York Times*, July 1, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/02/world/middleeast/after-retreat-iraqi-soldiers-fault-officers.html>.

283 Daniel Trombly and Yasir Abbas, “Who the U.S. Should Really Hit in IS,” *Daily Beast*, September 23, 2014, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/who-the-us-should-really-hit-in-isis?ref=author>.

284 Gina Harkins, “5 Things to Know About Islamic State's Military Capabilities,” *Army Times*, September 16, 2014. <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2014/09/22/5-things-to-know-about-islamic-state-s-military-capabilities/>.

285 “Arms Windfall for Insurgents as Iraq City Falls,” *New York Times*, June 10, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/11/world/>

aircraft weaponry such as the Chinese-made FN-6, which was provided to Syrian rebels who were ultimately overrun by ISIS fighters.<sup>286</sup> Nearly 90 percent of the weapons and ammunition acquired by IS originated in China, Russia, and Eastern Europe.<sup>287</sup>

ISIS also relied on IEDs (See figures 11 and 12) on an industrial scale. As documented by the researcher Charlie Winter, ISIS relied on vehicle-borne IEDs, or VBIEDs, “far more regularly than any other organization in history, jihadist or otherwise.”<sup>288</sup> This reliance on asymmetric tactics and VBIEDs in particular, are just but one example of the numerous ways ISIS engaged in irregular warfare. ISIS maintained factories throughout the territory it controlled in Iraq and Syria where its fighters experimented with various designs in order to determine what worked best when constructing myriad types of IEDs.<sup>289</sup>



**Figure 12.** IEDs recovered from ISIS (Syria 2015)<sup>290</sup>



**Figure 13.** Phosphide flasks (Iraq 2017)<sup>291</sup>

And it was not just ISIS that perfected the use of IEDs. Shia militias in Iraq, though not formally designated at the time as terrorist groups, detonated IEDs with impunity during the height of the Iraq war. Explosively formed penetrators (EFPs), essentially a more lethal version of an IED, were responsible for killing nearly 200 U.S. troops and wounding another 900 between 2005 and 2011.<sup>292</sup> With materials readily available and a network of highly skilled and experienced militants, many terrorist organisations in the Middle East could emulate the strategy employed by Iraqi Shia militias,

[middleeast/mosul-iraq-militants-seize-us-weapons.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/27/world/middleeast/missiles-of-isis-may-pose-peril-for-aircrews.html).

286 Kirk Semple and Eric Schmitt, “Missiles of IS May Pose Peril for Aircrews,” *The New York Times*, October 26, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/27/world/middleeast/missiles-of-isis-may-pose-peril-for-aircrews.html>.

287 Jamie Crawford, “Report Details Where IS Gets Its Weapons,” *CNN.com*, December 14, 2017. <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/12/14/politics/isis-weapons-report/index.html>.

288 Charlie Winter. *Suicide Tactics and the Islamic State*. The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague (ICCT). January 2017. <https://icct.nl/publication/suicide-tactics-and-the-islamic-state/>.

289 John Ismay, Thomas Gibbons-Neef and C.J Chivers, “How ISIS Produced Its Cruel Arsenal on an Industrial Scale,” *The New York Times*, December 10, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/10/world/middleeast/isis-bombs.html>.

290 “Weapons of the Islamic State: A Three-Year Investigation into Iraq and Syria,” *Conflict Armament Research*, December 2017, p. 144.

291 *Ibid.* p. 121.

292 Alex Horton, “Soleimani’s Legacy: The Gruesome Advanced IEDs that haunted U.S. Troops in Iraq,” *The Washington Post*, January 3, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2020/01/03/soleimanis-legacy-gruesome-high-tech-ieds-that-haunted-us-troops-iraq/>.

which used IEDs in terrorist attacks to great effect.

Hamas is less active in the acquisition of SALW and relies more on building and acquiring katyusha rockets. The types of weapons that terrorists and other violent non-state actors seek to acquire are dependent on sources (e.g., state sponsor) and adversary (nation state, non-state actor). Because a group like Hamas is primarily concerned with fighting Israel, it makes sense that the group would focus on acquiring rockets and not small arms like AK-47s, pistols, or handguns, although its members are surely equipped with basic SALW that allow them to operate in an environment like Gaza.

Both Salafi-jihadi terrorist organisations, notably AQAP, and militant groups, such as the al Houthi movement, successfully acquired a vast multitude and range of SALW. Like most armed groups in Yemen, these actors obtained publicly accessible Soviet-bloc small arms likely tracing back to previous arms stockpile raids during 1994 Yemeni Civil War. Yet, the individual arsenals of these groups have greatly expanded with the flow of more modern small arms platforms—largely attributed to end-user violations by members of the Saudi-led Coalition and the flow of Iranian SALW into the country. AQAP fighters are known to operate Belgian-made FN MINIMI light machine guns, as well as explosive weapon systems—notably OSA M79 rocket launchers of Yugoslav origin, which have also appeared on battlefields in Syria.<sup>293</sup> Elements of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria—Yemen Province (ISIS-YP) utilised Austrian Steyr SSG 69 sniper rifles in their operations against Houthi forces, while also acquiring explosive materials, such as mortar rounds from the Serbian Krušik factory and Iranian-made M112 C4 that likely originated from stockpile material available through commercial markets.<sup>294</sup> Houthi forces possess a combination of weapon systems of Western-origin, and both Iranian and Chinese small arms. Houthi militants are documented to possess German-G3 rifles, Swiss-HG85 hand grenades, MANPADs, Chinese AK-platform rifles, PKM light machine gun, and various rifles and SALW from Iran.<sup>295</sup>

### 3.2.2. Acquisition of SALW by terrorist organisations

A combination of post-conflict diversion and stockpile leakage, along with battlefield capture, transfers to non-state actors, and significant and ongoing military build-ups throughout the Middle East are all important factors to evaluate when analysing the acquisition of SALW by terrorist organisations in the region.<sup>296</sup> One interviewee who is an internationally-recognised expert on the convergence of transnational organised crime and terrorism states that many weapons in the Middle East come from post-conflict situations, where “stuff” [weapons and ammunition] is left on the battlefield.<sup>297</sup> Throughout the region, terrorist groups have acquired weapons and ammunition that were held in the stocks of state security forces, which could have been lost or looted, or captured on the battlefield.<sup>298</sup>

A separate interviewee who specialises in the SALW trade in Iraq and Syria, confirmed what the academic literature has documented, noting that there are several different typologies of diversion happening in the Middle East: battlefield capture, state-sponsored diversion, and loss from stockpiles during state collapse.<sup>299</sup> This tracks with research from organisations like CAR (See Box 6), which have documented that the vast majority of weapons analysed in the Middle East—91 percent—consist of small arms, namely assault rifles and machine guns. Even more so than light weapons such as mortars, heavy machine guns, and shoulder-fired rocket launchers, small arms are “particularly susceptible to diversion.”<sup>300</sup>

293 Mohamed Abo El Gheit, “The End User: How did western weapons end up,” *Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism*, February 28, 2019. <https://en.arij.net/report/the-end-user-how-did-western-weapons-end-up-in-the-hands-of-isis-and-aqap-in-yemen>.

294 Ibid.; Interview with Yemeni arms trafficking expert.

295 Interview with Yemeni arms trafficking expert.

296 Mark Bromley et al., “Arms Transfers and SALW Controls in the Middle East and North Africa: Mapping Capacity Building Efforts,” *SIPRI Background Paper*, 2018, [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/bp\\_1811\\_att\\_mena\\_1.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/bp_1811_att_mena_1.pdf).

297 Interview with internationally recognised expert on transnational organised crime.

298 Conflict Armament Research Backgrounder.

299 Interview Arms Trafficking in the Levant Expert.

300 Conflict Armament Research Backgrounder.

Another reason for the proliferation of SALW in the Middle East is simple supply and demand. The Middle East has been a region marked by instability and the growth of terrorist and insurgent groups for decades, with ongoing conflicts in Yemen and Syria driving demand by groups operating in these countries. Weak state capacity and prolonged conflict have been primary drivers of the proliferation of weaponry. The ongoing sectarian conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran also promotes the use of proxy groups and in turn, SALW trafficking to arm these groups. And finally, the collapse of Libya fuelled the movement of SALW throughout North Africa and into the Middle East.<sup>301</sup>

### **Box 5** Common sources of weapon diversion in the Middle East and the Gulf (Source: CAR dataset)

**Battlefield capture/Loss from national custody:** Terrorist groups in the Middle East and the Gulf have acquired weapons and ammunition that were held in the stocks of national security and defence forces. These may have been lost or looted from the stocks themselves, captured in battle, or diverted in some other way. CAR uses different means to identify loss from national custody, including the presence of import marks. For example, 175 weapons recovered from terrorist groups in Iraq and Syria were marked with Iraqi arsenal marks. These marks indicate that the weapons were once held in government stocks prior to the collapse of the Saddam Hussein regime in April 2003. CAR has also documented weapons with this distinctive mark outside of the MENA region. CAR is often not able to determine the chain of custody for these weapons after they were held in national stocks, and each weapon could have passed through several hands before reaching ISIS. At the very least, however, CAR estimates that 12 percent of the weapons recovered from ISIS between 2014 and 2017 had originated in Iraqi national stockpiles.

**State collapse:** The high intensity of armed conflicts has resulted in the partial or wholesale collapse of the governing authority in several countries in this region, including Libya, Syria, and Yemen. This has resulted in the dissolution of some security forces and the subsequent loss or illicit transfer of weapons that have then reached terrorist groups. Non-state armed groups in the MENA region have been able to take and hold large expanses of territory at such times, allowing them to move equipment and materiel more easily across countries and borders.

**State-sponsored diversion:** This mechanism of diversion includes direct, state-backed supply to an armed group, or the unauthorised retransfer of legally imported items carried out in spite of commitments made to the original exporter not to do so without their knowledge and consent. CAR has not documented any cases of unauthorised retransfer to terrorist groups in the Middle East or Gulf region. CAR has however reported previously on materiel that was supplied, despite non-retransfer agreements, by governments into the conflict with ISIS, presumably in support of Syrian opposition forces who then subsequently lost the items— either from battle or stocks – to ISIS at some point. This retransfer and subsequent loss to terrorist forces could be extremely rapid, sometimes within the space of a couple of months. In a 2018 analysis CAR identified that eight percent of the unique chains of custody for diverted weapons and ammunition documented in the MENA/Gulf region were a result of state-sponsored diversion.

## The importance of state sponsored diversion

State sponsorship of terrorist organisations in the Middle East is one of the main reasons the region is awash in weaponry. Iran is the most notorious state sponsor of terrorism, but several Gulf countries and Turkey have also supplied their patrons with weaponry at various points.<sup>302</sup> Moreover, in the earliest years of the conflict in Syria, the U.S. intelligence community worked with various rebel groups to indirectly supply them with sophisticated weapons. State sponsorship is a more important factor in the Middle East than in other regions, driven in part by the ongoing sectarian conflict between Iran

301 Méryl Demuynck, Tanya Mehra, and Reinier Bergema. *The Use of SALW by Terrorist Organisations as a Source of Finance in the Middle East and North Africa*. The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague (ICCT). June 2020. <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2020/06/The-Use-of-Small-Arms-Light-Weapons-by-Terrorist-Organisations-as-a-Source-of-Finance-in-the-Middle-East-and-North-Africa.pdf>.

302 Karen deYoung, "Syrian opposition fighters obtain U.S.-made TOW anti-tank missiles" *The Washington Post*, April 16, 2014. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/syrian-opposition-fighters-obtain-us-made-tow-anti-tank-missiles/2014/04/16/62d1a6f6-c4e8-11e3-b574-f8748871856a\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/syrian-opposition-fighters-obtain-us-made-tow-anti-tank-missiles/2014/04/16/62d1a6f6-c4e8-11e3-b574-f8748871856a_story.html).

and Saudi Arabia, which has cooperated with other Gulf countries to arm myriad non-state actors in the region.

Iran has long provided its proxy, Hezbollah, with SALW, including sophisticated weaponry. More than 500 Hezbollah arms caches are thought to exist in southern Lebanon alone.<sup>303</sup> The group boasts a diverse armoury that allows it to function as a guerrilla group or a small-scale conventional army. In addition to what looks like a typical weapon inventory for insurgents, Hezbollah has obtained military-grade global positioning system (GPS) platforms, advanced aircraft analysis and design software, stun guns, nitrogen cutters, naval equipment, ultrasonic dog repelling equipment, and laser range finders.<sup>304</sup> During a briefing at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy in November 2018, U.S. Department of State Coordinator for Counter-Terrorism Nathan A. Sales publicly announced that Iran provides Hezbollah with approximately \$700 million per year, a figure far higher than most had previously believed.<sup>305</sup> With that money, Iran has helped Hezbollah to develop an arsenal of upwards of 150,000 rockets and missiles. The external state support is just part of Hezbollah's operating budget, however, as the group continues to maintain a worldwide network of companies and middlemen that assist with weapons procurement and securing other critical dual-use equipment for the organisation.<sup>306</sup> Iran is not the only state sponsor of violent non-state actors in the region. It is also important to note that the flow of SALW has ebbed and flowed into the hands of rebel groups in Syria for the entirety of the past decade. The Gulf States and Turkey were major suppliers of SALW to non-state actors throughout Syria, including guided anti-tank weapons.<sup>307</sup> Saudi Arabia in particular funnelled anti-aircraft missiles to a bevy of rebel groups aligned against the Assad regime.<sup>308</sup> With active support from the Gulf States, Turkey provided valuable passive support, allowing its border with Syria to be used as a conduit for arms smuggling and trafficking, as long as the weapons were destined for groups fighting against the Assad regime.<sup>309</sup> In 2013 and early 2014, Turkey actively helped ship arms to a range of jihadist groups operating on the ground in Syria.<sup>310</sup> Military cargo flights from Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar would land at Esenboga Airport near Ankara in addition to several other airports in both Turkey and Jordan.<sup>311</sup> And while Turkey was far from the only country to send weapons into Syria to arm various rebel groups, its geographic location made it the most important of all countries to help facilitate the smuggling and trafficking of SALW.<sup>312</sup>

303 Steven Erlanger and Richard A. Opiel, "A Disciplined Hezbollah Surprises Israel with Its Training, Tactics and Weapons," *The New York Times*, August 7, 2006. <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/07/world/middleeast/07hezbollah.html>.

304 Thomas M. Sanderson, "Transnational Terror and Organized Crime: Blurring the Lines," *SAIS Review*, Vol. 24, No. 1, Winter 2004, p.52.

305 Nathan Sales, "Tehran's International Targets: Assessing Iranian Terror Sponsorship," *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, November 13, 2018, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/tehrans-international-targets-assessing-iranian-terror-sponsorship>.

306 Matthew Levit, "Hezbollah's Procurement Channels: Leveraging Criminal Networks and Partnering with Iran" *Combating Terrorism Center* 12, issue 3 (March 2019). <https://ctc.usma.edu/hezbollahs-procurement-channels-leveraging-criminal-networks-partnering-iran/>.

307 Frank Gradner, "Gulf Arabs 'stepping up' arms supplies to Syrian rebels," *BBC*, October 5, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34479929>.

308 Amena Bakr, "Saudi supplying missiles to Syria rebels: Gulf source," *Reuters*, June 17, 2013, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-missiles-saudi/saudi-supplying-missiles-to-syria-rebels-gulf-source-idUSBRE95G0DK20130617>.

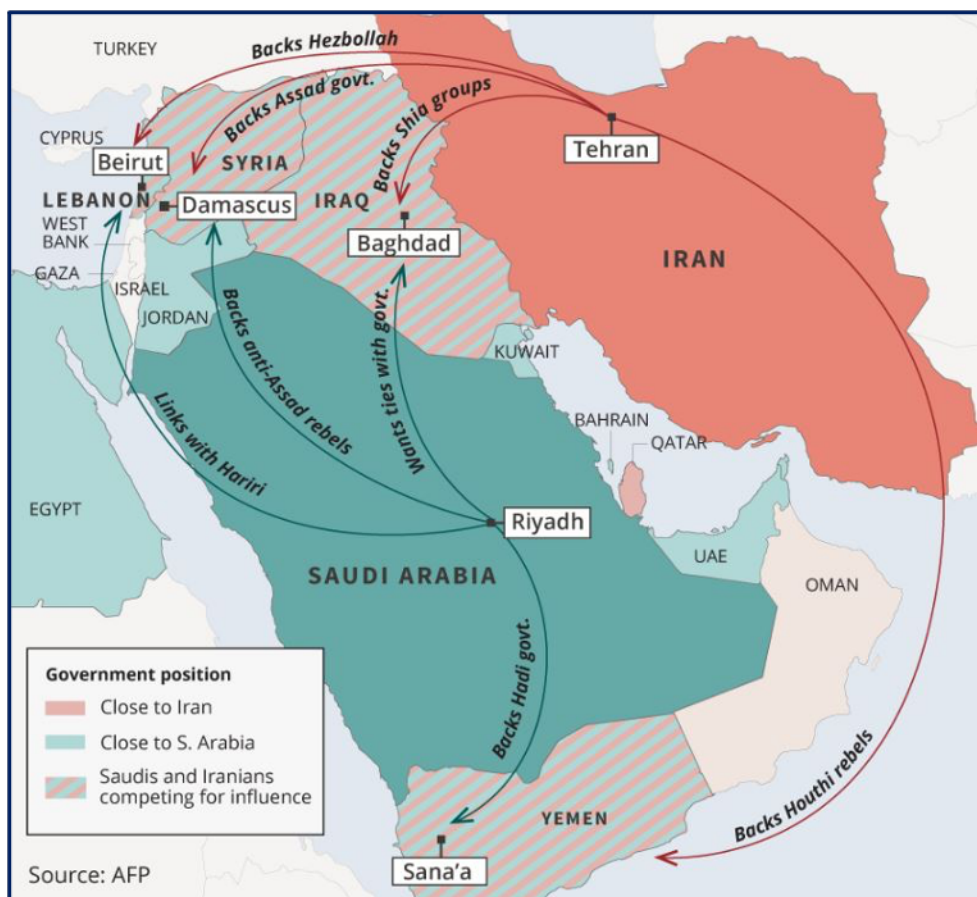
309 Marc Lynch, *The New Arab Wars: Uprising and Anarchy in the Middle East* (PublicAffairs; Reprint edition, 2017), p.193.

310 Humeyra Pamuk and Nick Tattersall, "Exclusive: Turkish intelligence helped ship arms to Syrian Islamist rebel Areas," *Reuters*, May 21, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-turkey-arms/exclusive-turkish-intelligence-helped-ship-arms-to-syrian-islamist-rebel-areas-idUSKBN0061L220150521>.

311 C. J. Chivers and Eric Schmitt, "Arms Airlift to Syria Rebels Expands, With Aid From C.I.A.," *The New York Times*, March 24, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/25/world/middleeast/arms-airlift-to-syrian-rebels-expands-with-cia-aid.html>.

312 Other countries that shipped SALW to Syrian groups opposed to the Assad regime include Croatia, Israel, Jordan, the UAE, and the US. See Shannon Dick, "The Arms Trade and Syria," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, (September 2, 2019), <https://www.georgetownjournalofinternationalaffairs.org/online-edition/2019/9/2/the-arms-trade-and-syria>.





**Figure 14.** This map demonstrates the Saudi-Iranian rivalry who have both have been accused of state sponsorship of terrorism.<sup>313</sup>

In Yemen, foreign intervention by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) produced profound implications for the Yemeni arms trade. Saudi Arabia continues to rely heavily on foreign weapon importations, mainly sourced from the West, to outfit its armed forces. The state's involvement in the Yemeni Civil War only increased the demand for advanced, sophisticated weapon systems to ensure that Saudi forces have a tactical advantage on the battlefield against Houthi insurgents. Data analysis from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute reflects the Saudi's increase in mass arms importations. From the war's start in 2015, through 2018, Saudi Arabia was the number one arms importer, estimating at importing \$14.1 billion worth of weapons sales; the spike in arms sales differs from the period prior to 2015, where Saudi Arabian arms imports were valued at \$8.7 billion between 2012 to 2015.<sup>314</sup> The same sense of reliance on foreign weapons sales applies to nearly all Arab states involved as part of the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen. Sales figures provided by Tufts University's World Peace Foundation place the U.S., U.K., France, Germany, and Italy amongst the top suppliers of weapons systems to nations that comprise the Saudi-led coalition—the largest recipients being Saudi Arabia and the UAE.<sup>315</sup>

Though these arms shipments act as a form of political-military support to the coalition they pose a critical security risk for Yemen's internal security. Part of the Saudi-led coalition strategy in Yemen centres around coordinating with local militant factions in Yemen to assist in offensive and defensive operations against the Houthis. Consequently, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, "openly passed" weapons "to militias aligned to the Saudi coalition [as well as] to marginalised and feuding groups fighting their

313 Madawi al-Rasheed, "Saudi Arabia executions: A cruel travesty of Justice" *Middle East Eye*, April 24, 2019, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/saudi-arabia-executions-cruel-travesty-justice>.

314 Referenced data draws from the quantitative analysis provided by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Trend Indicator Values (TIVs) of arms imports to the top 50 largest importers between 2015-2018 and TIV of arms imports to the top 50 largest importers between 2012-2015. [http://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/html/export\\_toplist.php](http://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/html/export_toplist.php).

315 Samuel Perlo-Freeman, "Who is arming the Yemen War? (And is anyone planning to stop?)," *World Peace Foundation—Tufts University*, February 18, 2018, <https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2019/03/19/who-is-arming-the-yemen-war-an-update/>.

own territorial battles.”<sup>316</sup> This practice of arms distribution to third-party groups, regardless of their allegiances and affiliation, serves as a direct violation of end-user agreements that prohibit the sale of armaments to third parties without authorisation from the initial supplier.<sup>317</sup> These legal violations of end-user agreements allowed modern weapon systems of Western-origin to appear on the Yemeni arms market, as factions outside the total-control of the Saudi-led coalition knowingly exchanged armaments to prominent insurgent and terrorist groups within Yemen—namely AQAP, ISIS-YP, and the Houthi movement.

## ISIS: diversified sources of weapons

During its peak, ISIS could be considered one of the most well-funded terrorist groups in history, and, also, one of the most well-armed.<sup>318</sup> ISIS managed to acquire a sizable arsenal of weapons to equip the army of its proto-state, focusing on becoming self-sufficient rather than depending on state sponsors. ISIS fighters trained with small arms, but also learned how to use heavy-calibre weapons that could be used in more conventional-style skirmishes. Its fighters proved innovative, demonstrating the skill and alacrity to modify a range of weapons systems. The group displayed a remarkable ingenuity in training new recruits, adept at onboarding both battle-hardened jihadists with experience in previous fronts, and newly arrived Europeans with little or no knowledge of military tactics. Its fighters’ reliance on suicide attacks was unprecedented in terms of overall numbers, lending credence to the saying that quantity can have a quality all of its own. Some scholars have argued that ISIS’s ability to wage conventional warfare was so advanced that the organisation of its military capabilities bore resemblance to the warfighting functions of the United States military in terms of combined arms concepts and command and control.<sup>319</sup>

Unlike many terrorist and insurgent groups, ISIS was not forced to rely upon external states to provide it with weaponry. Instead, its fighters forcibly looted hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth of weapons and equipment from Iraqi and Syrian military installations.<sup>320</sup> ISIS maintained a diversified source of weapons, including those acquired from other insurgents in Syria who defected to ISIS; weapons purchased from other insurgents who received them from foreign donors; weapons captured from defeated adversaries; and weapons bought from or traded for with corrupt members of the security forces in Syria and Iraq.<sup>321</sup> Unlike in some conflicts where much of the weaponry on the battlefield is old or antiquated, the lion’s share of ISIS’s weaponry, and especially the ammunition it was using, was predominantly found to have been delivered to the region since the Syrian conflict began in 2011.<sup>322</sup> Throughout the conflict there were reports of ISIS fighters using drones in a number of different ways, from surveillance and reconnaissance to actual attacks involving grenades and explosives.<sup>323</sup> The primary strength of ISIS is not necessarily the acquisition and use of advanced technology, but the improvised use of less advanced and easily accessible technology to great (and lethal) effect.<sup>324</sup>

316 Rod Austin, “Yemen: Inquiry finds Saudi diverting arms to factions loyal to their cause,” *The Guardian*, November 28, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/nov/28/arms-yemen-militia-were-supplied-by-west-find-analysts>.

317 “Saudi Arabia, UAE gave US arms to al-Qaeda-linked groups: Report,” *Aljazeera*, February 9, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/02/saudi-arabia-uae-gave-weapons-al-qaeda-linked-groups-cnn-190205055102300.html>.

318 “Islamic State Ammunition in Iraq and Syria: Analysis of Small-Calibre Ammunition Recovered from Islamic State Forces in Iraq and Syria,” *London: Conflict Armament Research*, October 2014, p. 5.

319 Thomas Maurer, “ISIS’s Warfare Functions: A Systemized Review of a Proto-State’s Conventional Conduct of Operations,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 29:2, 2018, pp.229-244.

320 “How IS Works,” *New York Times*, September 16, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/09/16/world/middleeast/how-isis-works.html?mtrref=www.ecosia.org&gwh=5E044ED85041DE7EEDFF8FF0A96139B8&gwt=regi&assetType=REGIWALL>.

321 C. J. Chivers, “IS Ammunition is Shown to Have Origins in U.S. and China,” *New York Times*, October 5, 2014. See also Julia Harte and R. Jeffrey Smith, “Where Does the Islamic State Get Its Weapons?” *Foreign Policy*, October 6, 2014, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/10/06/where-does-the-islamic-state-get-its-weapons/>.

322 “Weapons of the Islamic State: A Three-Year Investigation into Iraq and Syria,” *Conflict Armament Research*, December, 2017, p. 146.

323 Michael S. Schmidt and Eric Schmitt, “Pentagon Confronts a New Threat from IS: Exploding Drones,” *New York Times*, October 11, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/12/world/middleeast/iraq-drones-isis.html>.

324 Truls Hallberg Tonnessen, “Islamic State and Technology – A Literature Review,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 11:6, 2017.

## The influx of weapons to Syrian Civil War – and beyond?

There is a certain reciprocity to the conflict in Syria. Over the course of the past decade, as Assad grew weak, his backers, including Russia and Iran, stepped up assistance to the regime, including in the form of dumping weapons into the country. As SIPRI has noted, “the escalation of the Syrian conflict, in particular, has fuelled illegal arms smuggling between Lebanon and Syria in both directions.”<sup>325</sup> And it was not only Assad’s supporters who were sending weapons to Syria, it was also those countries which supported the patchwork of anti-Assad rebels. One of our interviewees singled out the yearlong timeframe from the autumn of 2011 to the autumn of 2012 as one of the most important of the Syria conflict, noting that SALW flowed into Syria from wealthy individuals linked to governments in the Gulf and privately funnelled weapons supplies into northern Syria. Based on personal relationships, including the Libyan diaspora in Qatar and the Syrian diaspora in Kuwait, familial networks benefited from support within governments, even though it was not official government policy. According to the interviewee, this included MANPADS but also SALW and huge amounts of ammunition.<sup>326</sup>

*“Syria has had an absolute influx of external weaponry into the conflict, and an influx of weaponry to actors on all sides...[including] pro-regime actors, Iranian-linked militias, and even other local armed actors who were operating early on in the conflict”*

**Middle East expert based in North America**

In an interview with a widely regarded expert on Syria, he suggested that the biggest trend was that SALW smuggling became more government-run. From mid-2013, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) took over as a kind of “overwatch” of governments that were smuggling very large quantities of weapons into both southern and northern Syria. The interviewee went on to note the covert nature of the operations, which was accomplished with the assistance of Turkish intelligence in the north and Jordanian military intelligence in the south. It became more well-coordinated, he noted, but as the SALW made it into Syria, it also became more illicit, with recipient groups sometimes selling off the arms.

Between mid-2014 into 2015-2016, Nusra gained more influence over the border regions and created its own kind of tax system on any external weapons shipments. Naturally, Nusra took a cut of these shipments. As one interviewee observed, the CIA was well aware that this was happening, according to Marc Lynch, who noted that “[i]n September [2013], CNN reported that CIA-funded arms were flowing to Syrian rebels. In October, the CIA program expanded further with paramilitary specialists deploying to Jordan to accelerate training. By December, the existence of ‘secret’ CIA training camps for Syrian rebels in Jordan was widely reported in the regional and international media. Somewhere around this time, the advanced anti-tank TOW missiles began to arrive.”<sup>327</sup> But as explained by a leading expert on Syria: “only certain weapons systems or certain supplies were included in the cut. Nusra mostly took SALW and ammunition, not heavy weapons, or TOW anti-tank weapons. The deal of what was an acceptable cut was what would not raise the ire of the international community. Taking AK ammunition was deemed acceptable.”<sup>328</sup>

Syria has experienced a massive influx of weaponry during the course of the conflict, flowing into all sides. SALW were sent to Turkey and then over the border into Syria in what one interviewee described as a “very chaotic process.” And according to this interviewee, it was not criminal networks that were running the show in Syria, but the use of pre-existing smuggling networks, and localised

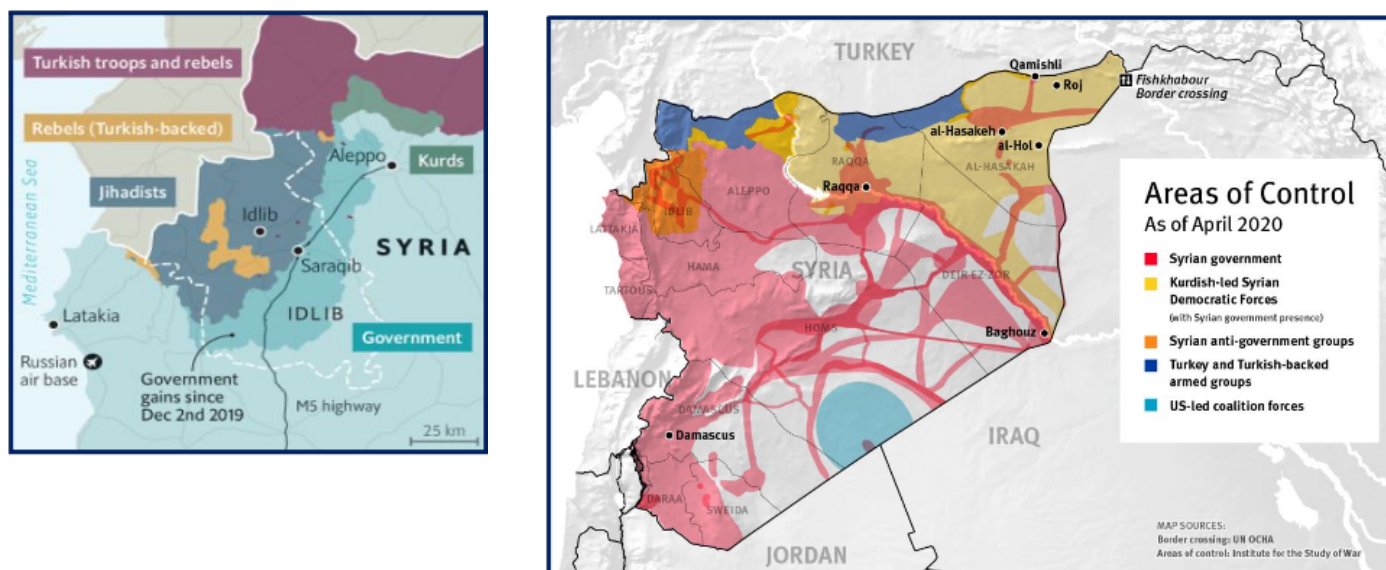
325 Mark Bromley, Giovanna Maletta and Kolja Brockmann. *Arms Transfer and SALW Controls in the Middle East and North Africa: Mapping Capacity-Building Efforts*. SIPRI Background Paper. November, 2018. [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/bp\\_1811\\_att\\_mena\\_1.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/bp_1811_att_mena_1.pdf).

326 Interview with Syria Expert.

327 Marc Lynch, *The New Arab Wars: Uprising and Anarchy in the Middle East* (PublicAffairs; Reprint edition, 2017), p.191.

328 Interview with Syria expert.

organised crime, which was critical. Part of the smuggling industry was state-sanctioned by the Assad regime.



**Figure 15.** The current power dynamic in Syria<sup>329</sup> (right) and the areas still under jihadist control<sup>330</sup> (above).

With the conflict now entering its tenth year, fighting continues to rage in various parts of the country. In Idlib Province located in Syria's northwest, terrorist organisations including Haya't Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and the al-Qaeda-linked Hurras al-Din remain active. Armed groups operating in these areas remain heavily outfitted with advanced military-grade weaponry. Consequently, engaging in any post-conflict disarmament will prove to be an extensive and high-demanding effort. Most of the actors who still maintain weapons are terrorist groups. Within Syria, HTS' possession of a vast array of SALW, in addition to heavy armaments, armoured vehicles, and high explosives, presents its own challenges to the DDR process. Not only is the group one of the most heavily armed terrorist actors operating in the country, but the organisation continues to maintain extensive territorial control and influence in northern Syria, making them a considerable stakeholder in Syria's asymmetric environment. As one internationally renowned Syrian expert stated:

*“Armed groups who are still active and hostile have fleets of tanks, APCs (Armoured Personnel Carriers), heavy artillery, towed howitzers. That is going to be a massive effort to reverse...most of the actors who still maintain those are terrorist groups. If you are talking about a DDR process, that would necessitate terrorist organisations being part of the settlement. So, there's lots of big questions to ask whether that is feasible or not.”*

**Middle East expert based in North America**

There are myriad ways in which the Syrian civil war will have a direct impact on the acquisition of SALW by terrorist organisations. Because Syria has always served as the primary conduit for Iranian arms passing into Hezbollah-controlled Lebanese territory, an Assad victory (which seems likely in early 2021) would enable Hezbollah and other violent non-state actors throughout the region to intensify or expand their arms acquisition efforts, as well as broaden their political and social influence. Iranian influence stretching through Iraq and into Syria and Lebanon, allows the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) the operational space needed to deliver weapons to Iranian proxies, including Iraqi Shia militia groups like Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH), as well as some of the Afghan and Pakistani brigades

329 “Bring Me Back to Canada: Plight of Canadians Held in North-East Syria for Alleged ISIS Links” *Human Rights Watch*, June 29, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/06/29/bring-me-back-canada/plight-canadians-held-northeast-syria-alleged-isis-links>.

330 “Syrians are putting down Roots in Turkey” *The Economist*, February 6, 2020, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2020/02/06/syrians-are-putting-down-roots-in-turkey?src=scn%2Ftw%2Fte%2Fbl%2Fed%2Fthenewturkssyriansareputtingdownrootsinturkeyeurope>.

operating in Syria as part of Iran's foreign terrorist fighter pipeline.<sup>331</sup>

## The hotbed of weapons; the case of Yemen

The overwhelming presence and public acceptance of SALW in Yemen plays a crucial role in the sustainability of arms trafficking in the country. Societal norms play a critical role, as firearms act as a cultural symbol of power, respect, and protection for Yemeni citizens.<sup>332</sup> The cultural value assigned to firearms, along with their large quantities and easy accessibility rationalises the large number of non-state gun ownership. As of 2017, estimates on non-state ownership of both legal and illegal firearms tallied at 14,900,000, with a projected rate of firearm holdings per 100 residents being at 52.8—second only to the U.S.<sup>333</sup> Economic security also drives civilian involvement in SALW trafficking. The overwhelming presence of gun ownership, matched with economic disparity, drives many Yemeni civilians to sell their firearms for economic survival.<sup>334</sup> Hostile actors, including the Houthis, have exploited rampant economic disparity to advance its own self-armament. Acting as buyers, the Houthis turned to economically struggling communities willing to part with their personal weapons by offering financial compensation. Those who engaged in illicit arms sales to Houthis in 2016 claimed the profession was profitable, indicating individuals earned around 100,000 rials (\$465) per week.<sup>335</sup> The SALW trade also relies on facilitators overseeing transnational trafficking activities throughout the Gulf of Aden. One interviewee claimed observing “the presence of intermediaries is key,” as she described the “ant trade by boat” that traffics weapons to and from the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>336</sup> These facilitators are extending activities to smuggle weapons from Yemen into trading hubs in the Horn of Africa, where an array of actors can acquire them—including Salafi-jihadists and other non-state actors.<sup>337</sup> Consequently, Yemen is becoming a catalyst for transnational arms trafficking that is expanding into the African continent.

Although an array of armed actors operate in Yemen, these actors remain unanimous in their need to arm their personnel and enhance their military capabilities. With the arms trafficking scene offering groups the means for self-armament, organisations aim to achieve high levels of tactical lethality to better enhance their presence and political standing. In the case of AQAP, the group's involvement in the arms trade assists in enhancing the group's operational capabilities. AQAP seized weapons caches abandoned by retreating Yemeni military forces in areas such as the city of Mukalla, where the group managed to retain weapons while selling off armaments that were likely either dated, lowquality, or not needed for the group's operations.<sup>338</sup> It remains unclear where these arms ended up, however it is likely these weapons were divided between the possession of local patrons and various arms bazaars. Abandoned stockpiles also served as one of the primary sources for AQAP's arms-acquisition of SALW.<sup>339</sup> Yet, middlemen also supply groups in Yemen with SALW, including AQAP. To what degree these people are actually AQAP themselves or ideologically aligned, perhaps at some level according to one interviewee is debatable, but she went on to observe they are more facilitators than group financiers.

331 Colin P. Clarke and Phillip Smyth. “The Implications of Iran's Expanding Shi'a Foreign Fighters Network,” *Combating Terrorism Center*, Vol 10, No 10. November 2017. <https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Boko-Haram-Beyond-the-Headlines.pdf>.

332 Christopher Carr, *Kalashnikov Culture: Small Arms Proliferation and Irregular Warfare*. Vol. 1. Westport, Conn: Prager Security International, 2008. 101.

333 Aaron Karp. “Estimating Global Civilian Held Firearms Numbers,” *Small Arms Survey*, June 2018. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SAS-BP-Civilian-Firearms-Numbers.pdf>.

334 Nasser al-Sakkaf. “Yemen's fire sale: How war turns civilians into arms dealers,” *Middle East Eye*, January 7, 2016, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/yemens-fire-sale-how-war-turns-civilians-arms-dealers>.

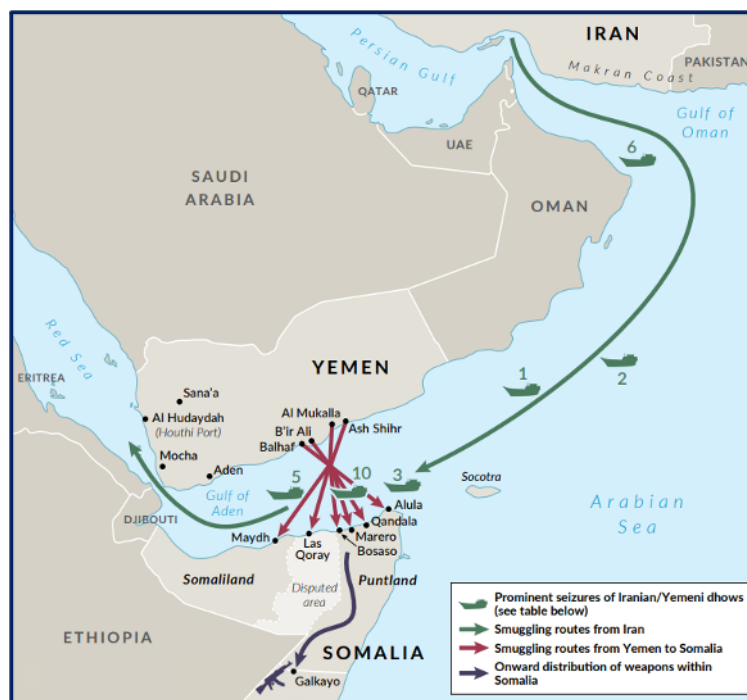
335 Ibid.

336 Interview with transnational organised crime expert.

337 Interview with transnational organised crime expert.

338 Michael Horton. “Yemen: A Dangerous Regional Arms Bazaar,” *Terrorism Monitor*. Vol. 15. No. 12. June 16, 2017. <https://jamestown.org/program/yemen-dangerous-regional-arms-bazaar/>.

339 Yara Bayoumy, Noah Browning, and Mohammed Ghobari, “How Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen has made al-Qaeda stronger—and richer,” *Reuters*, April 8, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/yemen-aqap/>.



**Figure 16.** Maritime trafficking routes from Iran into Somalia and Yemen.<sup>340</sup>

Houthi involvement in arms trafficking has evolved over the years. With receiving more advanced weaponry, the Houthis have become increasingly more dependent on armaments of Iranian origin.<sup>341</sup> Iranian SALW provisions to the Houthis include AK-platform rifles and PK-variant machine guns.<sup>342</sup> Nonetheless, despite reliance on external arms provisions, the Houthis continue to be participating actors in the arms trafficking business. In contrast to Iranian involvement, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have indirectly fuelled the SALW acquisition on behalf of hostile actors. In most cases, lacking oversight on weapons distribution on behalf of Saudi Arabia and the UAE allowed the Houthis and jihadist factions to acquire Western-SALW. There is no shortage of reports that attest to these arms acquisitions by radical groups in Yemen. Mohamed Abo El Gheit, an investigative journalist, provided evidence attesting to the acquisition of Western-arms by radical actors. El Gheit documented cases where AQAP, ISIS-YP, and the Houthis acquired Western-manufactured arms originating from prior-arms shipments arranged by coalition member states. These include cases of AQAP fighters utilising German-MG3 machine guns, Houthi rebels acquiring German-G3 rifles, AQAP militants firing Belgian FN MINIMI machine guns, and ISIS fighters with Austrian Steyr SSG 69 sniper rifles, with nearly all weapons tracing back to prior Saudi or Emirati arms shipments.<sup>343</sup> Saudi and Emirati malfeasance has altered the SALW trafficking landscape, with dealers benefiting from the influx of Western-SALW. Reports attest that traders throughout the country, such as the southwestern city of Taiz, are “offering to buy or sell anything, from a U.S.-manufactured rifle to a tank, to the highest bidder.”<sup>344</sup>

Arms dealers also utilise digital platforms for online arms purchases. The Telegram messaging service is widely used throughout the country, due to its offering of encrypted conversations allowing arms traders to operate outside the parameters of state oversight.<sup>345</sup> The use of Telegram in the Yemeni arms business is a mechanism seen in other regional conflict zones. ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliate groups

340 “Follow the Money,” *Global Initiative Against Transnational Crime*, September, 2020, p. 6. <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Following-the-money-The-use-of-the-hawala-remittance-system-in-the-Yemen-Somalia-arms-trade.pdf>.

341 Michael Knights, “The Houthi War Machine: From Guerrilla War to State Capture,” *Combating Terrorism Center*, Vol. 11. No. 8, September 2018. <https://ctc.usma.edu/houthi-war-machine-guerrilla-war-state-capture/>.

342 CJ Chivers and Eric Schmitt, “Arms Seized Off Coast of Yemen Appear to Have Been Made in Iran,” *The New York Times*, January 17, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/10/world/middleeast/yemen-iran-weapons-houthis.html>.

343 Mohamed Abo El Gheit, “The End User: How did western weapons end up,” *Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism*.

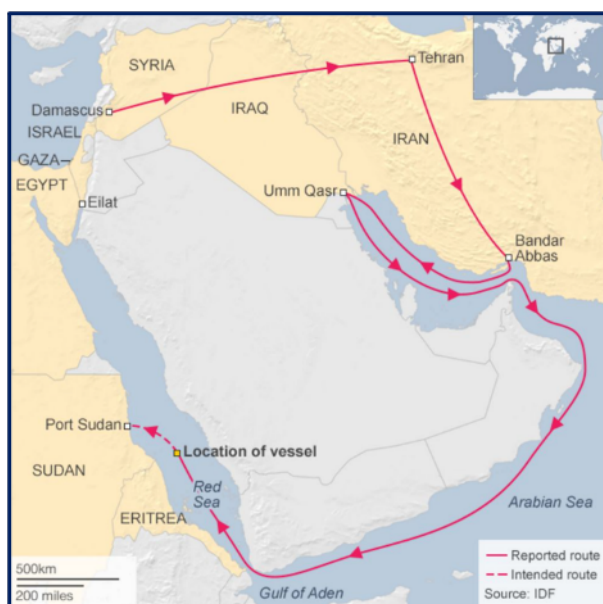
344 Nima Elbagir, Salma Abdelaziz, Mohamed Abo El Gheit, and Laura Smith-Spark, “Sold to an ally, lost to an enemy,” *CNN*, February 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2019/02/middleeast/yemen-lost-us-arms/>.

345 Mohamed Abo El Gheit, “The End User: How did western weapons end up,” *Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism*.

are known to utilise Telegram to engage in the illicit arms trafficking market within Syria.<sup>346</sup> The application now helps sustain the presence of illicit arms transactions in the country, while increasing accessibility to various audiences, including civilians, insurgents, and Salafi-jihadists. The presence of digital arms marketing in Yemen now presents a new array of challenges for state enforcement authorities that seek to curb the risk the illicit economy poses to internal security.

## North Africa as a Conduit to the Middle East

Given its nature far beyond the reach of the government in Cairo, the Sinai is the ideal location for smuggling networks to take root. The Sinai served as a key transit site for the movement of arms originating from Iranian-linked brokers, moved into Sudan, transferred to Egypt, ultimately destined for Hamas in Gaza—likely involving Bedouin and Sinai’s nomadic populations as facilitators.<sup>347</sup> Since Bedouins and nomads have maintained a traditional culture, which involved unregulated trade, the area has become, in effect, “both a haven and a crossing point for smuggling fighters, weapons and illicit goods” between Egypt and the Maghreb.<sup>348</sup> Israel has major concerns about weapons smuggling in the Sinai, since the region has been a key conduit for Hamas and other groups, including more recently violent Salafists, to bring in weapons and ammunition via underground tunnels.<sup>349</sup> The Sisi government in Egypt has tightened security along the Gaza border, shut down many of Hamas’s tunnels (flooding some of them with sewage) and even harassed Gazan fisherman that stray into Egyptian waters. This loss of sanctuary has provided Hamas with a serious logistical challenge, especially considering how critical these tunnels have been for smuggling goods (including weapons) and infiltrating fighters into Israel.<sup>350</sup>



**Figure 17.** This map (left) shows the route taken by the KLOS-C in 2014, a ship laden with weapons destined for the Gaza strip via Sudan and Egypt.<sup>351</sup> Below is an image taken by the Israeli military, showing weaponry confiscated in 2002 from the Karin A – a vessel, which was also destined for Gaza, with ties to Iran.<sup>352</sup>

346 Adam Rawnsley, Eric Woods, and Christiaan Triebert, “The Messaging App Fueling Syria’s Insurgency,” *Foreign Policy*, November 6, 2017, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/11/06/the-messaging-app-fueling-syrias-insurgency-telegram-arms-weapons/>.

347 Interview with Terrorism Expert.

348 Sudarsan Raghavan, “Militant Threat Emerges in Egyptian Desert, Opening New Front in Terrorism Fight,” *Washington Post*, March 14, 2018. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/militant-threat-emerges-in-egyptian-desert-opening-new-front-in-terrorism-fight/2018/03/13/1b24e776-1653-11e8-930c-45838ad0d77a\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/militant-threat-emerges-in-egyptian-desert-opening-new-front-in-terrorism-fight/2018/03/13/1b24e776-1653-11e8-930c-45838ad0d77a_story.html).

349 Colin P. Clarke, “How Salafism’s Rise Threatens Gaza,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 11, 2017.

350 Byman, *A High Price*, (A Saban Center at the Brookings Institute Book, 2011). p. 355.

351 “Israel Halts Weapons Shipments from Iran,” *BBC*, March 5, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26451421>.

352 “List of Past Iranian Attempts to Smuggle Weapons” *Israel Defense Forces*, November, 4, 2009, <https://idfspokesperson.wordpress.com/2009/11/04/list-of-past-iranian-attempts-to-smuggle-weapons-4-nov-2009/>.

The emergence and growth of Islamic State Wilayat Sinai (IS-Sinai) presents new opportunities for SALW trafficking activity on the peninsula. As IS-Sinai grows more tenacious in its operations, targeting Egyptian military personnel, civilians, and infrastructure, its demand for small arms to outfit its personnel and initiate kinetic operations will likely rise.<sup>353</sup> The group can possibly develop business relationships with Bedouin traffickers presently engaged in smuggling activities to act as a consumer of arms or to supply weapons for future financing efforts. One interviewee assessed that “there is a very likely some kind of relationship that exists in the context of IS-Sinai and the Bedouin in terms of exchange of arms and money.”<sup>354</sup> Elements of the Bedouin are known to have engaged in arms acquisition and trafficking activities in the past, notably with Hamas, however it remains difficult to indicate the levels of interaction that may presently exist between IS-Sinai and the Bedouin.<sup>355</sup> As the Bedouin continue to act as facilitators for the Sinai’s smuggling markets, IS-Sinai will have open access to mediators and arms traffickers, likely driving arms acquisition activity on the peninsula. If IS-Sinai emerges as a supplier of SALW in the area through acquiring weapons via battlefield capture or other means, the Bedouin are positioned to possibly buy arms from the group, where they can move them on to other non-state actors or terrorist groups for profit.<sup>356</sup> The Sinai remains an ungoverned territory, now used by jihadist organisations to smuggle weapons from looted arsenals in Libya.<sup>357</sup>

*“I suspect IS-Sinai, through the course of its raids against Egyptian military services, has acquired a great amount of arms, some of which they probably have sold to the Bedouins who then move it on to Hamas and they profit from it.”*

#### Middle East expert based in North America

The countrywide political instability that has engulfed Libya for the past decade has led to “the emergence of a vast regional black market in firearms.”<sup>358</sup> And while a thriving black market trade in weapons existed prior to the 2011, Gaddafi’s regime was capable of controlling the illegal arms trafficking that did take place.<sup>359</sup> With the regime no longer available as a bulwark, new opportunities emerged for criminal networks, especially as warring militias were in dire need of weapons and ammunition.<sup>360</sup> Following the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya in 2011 and unfolding over the course of the Arab Spring, vast quantities of MANPADS were looted from Libyan military depots and warehouses. The diversion of national stockpiles, including what occurred in Libya after Gaddafi’s fall, has contributed drastically to the proliferation of illicit civilian-held arms in the region, which through smuggling and trafficking to non-state armed groups, including terrorist organisations.<sup>361</sup> It should also be noted that “readily convertible alarm weapons” have flowed from the Middle East to North Africa, including Libya, “where both merchants and end users, including armed groups, are converting them.”<sup>362</sup> For the past decade, Libya has served as a regional hub for illicit arms flows.<sup>363</sup> Moreover, arms trafficking is not just a destabilising factor in Libya, but it also has direct implications

353 Interview with international terrorism expert.

354 Interview with international terrorism expert.

355 Interview with international terrorism expert.

356 Interview with international terrorism expert.

357 Daniel Byman, “Is Hamas Winning?” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 3, Summer 2013, p. 67.

358 According to some sources more than a million tons of weapons were looted after Gaddafi fell. Francesco Strazzari, and Francesca Zampagni, “Illicit firearms circulation and the politics of upheaval in North Africa,” in Nils Duquet and Kevin Goris. *Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe - Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE*. Flemish Peace Institute, Brussels, April 18, 2018, p.113, [https://www.flemishpeaceinstitute.eu/safte/files/vrede\\_syntheserapport\\_safte\\_lr.pdf](https://www.flemishpeaceinstitute.eu/safte/files/vrede_syntheserapport_safte_lr.pdf).

359 Rim Dhaouadi. “Social media and the sale of arms in Libya.” ENACT, April 2019. <https://enactafrica.org/research/trend-reports/social-media-and-the-sale-of-arms-in-libya>.

360 Meryl Demuyne et al. *ICCT Situation Report: The Use of Small Arms and Light Weapons by Terrorist Organisations as a Source of Finance in the Middle East and North Africa*, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT)- The Hague, 2020, <https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/The-Use-of-Small-Arms-Light-Weapons-by-Terrorist-Organisations-as-a-Source-of-Finance-in-the-Middle-East-and-North-Africa.pdf>.

361 Mark Bromley, Giovanna Maletta and Kolja Brockmann. *Arms transfers and SALW controls in the Middle East and North Africa: Mapping capacity-building efforts*. SIPRI Background Paper, November 2018, p.3, <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2018/sipri-background-papers/arms-transfer-and-salw-controls-middle-east-and-north-africa-mapping-capacity-building-efforts>.

362 Small Arms Survey (SAS). *Weapons Compass. Mapping Illicit Small Arms Flows in Africa*. January 2019, p.59, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/U-Reports/SAS-AU-Weapons-Compass.pdf>.

363 Alexis Arieff, “Crisis in Mali,” *Congressional Research Service (CRS)*, January 14, 2013, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42664.pdf>.



for its neighbours.<sup>364</sup>

*“There are well documented instances of Gaddafi area stockpiles being plundered. We are talking millions of rounds of ammunition, thousands and thousands of SALW, potentially thousands of Soviet-era MANPADS, and those definitely did make their way into Syria, Iraq, and possibly Yemen.”*

### Middle East expert based in North America

An estimated 5,000 missiles have been located and destroyed, but there could be as many as 15,000 MANPADS still unaccounted for.<sup>365</sup> While most of them are believed to have fallen into the hands of Libyan rebel groups, there is the possibility that dozens—possibly more, possibly fewer—made their way to groups including AQIM, Ansar al-Sharia, or the ISIS’s affiliate in Libya.<sup>366</sup> MANPADS have turned up across North Africa and the Middle East, in Algeria, Egypt, and Gaza. MANPADS are thought to be in the possession of today’s most capable terrorist groups—including al-Qaeda and ISIS. Given current trends, al-Qaeda and ISIS (and their affiliates) seem the most likely candidates to attempt an attack using MANPADS, but there are a host of other terrorist groups throughout the globe that have the capability to conduct such an attack. One key concern is that the shifting nature of the conflicts in places like Libya could bring terrorist groups into contact with one another, leading to cooperation that ultimately involves the exchange of either MANPADS themselves, or the tacit knowledge necessary to use these weapons effectively.

In September 2016, Rukmini Callimachi and Lorenzo Tondo reported in *The New York Times* on a new drug trafficking route discovered by the Italian Navy (see Figure 18), stretching from Sicily to Libya.<sup>367</sup> The new route is thought to be a response to increased surveillance along the Spanish coastline and the opportunity provided by the implosion of Libya, where drugs can now transit *en route* to Egypt and the Middle East, before entering Europe through the Balkans.<sup>368</sup> An investigation by Italy, which also included other European countries and the United States Drug Enforcement Administration, revealed that, at least for a time, drugs were transiting through territory in Libya controlled by ISIS, and likely taxed by the group which conducted similar procedures in Iraq and Syria. Other reports have detailed a transactional relationship between ISIS militants in Libya and the Calabrian ‘Ndrangheta, which is working with the Neapolitan Camorra.<sup>369</sup> The drug trade would not be possible without SALW, which provides the traffickers with the coercive threat necessary for any criminal transaction. The smuggling of arms and ammunition, antiquities and artefacts, counterfeit pharmaceuticals, and other contraband all transit smuggling routes between Europe and North Africa.

### 3.3. The use of SALW by terrorist organisations as a source of finance

Most of the evidence suggests that SALW play a much more significant role in the indirect use of SALW as a source of terrorist finance. While there have been accusations that groups like ISIS have profited from the trafficking of SALW, empirical evidence is difficult to come by to demonstrate the direct financing of funds and proceeds derived from the sale of SALW. What is clear, however, is that terrorist groups in the Middle East do benefit significantly from the indirect financing that would be impossible without the use of SALW. With a vast arsenal of AK-47s and more advanced weaponry,

364 Nicholas Marsh, “Brothers Came Back with Weapons: The Effects of Arms Proliferation from Libya,” *PRISM*, Vol.6, No.4, 2017, pp. 78-97.

365 Sharyl Attkisson, “Thousands of Libyan Missiles from Qaddafi Era Missing in Action,” *CBS News*, March 25, 2013, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/thousands-of-libyan-missiles-from-qaddafi-era-missing-in-action/>.

366 Andrew Lebovich, “AQIM and Libya’s Missing Weapons,” *Al-Wasat*, April 4, 2011, <https://thewasat.wordpress.com/2011/04/04/aqim-and-libyas-missing-weapons/>.

367 Rukmini Callimachi and Lorenzo Tondo, “Scaling Up a Drug Trade, Straight Through ISIS Turf,” *New York Times*, September 13, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/14/world/europe/italy-morocco-isis-drug-trade.html>.

368 Frederick Deknatel, “New Drug Routes Through Lawless Libya Raise Questions About ISIS’ Role,” *World Politics Review*, September 23, 2016, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/20011/new-drug-routes-through-lawless-libya-raise-questions-about-isis-role>.

369 Barbie Latza Nadeau, “Italian Mob Trades Weapons for Looted Art from ISIS in Libya,” *Daily Beast*, October 18, 2016. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/italian-mob-trades-weapons-for-looted-art-from-isis-in-libya>.

groups like ISIS have been able to carry out a range of criminal activities, functioning more akin to a heavily armed mafia state. Without an abundance of SALW, ISIS, Hezbollah, Hamas, and other terrorist groups in the region would not be able to carry out the same level of revenue-generating criminal activities. In short, SALW help facilitate the perpetration of an entire industry of illegal activities including smuggling and trafficking of illicit goods and products, extortion, and taxation, and KFR. After exploring the existence of a crime-terror nexus, which seems to be prevalent in the region (3.3.1), this section will thus explore (3.3.2) the direct and (3.3.3) indirect role played by SALW in terrorist organisations' financing strategies in the Middle East.



**Figure 18.** The new trafficking route as reported by the Italian navy in 2016.<sup>370</sup>

### 3.3.1. SALW and the prevalence of the crime-terror nexus

There have long been links between criminal networks and terrorist groups in respect to SALW trafficking in the Middle East. Because of the history of conflict in the region, as well as well-tread traditional smuggling routes applied by informal networks of Bedouins and traders, smuggling arms between various countries is a longstanding practice. Indeed, cross-border smuggling between Turkey and Iraq and Syria has been routine practice for decades, with guns and ammunition frequently smuggled from Turkey into neighbouring countries in the region.<sup>371</sup> The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) has been known to engage in the trafficking of explosive and weapons purchased from both Europe and Russia and smuggled into the Middle East.<sup>372</sup> States throughout the Former Soviet Union (FSU) have also served as suppliers of weapons to the Middle East.<sup>373</sup>

It is important to conceptualise the crime-terror nexus on a spectrum, and to recognise that not every interaction between a terrorist group and a criminal organisation is indicative of a nexus. Some transactions are merely that—transactional; yet others, particularly if they occur on a more regular basis, could provide more tangible evidence of a relationship, or at the very least, a tactical marriage of convenience. To some extent, most of the major terrorist groups analysed in this paper have *some* links to criminality and indeed may, including ISIS, have engaged in “do-it-yourself” (DIY) organised crime. Others like AQAP merely maintain on-again, off-again relationships with criminal elements who are able to supply them with a range of illicit resources, while also engaging in “mafia-like tactics,”—notably extortion and taxation.

370 Rukmini Callimachi and Lorenzo Tondo, “Scaling Up a Drug Trade, Straight Through ISIS Turf,” *New York Times*, September 13, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/14/world/europe/italy-morocco-isis-drug-trade.html>.

371 Philip Robins, “From Small-Time Smuggling to Big-Time Racketeering: Turkey and the Middle East,” in Mats Berdal and Monica Serrano, *Transnational Organized Crime & International Security: Business as Usual?* Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002, p. 145.

372 Mahmut Cengiz and Suleyman Ozeren, “The Evolution of the PKK into a Criminal Enterprise,” in Kimberley L. Thachuk and Rollie Lal, eds., *Terrorist Criminal Enterprises: Financing Terrorism through Organized Crime*, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2018, p. 136.

373 Misha Glenny, *McMafia: A Journey Through the Criminal Underworld*, New York: Vintage Books, 2008, pp. 223-224.

The Middle East is both a source region and a destination for illicitly trafficked SALW. According to Boris O. Saavedra, as many as 4,000 MANPADS from Iraq's pre-war arsenal could not be accounted for and disappeared onto the black market.<sup>374</sup> Iraq's legacy as a hotbed for arms smuggling and trafficking continues to the present day. In an area that has been labelled Iraq's "money and death triangle," smuggling networks linked to pro-government armed groups have thrived, and the region is the second largest market of small and medium-sized weapons in the entire country.<sup>375</sup>

Facilitators fulfil such a critical role in the SALW supply chain, making them key conduits in the various regional SALW trafficking markets. One interviewee supported this notion, suggesting that identifying these brokers at various points along the chain of custody is one of the most challenging aspects of attempting to document the trade in SALW.

While the concept of the crime-terror nexus arises often, one interviewee seemed doubtful about the utility of this notion, commenting instead that, there is "not a nexus because they are the same people—terrorists, criminals, insurgents, warlords." But to the extent that a crime-terror nexus in the Middle East does exist, the archetypal example is that of the Islamic State.

### 3.3.2. Scope and dynamics of the indirect use of SALW as a source of finance

#### Kidnapping for Ransom

Kidnapping is an ideal terrorist weapon as it can be used for political purposes or as a fund-raising activity. Kidnapping for ransom in Iraq became a staple of AQI (al-Qaeda in Iraq) during the four years or so following the U.S. occupation.<sup>376</sup> Iraqi kidnappings began with the targeting of Assyrian Christians and children of "middle income or wealthy families."<sup>377</sup> Another Christian sect, the Sabeen Mandeans were also targeted, in part because the community included goldsmiths and jewellers and had a reputation for wealth. The target pool was subsequently extended to professionals including doctors, scientists, and university professors as well as businessmen. Kidnapping of foreigners began in earnest in April 2004 when 43 people were abducted.<sup>378</sup> Reports suggested that France, Germany, and Italy paid about \$45 million for the release of 11 hostages.<sup>379</sup> Other countries such as Japan, Jordan, the Philippines, Sweden, and Turkey, are also believed to have paid significant ransoms for release of their hostages. In addition, multiple companies paid for the release of their employees. Within Iraq, connections were established between kidnapping gangs and groups such as AQI with the gangs conducting sub-contracting operations, selling the kidnapped victims to the highest bidder.

Although there was a high degree of opportunism in its kidnapping activities, ISIS reportedly developed an entire unit known as the "Intelligence Apparatus" specialising in kidnappings.<sup>380</sup> ISIS took a calculating approach to ransoms. This was evident in negotiations for the release of the 25 hostages "held by the Islamic State from the end of 2012 until the summer of 2014. The first ones to be released belonged to countries that pay the highest ransoms."<sup>381</sup> One negotiator even noted that "in 2013 the market for Western hostages in northern Syria was very well developed. Foreigners were

374 Boris O. Saavedra, "Transnational Crime and Small Arms Trafficking and Proliferation," in Kimberley L. Thachuk, ed., *Transnational Threats: Smuggling and Trafficking in Arms, Drugs, and Human Life*, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2007, p. 73.

375 Husham al-Hishami, "ISIS Thrives in Iraq's 'Money and Death' Triangle," Center for Global Policy, August 11, 2020, <https://cgpolicy.org/articles/isis-thrives-in-iraqs-money-and-death-triangle/>.

376 This paragraph draws heavily on Phil Williams, *Criminals, Militias and Insurgents: Organized crime in Iraq* (SSI-Strategic Studies Institute-US Army War College, 2019), <https://www.scribd.com/document/51387663/Criminals-Militias-and-Insurgents-Organized-Crime-in-Iraq>.

377 *Ibid.* p. 118.

378 *Ibid.* p. 125.

379 *Ibid.* p.144.

380 "Inside the Islamic State Kidnap Machine" *BBC Magazine*, September 22, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-34312450>.

381 *Ibid.* Location 1803.

traded according to their nationality and profession.”<sup>382</sup> The result was the release of around two thirds of the hostages after ransom payments were made, totalling somewhere between 60 million and 80 million Euros.<sup>383</sup> In other cases, however, hostages were killed.

ISIS also kidnapped locals “including many Yezidis, releasing them for sums of up to 4,000 dollars.”<sup>384</sup> In 2015, ISIS engaged in a mass kidnapping of 230 Assyrian Christians in Syria. Facilitated by contributions from the global community of Assyrian Christians, ransom payments were subsequently made, and the hostages were gradually freed, with the last 42 of them released in February 2016.<sup>385</sup> Reports of how much had been paid in ransom varied from around 9 million to between 25 and 30 million dollars.<sup>386</sup> KFR would not be possible without the acquisition and use of SALW as a form of coercion. To be sure, weapons are essential to terrorist groups’ ability to kidnap individuals or small groups of people by force and then extort their families or employers for money. Kidnapping gangs cannot function without SALW. The threat of violence or death is the forcing mechanism, and the weapons themselves are the enabling tools.

## Extortion and Taxation

Numerous terrorist groups in the Middle East rely on extortion and taxation, backed by the coercive power of SALW, to fund their organisations. Hamas, ISIS, and AQAP have each engaged in these practices over time.

In September 2012, an extortion ring responsible for the kidnapping of an Eritrean immigrant was uncovered by Israeli police and involved Hamas members, militants from the Sinai, and four Israelis.<sup>387</sup> Allegations from as recent as July 2014 allege that Hamas leaders, including Ismael Haniyeh, have benefited financially from a 20 percent tax imposed on all goods throughout Hamas-controlled tunnels in Gaza.<sup>388</sup> Without ‘muscle’ provided by SALW, Hamas would not be able to dominate local politics in Gaza in the manner that it does. While the group certainly possesses a significant amount of political legitimacy, that legitimacy was garnered in a sense through the organisation’s ability to fight Israel and eliminate other Palestinian rivals internally.

Of all the al-Qaeda affiliates, perhaps no group relied more on extortion to fund its activities than AQI. In the anarchic situation that developed throughout Iraq following the 2003 United States-led invasion, Baghdad and its surrounding areas fell victim to AQI fighters that extorted individuals and businesses, large and small. Around Mosul, insurgents extorted between 5 and 20 percent of the value of contracts local businessmen obtained from the Iraqi government.<sup>389</sup> The checkpoints that the insurgents manned were enforced by SALW. With no weapons, the militants would have no ability to enforce their demands.

ISIS’s extortion practices demand between 10 and 20 percent of revenue from businesses in its territories and operates other “mafia-style” rackets that help the group bring in as much as \$1 million a day.<sup>390</sup> According to Jonsson, ISIS couches its extortion related activities in terms of *jizya*, which is traditionally a tax paid by non-Muslims living in Muslim lands and is similar to other forms of

382 Ibid. Location 2164.

383 Ibid. Location 1803.

384 Laurance Binder and Gabriel Poirot. *ISIS Financing*. Center for the Analysis of Terrorism, May 2016, *ISIS Financing 2015*, p. 19.

385 “ISIS collects millions in ransom for abducted Christians” *CBS News* February 22, 2016, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/isis-collects-millions-in-ransom-for-abducted-christians/>.

386 Ibid.

387 “Hamas Extortion Ring Uncovered in Israel,” *Xinhua*, September 24, 2012, [english.sina.com/world/2012/0923/509420.html](http://english.sina.com/world/2012/0923/509420.html).

388 “Hamas Leaders Worth Millions of Dollars from Allegedly Skimming Donations and Extortion: Is Anyone Surprised?” *Inquisitr*, July 18, 2014.

389 Phil Williams, *Criminals, Militias and Insurgents: Organized crime in Iraq* (SSI-Strategic Studies Institute-US Army War College, 2019), p. 158, <https://www.scribd.com/document/51387663/Criminals-Militias-and-Insurgents-Organized-Crime-in-Iraq>.

390 David E. Sanger and Julie Hirschfield Davis, “Struggling to Starve ISIS of Oil Revenue, U.S. Seeks Assistance from Turkey,” *The New York Times*, September 13, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/14/world/middleeast/struggling-to-starve-isis-of-oil-revenue-us-seeks-assistance-from-turkey.html>.

“revolutionary” taxes collected by a number of other insurgent groups.<sup>391</sup> In Mosul alone, ISIS earned an estimated \$8 million a month from its extortion activities in 2012 and 2013,<sup>392</sup> with the bulk of funding coming from commercial, reconstruction, and oil sectors of northern Iraq,<sup>393</sup> including taxes collected on trucks and cell phone towers.<sup>394</sup> ISIS also extorts individuals or groups moving back and forth through critical border crossings between Syria and Iraq.<sup>395</sup> The group has even extorted the Syrian government, as was the case in February 2013 when ISIS militants seized control of the Tabqa Dam in eastern Syria and sold electricity back to the Assad regime.<sup>396</sup> A 2015 report by the FATF noted that ISIS “manages a sophisticated extortion racket by robbing, looting, and demanding a portion of the economic resources in areas where it operates, which is similar to how some organized crime groups generate funds.”<sup>397</sup> The extortion encompasses a wide variety of goods and activities, ranging “from fuel and vehicle taxes to school fees for children.”<sup>398</sup> The report added that although all of this “is done under the auspices of providing notional services” it is “underwritten by the threat of force” and amounts to “a sophisticated protection racket where involuntary ‘donations’ purchase momentary safety or temporary continuity of business.”<sup>399</sup>

In addition, ISIS has imposed transit taxes on goods moving into and through territory it controls. These include “a road tax of 200 USD in northern Iraq and an 800 USD ‘customs’ tax on trucks entering Iraq along the Syrian and Jordanian borders.”<sup>400</sup> ISIS has also proved to be quite entrepreneurial. In Mosul, for example, ISIS turned a former police station “into a market, with 60 shops selling fruits and vegetables. The annual rent for a market stall is... roughly \$2,500.”<sup>401</sup> In Raqqa, ISIS has an Office of Services that collects “a cleaning tax” from market shops of “\$7 to \$14, per month depending on the size of the shop.”<sup>402</sup> Residents go to collection points to pay their monthly electricity and water bills: \$2.50 for electricity and \$1.20, for water.<sup>403</sup> In addition, ISIS imposes a 4 or 5 percent income tax on salaries.<sup>404</sup> The income tax was particularly effective in Iraq as the central government in Baghdad continued to pay salaries to government employee in ISIS-controlled areas until July 2015. Even after the cessation of the payments, however, ISIS members reportedly forced “some employees to leave IS controlled territory to collect their salaries, holding their property as collateral, only to retroactively tax them” on their return.<sup>405</sup> This created a serious dilemma for the government in Baghdad.

ISIS also controlled the banks within its territory. When it took Mosul in summer 2014, there were multiple reports of the largest ever bank robbery amounting to around \$500 million dollars.<sup>406</sup> The robbery itself could not have occurred without ISIS’s use of SALW. Although the reports portrayed

391 Michael Jonsson, “Following the Money: Financing the Territorial Expansion of Islamist Insurgents in Syria,” Swedish Defence Research Agency, FOI Memo #4947, May 2014.

392 Harith Hasan, “Al Qaeda Sinks Roots in Mosul,” *Al-Monitor*, October 24, 2013, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/10/al-qaeda-mosul-iraq-sunnis-minorities.html>.

393 Patrick B. Johnston and Benjamin Bahney, “Hitting ISIS Where It Hurts: Disrupting ISIS’s Cash Flow in Iraq,” *New York Times*, August 13, 2014.

394 Ariel I. Ahram, “Can ISIS Overcome the Insurgency Resource Curse?” *Washington Post* Monkey Cage, July 2, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/07/02/for-isis-its-oil-and-water/>.

395 Ben Hubbard, Clifford Kraus and Eric Schmitt, “Rebels in Syria Claim Control of Resources,” *The New York Times*, January 28, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/29/world/middleeast/rebels-in-syria-claim-control-of-resources.html>.

396 Ariel Ahram, “The Dangerous Mixture of Oil and Water in Iraq,” *Political Violence @ a Glance*, August 18, 2014. See also, Hwaida Saad and Rick Gladstone, “Syrian Insurgents Claim to Control Large Hydropower Dam,” *New York Times*, February 11, 2013.

397 Financial Action Task Force, *Financing of the Terrorist Organization Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)* p. 12 available at [www.fatf-gafi.org/topics/methodsandtrends/documents/financing-of-terrorist-organisation-isis.html](http://www.fatf-gafi.org/topics/methodsandtrends/documents/financing-of-terrorist-organisation-isis.html).

398 Ibid. p.12.

399 Ibid p.12.

400 Ibid. p.17.

401 Dave Jolly, “ISIS Making Hundreds of Millions of Dollars Through Extortion” *Godfather Politics* December 7, 2015 available at <http://godfatherpolitics.com/isis-making-hundreds-of-millions-of-dollars-through-extortion/>.

402 Ibid.

403 Ibid.

404 “The Al-Qaeda Way: ISIS Resorts to Extortion Kidnapping for Money” *Associated Press*, October 19, 2016.

405 Ibid.

406 Robert Tait, “ISIS’ half-a-billion-dollar bank heist makes it world’s richest terror group” *The Telegraph* June 14, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/10899995/ISIS-half-a-billion-dollar-bank-heist-makes-it-worlds-richest-terror-group.html>.

ISIS actions as a heist, it seems more likely to have been an assertion of control over the bank and everything in its vault.<sup>407</sup> Indeed, since then, ISIS has treated “state-owned and private banks differently.”<sup>408</sup> The state banks have effectively been appropriated by the Caliphate. At the private banks, ISIS imposed a “tax of 5 percent on all customer cash withdrawals” thus providing another form of extortion.<sup>409</sup> In addition, ISIS imposed fines for any kinds of behaviour that violated the societal and behavioural norms it imposed.<sup>410</sup>

ISIS also established control over businesses, agriculture, and industry throughout the territory it controlled in Syria and Iraq. As the Center for the Analysis of Terrorism noted, “ISIS exerts its authority over a wide range of industrial and commercial activities, natural resources and raw materials, from oil to agricultural products, including minerals.”<sup>411</sup> Again, the use of violence or the threat of violence is essential to this practice. It may seem obvious, but bears repeating, that without a large arsenal of SALW, terrorist and insurgent groups would be unable to engage in widespread and systematic acts of illicit activity, from KFR to extortion to robbery. Without SALW serving as the enforcement mechanism behind threat of violence, ISIS would not have been able to secure control over the various sectors that facilitated its financial success.

Similar to actions of ISIS, AQAP has also engaged in “mafia-like” tactics to advance the organisation’s revenue generation in Yemen. Notable cases include AQAP’s levying of financial tolls on ship traffic around the south-eastern port city of Mukalla, until an Emirati-led offensive forced AQAP out of the city in 2016.<sup>412</sup> AQAP’s engagement in racketeering as a form of financing also extended into Mukalla’s SALW trade. While the organisation maintained an extensive presence in Mukalla, it oversaw the imposing of taxes on weapons sales and other smuggled goods being trafficked through the port city’s thriving trafficking networks.<sup>413</sup>

## Oil Smuggling and Trafficking

A substantial portion of ISIS’s impressive war chest was derived from the smuggling and trafficking of oil and oil-related products. The group’s predecessor, AQI, had been involved in the theft, diversion, and smuggling of oil, but ISIS was able to elevate the practice to industrial-scale levels. The group captured key oilfields and refineries in north-eastern Syria and northern Iraq between June 2014 and September 2014 and took control of key roads and other centres of commerce.<sup>414</sup> ISIS was able to gain control over these key resources through violence and the threat of violence. Individuals who resisted were shot, and the message soon reached others, who either complied or fled. Those workers who remained did so under the threat of coercion and death, once again, enabled by SALW.<sup>415</sup>

407 Borzou Daragahi, “Biggest bank robbery that ‘never happened’ – \$400m Isis heist,” *Financial Times*, July 17, 2014 available at <https://www.ft.com/content/0378d4f4-0c28-11e4-9080-00144feabdc0>.

408 Financial Action Task Force, *Financing of the Terrorist Organization Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)* p. 12. Available at [www.fatf-gafi.org/topics/methodsandtrends/documents/financing-of-terrorist-organisation-isil.html](http://www.fatf-gafi.org/topics/methodsandtrends/documents/financing-of-terrorist-organisation-isil.html).

409 Ibid p. 13.

410 Laurance Binder and Gabriel Poirot. *ISIS Financing*. Center for the Analysis of Terrorism, May 2016, *ISIS Financing 2015*, p. 17.

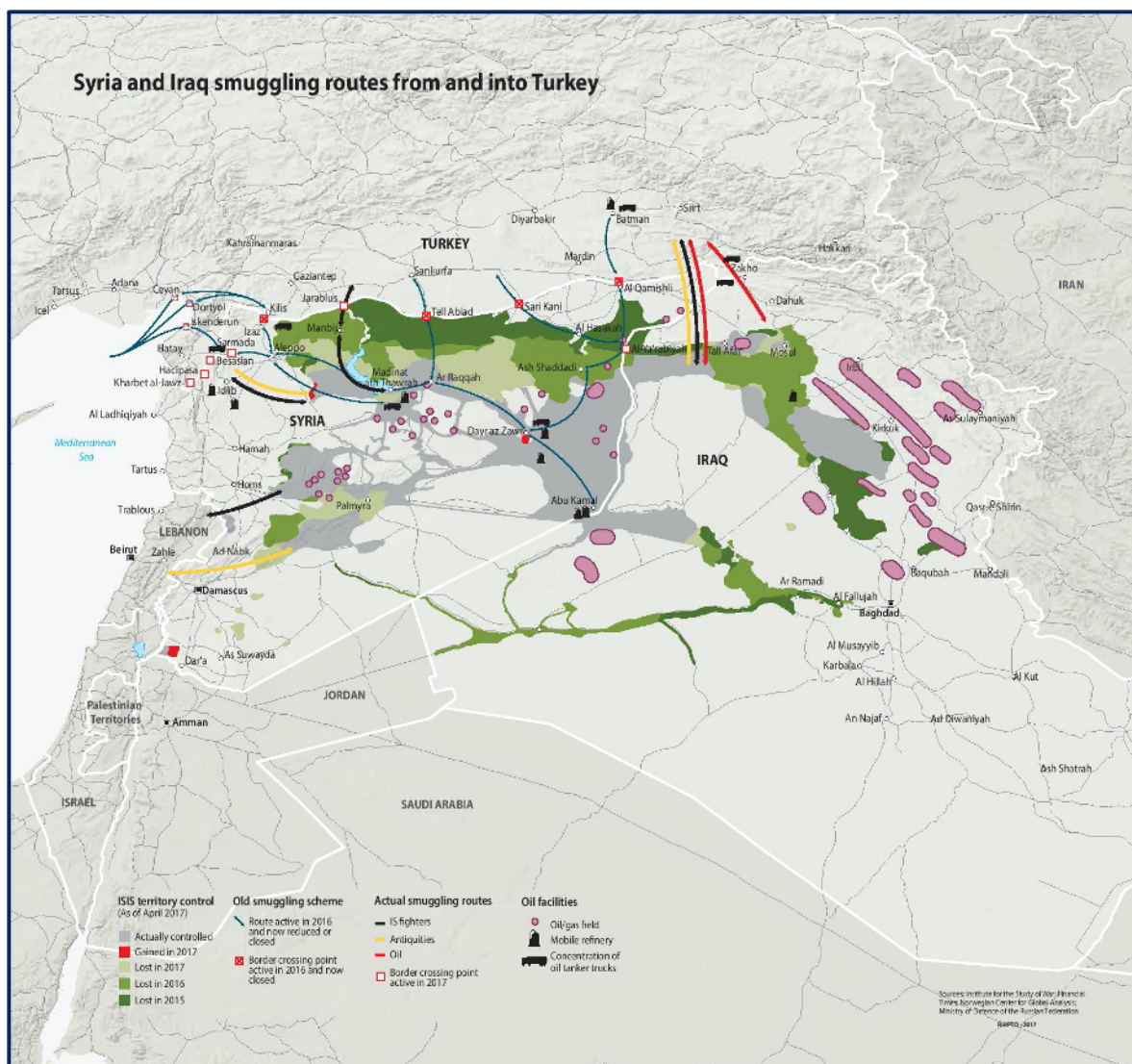
411 Ibid. p. 4.

412 Yara Bayoumy, Noah Browning, and Mohammed Ghobari, “How Saudi Arabia’s war in Yemen has made al-Qaeda stronger - and richer,” *Reuters*, April 8, 2016. <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/yemen-aqap/>; Andrea Carboni and Matthias Sulz, “The Wartime Transformation of AQAP in Yemen,” *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, December 14, 2020, <https://acleddata.com/2020/12/14/the-wartime-transformation-of-aqap-in-yemen/>.

413 Michael Horton, “Yemen: A Dangerous Regional Arms Bazaar,” *Jamestown Foundation—Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 15, No. 12, June 16, 2017. <https://jamestown.org/program/yemen-dangerous-regional-arms-bazaar/>; Yara Bayoumy, Noah Browning, and Mohammed Ghobari, “How Saudi Arabia’s war in Yemen has made al-Qaeda stronger - and richer,” *Reuters*, April 8, 2016.

414 Tom Keatinge, “How the Islamic State Sustains Itself: The Importance of the War Economy in Syria and Iraq,” *RUSI Analysis*, August 29, 2014.

415 Ben Hubbard, “ISIS Promise of Statehood Falling Far Short, Ex-Residents Say,” *New York Times*, December 1, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/02/world/middleeast/isis-promise-of-statehood-falling-far-short-ex-residents-say.html>.



**Figure 19.** A visualisation of the smuggling routes and oil fields in ISIS held territory as of April 2017.<sup>416</sup>

When ISIS gained control over Deir Ezzor in 2014, it laid claim to Syria's largest oil field, al-Omar, in addition to several smaller but still significant oil fields including Tanak, Jafra, and Ward.<sup>417</sup> It also developed relationships with traditional smuggling organisations, such as the Berri clan in Aleppo, that were critical in moving gasoline into Turkey where prices are among the highest in the world. Without access to SALW, ISIS would have lacked the “muscle” to move into the dominant position in such a lucrative criminal market. Turkey plays a major role in the SALW trade, according to one interviewee, who went on to say that the porous border between Turkey and Syria and the myriad different family groups operating in the region to facilitate the movement of illicit products is one of the major reasons why the trade in SALW is thriving.

ISIS needed SALW to overtake the personnel at the oil facilities and enforce new management. In some cases, ISIS compelled technicians to remain in their jobs to ensure that oil continued to flow. The individuals were not necessarily given a choice—they were paid, but operated under duress, understanding that if they abandoned their jobs or refused, they would be killed, most likely alongside their families. Without SALW, ISIS never would have had the coercive capabilities to seize control of the oil fields. And without control of the oil fields, ISIS would have struggled mightily to build its proto-state, so there is a direct connection between SALW and ISIS financing, and in effect, its ability to

416 “Maps and Graphics,” Norwegian Center for Global Analyses, RHIPTO/Riccardo Pravettoni, Accessed February 20, 2021, <https://www.rhipto.org/maps-and-graphics>.

417 Rachel Kreisman, “Raqa and the Oil Economy of ISIS,” *The Atlantic Council*, May 15, 2017, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/raqa-and-the-oil-economy-of-isis/>.

construct its so-called caliphate.

Not only were SALW essential to ISIS gaining control of the oil fields, but the entire value chain of moving the oil and oil-related products was also linked to SALW. The convoys that smuggled and trafficked oil throughout the region needed to be accompanied by heavily armed soldiers to avoid being robbed or overtaken. As such, armed militants were the guardians of these lucrative assets and the entire illicit supply chain that sustained such robust revenues for the organisation.

## Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking

One area of activity that has been discussed a great deal, but very little in terms of ISIS profit-making, is human smuggling of refugees. Napoleoni, however, claimed that “in the summer of 2015, the tax on human cargo crossing into Turkey generated about half a million dollars a day for the Islamic State.”<sup>418</sup> She also argued that ISIS forces in Libya are regulating and taxing refugee boats leaving to cross the Mediterranean, limiting the number of passengers to 120 per boat.<sup>419</sup> “Traffickers pay 50 percent of their profits to ISIS in exchange for the right to sail, so counting the migrants also establishes the amount of tax each boat must pay. In 2015, this tax generated about \$ 20 million for every 10 thousand migrants.”<sup>420</sup> This was at the height of the refugee crisis and it seems likely that since then, this revenue stream has declined somewhat. There is often a connection between the trade in SALW and other aspects of transnational crime. For example, according to one interviewee who studies illicit criminal activities in the Middle East, the boats that smuggle and traffic humans to various destinations in the Persian Gulf “never go back empty.” She noted that they almost always bring weapons back to trading hubs and arms bazaars throughout the region and even further afield to the Horn of Africa.<sup>421</sup>

In addition to the taxation of human smugglers, ISIS has subsequently become involved in human trafficking and according to one report “has set up prostitution businesses in certain towns and cities in which they occupy using primarily teenage girls that they force to work in such businesses.”<sup>422</sup> In 2014, ISIS abducted over 5,000 Yazidi women which its members used to conduct “slave auctions.”<sup>423</sup> ISIS was able to overtake Yazidi areas because of the group’s superior firepower. Men were separated from women and children, and in many cases killed using SALW. Small clans and tribes were simply outnumbered and outgunned, given ISIS’s vast arsenal of weapons. Similarly, to the ways jihadist groups engage in kidnapping for ransom, the acquisition of SALW permits ISIS to effectively coerce vulnerable populations into involuntarily services as part of its human trafficking mechanisms.

## Drug Trafficking

As discussed throughout this chapter, ISIS has diversified its funding portfolio to ensure a steady supply of financing to support its operations and organisation.<sup>424</sup> And as its territory is further squeezed in Iraq and Syria, it will increasingly turn to opportunistic methods of raising money, including drug trafficking.<sup>425</sup> One major consequence of the Arab Spring and follow-on geopolitical tumult has been a shift in smuggling and trafficking networks throughout the Middle East and North Africa, with criminal

418 Loretta Napoleoni, *Merchants of Men: How Jihadists and ISIS Turned Kidnapping and Refugee Trafficking into a Multi-Billion Dollar Business* (Kindle Locations 3564-3570). Seven Stories Press. Kindle Edition.

419 Ibid. Location 3563.

420 Ibid. Location 3569.

421 Interview with Middle East crime expert.

422 Christine Duhaime, “Terrorist Financing and the Islamic State” available at <http://www.duhaimelaw.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/White-Paper-Terrorist-Financing-Methods-2.pdf>.

423 Financial Action Task Force, *Financing of the Terrorist Organization Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)* p. 13. Available at [www.fatf-gafi.org/topics/methodsandtrends/documents/financing-of-terrorist-organisation-isil.html](http://www.fatf-gafi.org/topics/methodsandtrends/documents/financing-of-terrorist-organisation-isil.html).

424 Eric W. Schoon, “ISIS, Ideology, and the Illicit Drug Economy,” *Political Violence @ a Glance*, July 24, 2015. See also, Colin P. Clarke, “Drugs & Thugs: Funding Terrorism through Narcotics Trafficking,” *Journal of Strategic Security*, Volume 9, Issue 3, Fall 2016, pp. 1-15.

425 Dominic Dudley, “Why Defeat in Mosul Could Push Islamic State into Drug Trafficking,” *Forbes*, November 4, 2016, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dominicdudley/2016/11/04/isis-defeat-mosul-drug-trafficking/?sh=7b42d4005cef>.



groups and terrorist organisations taking advantage of continued instability in key geographic hubs throughout the Mediterranean region.<sup>426</sup> ISIS fighters are cognisant of the benefits that this instability affords, even stressing in a 2017 issue of *Rumiyah* that conflict zones such as Ukraine and Syria, provide ample opportunities for connections to underground criminal networks.

And ISIS militants are not just in the business of profiting from drugs but are apparently taking them too. Myriad reports suggest that terrorists are widely using captagon, also known as ‘jihad pills,’ an amphetamine that suppresses feelings of pain, induces euphoria, and allows fighters to remain awake for extended periods of time during intense battles.<sup>427</sup> The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime estimates that the captagon market could be worth approximately 1.39 billion dollars.<sup>428</sup> Criminal gangs from Syria and Bulgaria and other terrorist groups, including Hezbollah, are thought to be involved with the production and sale of captagon throughout the Middle East, which could potentially bring them into contact with ISIS militants as fighters flee the collapsing Caliphate.<sup>429</sup>

### 3.3.3 Scope and dynamics of the direct use of SALW as a source of finance

Terrorist groups using the smuggling and trafficking of SALW to finance their organisations is difficult to document, although according to several interviewees, it does indeed happen. The more common usage of SALW is indirect financing, wherein terrorist groups use SALW to help carry out a range of illicit activities, from extortion to armed robbery. When asked about whether terrorist groups profit from SALW trafficking (e.g., direct financing), one interviewee noted that “we don’t see a lot of it...but just because you can’t find it doesn’t mean it’s not happening.” She went on to say that “everybody wants a nice clean picture, but it’s very messy.”<sup>430</sup> This comment tracks with similar perspectives from several other interviewees who each spoke about their gut instinct that these groups might be profiting from the illicit trade in SALW, but because weapons are also useful on the battlefield, it was often much more difficult to discern a pure profit motive, as is typically the case with drug smuggling or human trafficking.

#### Terrorist organisations’ direct involvement in SALW trafficking

Several interviewees expressed the viewpoint that for terrorist groups in the Middle East, arms trafficking was not a primary source of revenue, and perhaps only secondary at best. In their article in *Foreign Policy* from January 2018, Renad Mansour and Hisham al-Hishami noted that ISIS profits from trade of illicit arms, in addition to a range of other products it buys and sells on the black market, including illicit drugs and antiquities.<sup>431</sup> In a separate piece, Hishami notes that “the revenue ISIS generates from the border economy provides the group with funds to carry out its terrorist attacks and obtain arms, food, medicine, vehicles, and anything else needed to survive and continue its activities, as well as for recruitment for support functions.”<sup>432</sup> Rollie Lal, an expert on transnational organised crime, has similarly asserted that ISIS has profited from weapons trafficking.<sup>433</sup>

426 Giacomo Persi Paoli and Jacopo Bellasio, *Against the Rising Tide: An Overview of the Growing Criminalisation of the Mediterranean Region*, RAND Europe, January 26, 2017.

427 “‘Jihad Pills’ Found by Dutch and Italian Police,” *BBC*, May 10, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39870180>. See also, Mirren Gidda, “Drugs in War: What is Captagon, The ‘Jihad Pill’ Used by Islamic State Militants?” *Newsweek*, May 12, 2017, <https://www.newsweek.com/drugs-captagon-islamic-state-jihad-war-amphetamines-saudi-arabia-608233>.

428 Ben Crabtree, “The Nexus of Conflict and Illicit Drug Trafficking—Syria and the Wider Region,” *The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime*, November 27, 2016.

429 Chavala Madlena and Radwan Mortada, “Syria’s Speed Freaks, Jihad Junkies, and Captagon Cartels,” *Foreign Policy*, November 19, 2015.

430 Interview with a Middle East expert.

431 Renad Mansour and Hisham al-Hishami, “ISIS, Inc.,” *Foreign Policy*, January 16, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/01/16/isis-inc-islamic-state-iraq-syria/>.

432 Husham al-Hishami, “ISIS on the Iraqi-Syrian Border: Thriving Smuggling Networks,” *Center for Global Policy*, June 16, 2020, <https://cgpolicy.org/articles/isis-on-the-iraqi-syrian-border-thriving-smuggling-networks/>.

433 Rollie Lal, “Da’esh and Al-Qaeda in Europe,” in Kimberley L. Thachuk and Rollie Lal, eds., *Terrorist Criminal Enterprises: Financing Terrorism through Organized Crime*, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2018, p. 50.

Throughout the interviews, experts disagreed over the extent to how much groups profited directly. In terms of whether groups like ISIS actually profit from the sale of SALW, one interviewee was sceptical. She believes the fact that ISIS maintained its own weapons production facilities meant that it lacked a surplus, and thus was unlikely to be selling SALW for a profit. Still, another interviewee who is considered one of the world's leading experts on conflict in Syria believes that many terrorist organisations have made money by selling weapons to the regime, as well as to regime-linked actors (Russian, Iranian). He spoke of numerous border crossings where the SALW trade was very well known. He went on to say that one way for terrorists to maintain an additional income was for them to sell arms to their enemies. Nusra did it, ISIS has been widely accused of doing it. Holistically, it is evident that terrorist financing via SALW trafficking remains extremely multi-faceted, rationalising the need for continued comprehensive and diligent monitoring.

*“[ISIS] obviously gained access to a great amount of armaments related to Syria and Iraq, so establishing dark websites to sell some of this material so they can make money makes sense... It wasn't a significant source of financing for a group like ISIS relative to the other sources they were benefiting from, like extortion.”*

#### Middle East expert based in North America

Areas under Houthi control have seen immense growth in the arms trafficking business. Locals residing in Sanaa attest that the arms market in urban centres under Houthi control is “accelerating at an alarming rate”, with little oversight in documenting what weapons variants are sold and to whom.<sup>434</sup> In some of these areas, fighters participate as suppliers. Ahmed Himmiche, a coordinator for the UN Security Council's Panel of Experts, claims that reports emerging from Yemen attest that militants often sell their issued weapons in the absence of wages.<sup>435</sup>

### Terrorist organisations' indirect involvement in SALW trafficking

As part of secondary source financing via SALW trafficking, extortion and other “mafia-like” tactics executed by terrorist groups remain among the prevalent criminal strategies executed by these non-state actors. With states continuing to struggle to exert social control over portions of conflict zones, ranging from Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, these groups remain positioned to tax the flow of SALW throughout the country, often through coercing traffickers through the threat of armed confrontation or limiting their access to regional trade outlets. Consequently, though these groups do not rely heavily on direct engagement in arms sales as a primary source for revenue generation, they continue to be immediate beneficiaries of the SALW trade. Within areas under militant control, groups are positioned to potentially extort local arms businesses or impose regulatory taxes on arms sales.

Outside of the case of Mukalla, AQAP and other Salafi-jihadist groups operating in Yemen likely continue to impose taxes on the movement of SALW in areas where the group maintains levels of social control or significant influence. One interviewee supported this notion, claiming terrorist groups in Yemen are likely gaining most of their revenue from “mafia activity” and extortion through the arms trade.<sup>436</sup> Despite limits in territorial control of Salafi-jihadi actors, the tribal dynamics and economic hardships of the Yemeni conflict zone is likely driving jihadist groups to charge traffickers utilising routes through the territories where they do exercise considerable influence. While SALW traffickers remain key facilitators in Yemen's smuggling environment, they likely engage in transactional interactions with terrorist groups, where they either pay the organisation or agree to a negotiated percentage in order to access weapons markets.<sup>437</sup> As suggested by the interviewee, this practice can be best understood as a brand of “warlordism” that jihadist groups are embracing, claiming “[traffickers] don't

434 “Chaos of Houthi-Controlled ‘Arms Markets’ Grows in Yemen,” *Asharq Al-Awsat*, December 13, 2019, <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/2034411/chaos-houthi-controlled-%E2%80%98arms-markets%E2%80%99-grows-yemen>.

435 Mohamed Abo El Gheit, “The End User: How did western weapons end up,” *Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism*, <https://en.arj.net/investigation/the-end-user-how-did-western-weapons-end-up-in-the-hands-of-isis-and-aqap-in-yemen/>.

436 Interview with transnational organised crime expert.

437 Ibid.

end up having to fight them. It's easier for traffickers to pay."<sup>438</sup>

Moreover, like other illicit markets, SALW trafficking is adapting in the digital age. The presence of SALW sales via digital applications in Yemen and Syria, notably Telegram, reflects the fluid nature of SALW marketability in regional conflict zones. The presence of SALW in the digital sphere not only allows arms dealers to expand its consumer pool, but it also now provides terrorist organisations with additional mechanisms to expand the acquisition and possible sale of SALW across demographics and geographic areas. With terrorist organisations enhancing their technical fluency with exploiting digital platforms in these conflict zones, states with declining legitimacy and enforcement capabilities will likely continue to struggle in combatting the presence of a digital-SALW marketplace. Consequently, this will likely pose challenges for counter-SALW efforts aiming to address the emerging marketability of SALW in cyberspace and the implications for the acquisition and sale of arms by terrorist organisations.

### 3.4. Conclusion

As detailed throughout this report, there are myriad ways that terrorist organisations use SALW trafficking to conduct operations and in some cases, indirectly finance their organisational activities. Terrorist groups in the region have access to, and ultimately obtain, a wide range of SALW, and they do so through state sponsorship, diversion, and theft, and through taking advantage of weak state capacity, porous borders, and corrupt law enforcement and border security officials. State sponsorship of terrorist groups and sub-state proxies has flooded the Middle East with SALW, which further contributes to instability and provides terrorist groups with the means of sustaining their campaigns, by offering the means of indirect financing—through KFR, extortion and taxation, and various types of illicit smuggling and trafficking activities.

Terrorist organisations like ISIS, AQAP, and Hezbollah have displayed remarkable staying power. Their strength has been bolstered, both directly and indirectly, by the possession and acquisition of SALW, which has in turn fuelled civil war, terrorism, and insurgency throughout the Middle East. But SALW remain a problem beyond the violence itself, because these weapons of war are crucial to terrorist organisations' ability to raise funds that sustain their movements, as they serve as the primary coercive mechanism that fuels extortion, kidnapping for ransom, and numerous other forms of illicit activities perpetrated by terrorist groups in the region and beyond.

As documented throughout this paper, there are numerous examples of the indirect financing of terrorist organisations through the use of SALW. Nearly every illicit revenue stream pursued by terrorist organisations in the Middle East is underpinned by the use of force or by the threat of force. SALW provide terrorist groups with the 'muscle' needed to coerce their targets. And, as demonstrated by ISIS with frequency, this was more than just an idle threat. ISIS took barbarism to new levels and in the process, managed to gain control over key sectors of the illicit economy. This revenue in turn fuelled the ISIS war machine. Numerous al-Qaeda affiliates in the Middle East—including AQAP and al-Qaeda's franchise in Syria—also rely on SALW to hold territory, fight their adversaries, and pursue illicit revenue generating activities that help sustain these groups' operational and organisational lines of effort.

Looking ahead, it is prudent to anticipate what could be coming over the horizon in the near future, including a move toward online and digital transactions. Arms dealers utilise digital platforms for online arms purchases. The Telegram messaging service is widely used throughout the country, due to its offering of encrypted conversations allowing arms traders to operate outside the parameters of state oversight.<sup>439</sup> The use of Telegram in the Yemeni arms business is a mechanism seen in other regional conflict zones. ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliate groups are known to utilise Telegram to engage in the illicit arms trafficking market within Syria.<sup>440</sup> The application now helps sustain the presence of illicit arms

438 Ibid.

439 Ibid.

440 Adam Rawnsley, Eric Woods, and Christiaan Triebert, "The Messaging App Fueling Syria's Insurgency," *Foreign Policy*,

transactions in the country, while increasing accessibility to various audiences, including civilians, insurgents, and Salafi-jihadists. The presence of digital arms marketing in Yemen now presents a new array of challenges for state enforcement authorities that seek to curb the risk the illicit economy poses to internal security.

# The suitability of DDR programmes to disarm terrorist groups

## 4.1. Introduction

Modern-day conflicts, particularly those in Africa and the Middle East, have become increasingly multi-layered and complex, with terrorist groups over the past couple of decades proliferating in already fragile and conflict-affected settings. In the Sahel and larger West African region, the terrorist threat posed by a number of al-Qaeda and IS-affiliated terrorist organisations has increased<sup>441</sup> and has further exacerbated already existing tensions. A multitude of non-state armed groups, community-based militias, bandits, and criminal actors now operate in the region, most notably in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Nigeria, and take advantage of the historic trans-Saharan trade routes. In the Middle East, ISIS at its height controlled a vast territory and in many ways acted as a state, while Yemen has been faced with multiple conflicts involving terrorist groups which has seen the government being embroiled in a conflict against Houthi rebels but also with AQIP. In addition to this, various armed groups are also engaged in conflict with each other in the region.

The nature of warfare itself has changed significantly due to technological advancements and the use of communication platforms, particularly in the Middle East. Non-state armed groups including terrorist groups are becoming capable of acquiring or manufacturing weapons, adding to the proliferation of SALW. Several terrorist groups like ISIS have been using IEDs for a long time but can now also develop remote capabilities to carry out attacks, obtain knowledge on how to make weapons through the Internet or rely on 3D technologies to produce weapons.<sup>442</sup> Technological advances in manufacturing, design and the production of weapons also present challenges to both DDR processes and Weapons and Ammunition Management Programmes (WAM).

Against this backdrop, peace operation efforts need to be conducted in complex and often fragile environments in which many different actors operate, including terrorist groups. In the aftermath of a conflict, countries face numerous challenges ranging from creating stability, building strong institutions, providing humanitarian assistance, and conducting reconstruction efforts, whereas the longer-term goal is to prevent the recurrence of violence and conflict. Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), in addition to security sector reform (SSR), transitional justice and arms control are all part of a wider peacebuilding effort that is needed in countries emerging from a conflict. These different components may overlap but are distinct. With consideration to the increasing involvement of terrorist groups in conflicts and the changing nature of warfare, as well as how DDR programmes have evolved in the last decade, this section will explore how the interplay of these dynamics might contribute to reducing the trafficking and possession of SALW by terrorist groups.

## 4.2. D for Disarmament

Disarmament, security, and development are intrinsically linked. Sustainable development goal 16 is dedicated to peace, justice and strong institutions and one of the targets is to significantly reduce the illicit financial market for SALW and arms flows themselves, strengthen recovery, the return of stolen assets, and combat all forms of organised crime by 2030.<sup>443</sup> The updated version of the UN Integrated DDR Standards (UNIDDRS) published in 2018 has been developed by more than 20 UN agencies to provide guidance in post-conflict contexts where DDR forms an integral

441 Danielle Paquette, Souad Mekhennet and Joby Warrick, "ISIS attacks surge in Africa even as Trump boasts of a '100-percent' defeat caliphate," *The Washington Post*, October 19, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/islamic-state-attacks-surg-ing-africa/2020/10/18/2e16140e-1079-11eb-8a35-237ef1eb2ef7\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/islamic-state-attacks-surg-ing-africa/2020/10/18/2e16140e-1079-11eb-8a35-237ef1eb2ef7_story.html).

442 Audrey Kurth Cronin, *Power to the People: How Open Technological Innovation is Arming Tomorrows Terrorists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

443 "The 17 Goals," United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Sustainable Development, accessed February 18, 2020, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

part of comprehensive peace agreements. According to UNIDDRS, the first D of DDR represents the collection, documentation, control and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives and light and heavy weapons belonging to combatants and often also the civilian population.<sup>444</sup> Disarmament also includes the development of responsible arms management programmes.<sup>445</sup> From this definition, it becomes clear that disarmament is broader than just disarming combatants and can overlap with arms control programmes, which are often conducted among States - in peace time - to reduce the number of all types of weapons owned by States.



**Figure 20.** Demobilisation process begins, outside Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, 2012.<sup>446</sup>

While the proliferation of arms is not itself considered the cause of violence, it does increase the severity of violence as a force multiplier.<sup>447</sup> General Assembly Resolution 71/64 on the consolidation of peace through practical disarmament measures emphasised the need to address the illicit trafficking of SALW, including through weapons collection, disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration programmes and the enhancement of physical security and stockpile management practices, as well as relevant training programmes. The Resolution also acknowledged that a comprehensive and effective weapons management programme can contribute to sustainable peacebuilding efforts.<sup>448</sup> The importance of adequate DDR and weapons reduction programmes in the process of addressing the prevalence of SALW has also been emphasised as a ‘best practice’ by the UN and World Bank, though evidence of its effectiveness remains limited.<sup>449</sup>

444 United Nations. “Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS): Glossary and Definitions.” August 1, 2006, <https://www.unddr.org/modules/IDDRS-1.20-Glossary.pdf>.

445 The EU’s Concept for support to Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration adopts the UN definitions for DDR in full, but the definition of disarmament is qualified by a footnote stating that the development of responsible arms management programmes is ‘not mandatory’, though it should be noted that disarmament is often linked to civilian voluntary surrender programmes. See Council of the European Union. *Draft EU Concept for Support to Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR)*. December 2006. P.6 n.2. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004\\_2009/documents/dv/16387\\_/16387\\_en.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/16387_/16387_en.pdf).

446 United Nations. “Handbook for United Nations DDR Practices: Effective Weapons and Ammunition management in a changing Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Context” *Department of Peacekeeping Affairs*, 2018, p. vi. [https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/effective\\_weapons\\_and\\_ammunition\\_management\\_ddr\\_handbook.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/effective_weapons_and_ammunition_management_ddr_handbook.pdf).

447 Andrew D. Pinto, Malika Sharma, and Robert Muggah, “An agent–vector–host–environment model for controlling small arms and light weapons,” *Medicine, Conflict and Survival* 27, no. 2 (September 2011): 111-127, DOI: 10.1080/13623699.2011.608630.

448 United Nations General Assembly. “Consolidation of peace through practical disarmament measures.” Resolution 71/64, Adopted by the General Assembly on December 5, 2016.

449 Robert Muggah, “Emerging from the shadow of war: A critical perspective on DDR and weapons reduction in the post-conflict period,” *Contemporary Security Policy* 27, no.1 (January 2007): 190-205, DOI: 10.1080/13523260600603493.

### 4.3. From first to third generation of DDR programmes

Peace operations and DDR programmes have evolved to address the recognised changing environment in which they are being utilised.<sup>450</sup> With regard to DDR, these changes have manifested as what are referred to as generational changes in policy and practice. The first generation of DDR programmes have traditionally been implemented after an international armed conflict - between States, or within one State - has ended. The scope and modalities of these original DDR programmes are part of the peace agreement and based on the willingness and implied trust to implement the programme itself.<sup>451</sup> Whilst first generation DDR programmes focus on the combatants, the second generation of DDR programmes are broader and also address the needs of communities that have been affected by violence.<sup>452</sup> An important concept under the second generation DDR programmes is community violence reduction (CVR), which has been incorporated in UN peace operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO), the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), Mali (MINUSMA) and Darfur (UNAMID).<sup>453</sup>

While DDR and CVR programmes have the same objective to reduce violence, CVR programmes are often implemented when a peace agreement has not yet been concluded and the pre-conditions of a DDR process are not met. CVR programmes can be implemented in addition to or instead of DDR programmes, and are focused on the needs of the local communities. This priority is demonstrated through developmental activities ranging from repairing schools and roads to vocational training, the creation of gun-free zones, and registration capabilities. By building trust and creating space for dialogue, the programmes contribute to stability and can lay the groundwork for the subsequent introduction of DDR programmes.<sup>454</sup> The advantages are that CVR programmes can include members of the armed groups, including terrorist groups, that are not likely to be signatories to peace agreements and thus not eligible for DDR. In Mali, for example, CVR programmes have been implemented to address recruitment into the armed movements present in the country, including those allied to al-Qaeda.<sup>455</sup> Importantly, however, the expressed primary aim of CVR is to prevent and reduce violence, not necessarily to reduce arms flow of weapons to/from terrorist groups. The developmental and community-building work conducted may nevertheless contribute to conditions conducive for arms reduction.

The third generation DDR programmes are being implemented in fragile contexts characterised by a lack of the rule of law and weak government, and often during an on-going conflict. In such circumstances, the parties in the conflict are not likely to give up their weapons. A practicing expert in DDR and CVR confirmed in interview that the pre-conditions for a successful DDR programme, i.e., the willingness and trust to voluntarily agree to disarm, demobilise and reintegrate, are thus difficult to achieve.

*“It’s a common misconception when people say that a DDR programme goes on after a war is done. Most of the time, the war is still going on. So, if I were them, I wouldn’t give up my weapon either, it’s kind of stupid from a personal security point of view.”*

**DDR and CVR Expert**

450 Robert Muggah and Chris O'Donnell, “Next Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration,” *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 4 no.1 (May 21, 2015): 30, pp. 1-12. <https://stabilityjournal.org/articles/10.5334/sta.fs/galley/325/download>.

451 United Nations International Organization for Migration (IOM), “Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration: Compendium of Projects 2010–2017.” 2019, [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/ddr\\_compendium.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/ddr_compendium.pdf).

452 United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations. “Second Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Practices in Peace Operations.” January 2010, [https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/2gddr\\_eng\\_with\\_cover.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/2gddr_eng_with_cover.pdf).

453 United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations. “Effective Weapons and Ammunition Management in a Changing Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Context.” 2018.

454 United Nations Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR). “Community Violence Reduction: Creating Space for Peace.” Undated, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/ddr-and-cvr-creating-space-for-peace.pdf>.

455 United Nations. “Report of the Secretary-General on the threat of terrorists benefiting from transnational organized crime.” 2018, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/795063?ln=en>.

Third-generation DDR programmes have begun developing transitional centres that differ from classic cantonment sites, and which are more suitable for the demobilisation of violent extremists.<sup>456</sup> Yet, many challenges remain for third generation DDR programmes to address the specific issues relating to terrorists, such as how to provide safe passage to those who wish to leave the terrorist group, the provision of de-radicalisation programmes and the collection of weapons while the conflict and terrorist action remain ongoing.<sup>457</sup> The reintegration of ex-combatants/fighters often occurs in fragile contexts, including during ongoing conflicts, where non-state armed groups continue to operate or advocate for the use of violence even as reintegration efforts are underway.

The resulting lack of focus on disarmament as a priority in third generation DDR programmes has led many to continue to suggest that it should be renamed to provide a more accurate description of the process. However, there remain operational and bureaucratic reasons why such a rebrand cannot happen, reasons which couple as an explanation as to why the newest generations of DDR include accompanying but separate programmes.

*“DDR has been going on for 25 years. If you change your acronym, you lose every resolution for 25 years that you get your money from, that you get in peacekeeping. So ... we started renaming spin-offs, [like] CVR – community violence reduction – the idea was to stop the violence not to stop the weapon. The acronym is wrong, you just can’t get away from it for very bureaucratic reasons.”*

**DDR Expert Practitioner**

#### 4.4. DDR as a tool which incorporates terrorists

The evolutionary adaptations to DDR processes made in the last few decades have sought to align the programmes with the rapidly evolving conflict dynamics in Africa.<sup>458</sup> Despite these changes however, there are still questions as to DDR’s suitability when it comes to terrorists. Directly addressing the suitability of the use of DDR when faced with terrorist and violent extremist groups, the UN University recently compiled a report questioning whether UN DDR was fit for purpose in the era of violent extremism.<sup>459</sup> A major barrier posed by the designated status of terrorist organisations is that it discounts these groups from being signatories to formal peace agreements, and therefore from DDR participation. One of the major facets of DDR as a process is that it is voluntary, and to be effective requires commitment to not just disarm, but also to completely demobilise and reintegrate into society, but above all, it requires trust in the government to genuinely and meaningfully reintegrate those who entered the DDR programmes. The political motivations of most terrorist groups and their persistent attacks against governments are challenges which DDR was not designed to address. Significantly, if a terrorist group becomes a signatory to a peace agreement, they surrender the ability to impose their ideology through force, the disarmament process would remove their capability to do so.

*“[DDR] is not a tool that is made for dealing with violent extremist movements and was not set up to be one but it is sort of being labelled in some way as being the answer because we don’t have much else at the moment.”*

**Disarmament Expert Practitioner**

456 Robert Muggah and Chris O’Donnell, “Next Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration,” *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 4 no.1 (May 21, 2015): 30, pp. 1-12, <https://stabilityjournal.org/articles/10.5334/sta.fs/galley/325/download>.

457 Ibid.

458 United Nations General Assembly. “Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration Report of the Secretary-General”. March 2006, [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKewj3n7rXzf\\_sAhUPjqQKHTOGCBQQFjAAegQIBxAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.undp.org%2Fcontent%2Fdam%2Fundp%2Fdocuments%2Fcpr%2Fdocuments%2Fddr%2FSG\\_Report\\_on\\_DDR\\_to\\_GA\\_s-60-705\\_March\\_2006.pdf&usq=AOvVawIi0JpSEsMYrD2zStFXPD8Q](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKewj3n7rXzf_sAhUPjqQKHTOGCBQQFjAAegQIBxAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.undp.org%2Fcontent%2Fdam%2Fundp%2Fdocuments%2Fcpr%2Fdocuments%2Fddr%2FSG_Report_on_DDR_to_GA_s-60-705_March_2006.pdf&usq=AOvVawIi0JpSEsMYrD2zStFXPD8Q).

459 James Cockayne and Siobhan O’Neil (eds.). *UN DDR in an Era of Violent Extremism: Is It Fit for Purpose?* New York: UNU-CPR, 2015. [https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/un\\_ddr\\_in\\_an\\_era\\_of\\_violent\\_extremism.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/un_ddr_in_an_era_of_violent_extremism.pdf).



The ramifications of encouraging individuals to engage in DDR processes when the group they are a part of have not officially committed to the programme can be severe. Those who utilise DDR in this way transform its existence from an overarching peacekeeping regime to a piecemeal exit programme with enhanced risks attached. A peacekeeping expert gave an example:

*“There was an attack on the first day of the [MINUSMA Mécanisme Opérationnel de Coordination] in Gao, which led to 60 deaths, so [the fighters of the armed groups] said “well, but wait, we become targets for the terrorists because we are finally the symbol of the implementation of the peace agreement.”*

**Peacekeeping Expert**

However, there have been significant developments in this area, including the peace agreement that has been signed involving the Taliban in Afghanistan. In February 2020, an agreement was concluded with the United States on the withdrawal of US troops and a breakthrough was achieved with the Afghan government in early December.<sup>460</sup> How DDR, if at all, will be part of the peace deal remains to be seen. It is thought that any disarmament phase, initially at least, will take on the characteristics of a weapons and ammunition management programme rather than the first step of a DDR programme because Taliban fighters will likely not agree to hand over their weapons to their rival Afghan National Defense and Security Forces personnel.<sup>461</sup> Thus, DDR will likely be a result of, rather than a leading factor in, the larger peace process.

#### 4.5. The Potential for DDR to Negatively Impact SALW Flows

The general challenges that DDR programmes face include the high prevalence of firearm ownership, high military spending in the region, brigade impunity, and a lack of stockpile and border security.<sup>462</sup> The implementation of such programmes also has the potential to present additional problems with regard to the very flow of SALW they would ideally address. In Côte d’Ivoire for example, following the conflict, weapons that were handed over in the DDR process were reappearing in the hands of terrorist groups throughout the Sahel, specifically in Burkina Faso and subsequently in Mali. Ivorian authorities were questioned in these cases, but the issue does not seem to have been resolved. The continued systematic erasure of serial numbers on weapons seized on the southern border of Burkina Faso with Côte d’Ivoire raises further questions as to the existence of corruption from within the DDR/WAM programmes themselves. The type of extensive erasure witnessed is rarely otherwise seen in the region, the lack of any good/developed weapons and ammunition registration/recording databases means that erasure of serial numbers is not typically an important priority for armed groups.<sup>463</sup>

*“The fact that they are doing this still raises the suspicion that these weapons continue to come from a stockpile that is traceable in Côte d’Ivoire, possibly the DDR stockpile or the stocks of the Ivorian armed forces that continue to slide into the Burkina Faso region.”*

**Small Arms Expert**

This issue was reiterated in another of our conducted interviews with a disarmament expert who explained that a large number of vz. 58 rifles which had been marked for destruction with geographic identification information in Côte d’Ivoire during DDR operations, were instead somehow moved out of the stockpiles and back into the hands of individuals and groups.

460 Hamid Shalizi and Abdul Qadir Sediqi. “Afghan government, Taliban reach breakthrough deal as calls grow for a ceasefire,” *Reuters*, 2 December 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/afghanistan-taliban-agreement-int-idUSKBN28C1NS>.

461 James Dobbins, Jason H. Campbell, Laurel E. Miller, S. Rebecca Zimmerman, “DDR in Afghanistan: Disarming, Demobilizing, and Reintegrating Afghan Combatants in Accordance with a Peace Agreements,” *Rand Corporation*, (February, 2020), [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE300/PE343/RAND\\_PE343.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE300/PE343/RAND_PE343.pdf).

462 Gemma Bowsher, Patrick Bogue, Preeti Patel, Peter Boyle and Richard Sullivan, “Small and light arms violence reduction as a public health measure: the case of Libya,” *Conflict and Health* 12, no. 29 (July 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13031-018-0162-0>.

463 Interview with Small Arms Expert.

Implementing a peace agreement and DDR programme in Mali whilst terrorist attacks continue to shape the security landscape has proven to be very challenging. More than five years have passed since the Malian government and the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA) concluded a peace agreement and so far, little progress has been made in the implementation of the agreement's commitments by either of the signatories. According to the defence and security section of the peace agreement, a cantonment process needs to be set up to identify which combatants are eligible to enter the DDR programme, a national committee for DDR needs to be established and armed and security forces need to be deployed.<sup>464</sup> Although hostilities between the signatory parties have reduced, the jihadi terrorist groups are not party to the peace agreement and many members of the signatory groups have been targeted by jihadist terrorist acts.<sup>465</sup> Terrorist attacks have continued throughout 2020 including against MINUSMA. In UNSC 2531(2020) the government of Mali was again urged to address the proliferation and trafficking of SALW, and to strengthen the effective management and storage of national stockpiles.<sup>466</sup> According to the Carter Centre who have been appointed as an independent observer since 2017, little progress has been made on the DDR process. Its most recent report shows that the accelerated DDR involves just 1176 combatants which are not fully integrated, while the comprehensive DDR process still needs to be finalised and launched.<sup>467</sup> Considering that the signatory parties registered nearly 85000 combatants, full implementation of the committed DDR process will take a long time.

The other important shift that the introduction of DDR programmes can cause is to transform weapons from being merely instruments into being desirable commodities and gateways into DDR programme participation which often produces employment for the individuals taking part. Setting a weapon surrender requirement as a criteria for entry into a DDR programme can push people to arm or rearm with the plan that one day they will turn the weapon into the DDR system and will be provided with reintegrative employment, financial remuneration, or material reward. This danger was realised throughout the late 1990s in the case of the incomplete Mozambican disarmament process, the consequences of which fuelled the SALW trafficking industry both domestically and internationally throughout South Africa, Zambia, and Malawi, and increased the proliferation of SALW amongst the population.<sup>468</sup> These unintended consequences have the potential to directly contribute to the financial resources of armed groups.<sup>469</sup>

During the second attempt at DDR in Liberia, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) disarmed and demobilised more than 100,000 former fighters and collected nearly 28,000 weapons between December 2003 and November 2004. The DDR programme estimated that 38,000 combatants would enrol. The reason for the unexpected high number was in part related to eligibility criteria. Combatants needed to be identified by the commander and some registered their family members so they could gain benefits from the DDR programme. Females and children associated with the armed groups could also enter the programme with or without weapons and ammunition. The benefits, in particular the large sum of cash, attracted not only combatants from Liberia but also combatants from Sierra Leone. The offering US\$300 essentially created a demand to buy weapons on the black market.<sup>470</sup> Often commanders would send their own children or those of relatives to register for the DDR programme to cash in the money. This type of buy-back element of DDR programs has similarly

464 Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali: Resulting from the Algiers Process. (Translation: University of Edinburgh). See. [https://www.un.org/en/pdfs/EN-ML\\_150620\\_Accord-pour-la-paix-et-la-reconciliation-au-Mali\\_Issu-du-Processus-d%27Alger.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/pdfs/EN-ML_150620_Accord-pour-la-paix-et-la-reconciliation-au-Mali_Issu-du-Processus-d%27Alger.pdf).

465 Mathieu Pellerin, "Mali's Algiers Peace Agreement, Five Years on: An Uneasy Calm," *International Crisis Group*, (June 24, 2020), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali/laccord-dalger-cinq-ans-apres-un-calme-precaire-dont-il-ne-faut-pas-se-satisfaire>.

466 United Nations Security Council. "Resolution 2531(2020)." June 29, 2020, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2531>.

467 The Carter Center. "Observations on the Implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, Resulting from the Algiers Process." December 2020. <https://pubhtml5.com/qjno/wlre/>.

468 Mark Knight and Alpaslan Ozerdem, "Guns, Camps and Cash: Disarmament, Demobilization and Reinsertion of Former Combatants in Transitions from War to Peace," *Journal of Peace Research* 41, no. 4 (July 2004): 499–516, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343304044479>.

469 "How best to remove guns from post-conflict zones?" *The New Humanitarian*, July 28, 2011, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2011/07/28/how-best-remove-guns-post-conflict-zones>.

470 Ibid.

failed in Sierra Leone<sup>471</sup> and is now largely advised against.

*“[The UN tried] cash for weapons and quickly shut it down because what was happening was that the amount of cash that they were offering was above the market price, so basically people started buying weapons to sell them to the UN. ... [Now] you’ll see in the IDDRS there was a strong guidance that said, do not do cash for weapons because you’re really going to risk affecting the market.”*

#### DDR and CVR Expert Practitioner

Attempts have been made in the past to avoid the potentially exacerbating conditions that direct financial trade can create such as the careful tailoring of disarmament incentives within DDR programmes. This has included removing cash incentives from the equation completely with the implementation of ‘weapons lotteries’ in Mozambique and Bosnia in which SALW returns were rewarded with the chance to ‘win’ a product such as a DVD player or similar commodity.<sup>472</sup> Similarly, in Sierra Leone, the reintegration of Revolutionary United Front (RUF) militias saw conditions attached to the financial support as they were issued as loans. This allowed former combatants to rent vehicles to use in employment as taxi drivers which helped them fund their new life and repay what they owed.<sup>473</sup> However, this clearly does not solve the issue of those who buy SALW or engage with armed-groups for the sole purpose of obtaining a weapon to use as entry into a DDR programme thereafter.

One way that has been used to guard against this is through careful surveillance of the region prior to implementing the system in order to understand how many weapons and what types of weapons are in the hands of the terrorist groups that the disarmament process is aimed at. This presents the possibility of building a catalogue of what is expected to arrive which can then be cross-referenced against what is actually collected. Many members of terrorist groups also post photos on social media after their operations holding a weapon.<sup>474</sup>

This may also help to address another present issue of individuals turning in broken, outdated, or otherwise useless weapons that would serve no purpose in combat, or are surplus to a weapons cache that is maintained by a group or individual.

*“Most of the time they handed in their second weapon and there are many different ways that armed groups have weapons. Sometimes, one person can have many weapons, sometimes they are shared weapons, there are also crew weapons – like nobody owns a 50 calibre, right? It’s a crew weapon and you need at least 3 people to be operating that kind of weapon, the same thing with things like missiles. And a “weapon” is not always a weapon. Like an RPG-7, once you’ve launched it, unless you have a couple of missiles, it’s dead. It’s just a launcher. So, I think there is a big thing that first, you can’t just talk about weapons, you do really have to categorise the type of weapon.”*

#### DDR Expert Practitioner

If a large proportion of weapons collected in DDR programmes are not those which would be used by terrorist groups or by individuals in the commission of violence in the community then their collection cannot be said to have a meaningful effect on the flow of SALW in the region. The consequences on market forces of setting disarmament as a requirement of DDR participation might not therefore be justifiable.

The result of the above, and the perceived necessity to address the threat to civilians posed by

471 Gemma Bowsher, Patrick Bogue, Preeti Patel, Peter Boyle and Richard Sullivan, “Small and light arms violence reduction as a public health measure: the case of Libya,” *Conflict and Health* 12, no. 29 (July 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13031-018-0162-0>.

472 Ibid.

473 Krijn Peters, “From weapons to wheels: young Sierra Leonean ex-combatants become motorbike taxi-riders,” *Journal of Peace Conflict and Development*, (March 10, 2007), <https://library.wur.nl/WebQuery/wurpubs/fulltext/26906>.

474 Interview with DDR Expert.

terrorist organisations, has in some cases resulted in a move away from DDR engagement as the initial objective and towards engagement with process such as the already mentioned CVR, but also Transitional Weapons and Ammunition Management.

## 4.6. From Traditional to Transitional Weapon Management

When terrorist organisations are designated as such by the UN Sanctions Committee or the EU, it makes it increasingly complicated to conclude a peace agreement. This means that terrorist groups may not be eligible for a DDR programme, that the armed actors are not willing to disarm, or that the pre-conditions for a DDR programme are lacking. In such cases, peace and security can be achieved by the comprehensive maintenance of a tool traditionally used in arms control, which has now become a vital component, both within and independent of, DDR programmes: weapons and ammunition management.

*“Weapons and ammunition management is the oversight, accountability and management of arms and ammunition throughout their lifecycle, including the establishment of frameworks, processes and practices for safe and secure materiel acquisition, stockpiling, transfers, tracing, and disposal. WAM does not only focus on small arms and light weapons, but on a broader range of conventional weapons including ammunition and artillery.”*

**United Nations Integrated DDR Standards**

Over-accumulation of and excessive SALW proliferation only contributes to the prolonging of conflicts. Effective WAM of national stockpiles, can help to address over-accumulation and contain the conflict but also to address the risk of proliferation of SALW.<sup>475</sup> Furthermore, effective weapon management goes beyond merely focusing on the physical protection of national stockpiles. It includes measures ranging from recording keeping, conducting risk assessment, storing, and securing facilities and transport, to destruction of SALW. Further guidance can be found in the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines (IATG).<sup>476</sup>



**Figure 21.** Weapons being inspected before their destruction by UNMAS. DRC, 2017.<sup>477</sup>

475 UNIDIR. “The changing role of conventional arms control in preventing and managing violent conflicts.” 2018, <https://www.unidir.org/publication/changing-role-conventional-arms-control-preventing-and-managing-violent-conflicts>.

476 United Nations. “International Ammunition Technical Guidelines.” February 2005, <https://unsafeguard.org/un-safeguard/guide-lines>.

477 United Nations. “Handbook for United Nations DDR Practices: Effective Weapons and Ammunition management in a changing Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Context” *Department of Peacekeeping Affairs*, 2018, p. 25. [https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/effective\\_weapons\\_and\\_ammunition\\_management\\_ddr\\_handbook.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/effective_weapons_and_ammunition_management_ddr_handbook.pdf).

In the latest report of April 2020 by the Secretary General on small arms and light weapons, weapons and ammunition management is considered vital in peace operations and the UN has assisted national authorities in weapons and ammunition management processes in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali, and has supported DDR activities with the aim to reduce community violence.<sup>478</sup> At the time of writing, February 2021, the UNIDDRS are being updated. What is known is that the new version will contain a chapter on SALW, but the details have not yet been released to the public. Some mandates may include detailed provisions regarding DDR WAM, for instance by requesting the UN peacekeeping mission to support the authorities in collecting, registering, securing, and disposing of weapons held by armed groups.

In practice, a distinction can be drawn between traditional and transitional WAM. The traditional WAM framework aims to regulate the full life cycle of weapons and ammunition and should be part of a DDR programme and the accompanying peace agreement. The framework should contain the eligibility of combatants that may enter the programme including age, the type of weapons that are eligible and provisions on documenting, storing, and destroying of weapons. In comparison:

*“Transitional WAM is a series of interim arms control measures that can be implemented by DDR practitioners before, after and alongside DDR programmes. Transitional WAM can also be implemented when the preconditions for a DDR programme are absent. The transitional WAM component of a DDR process is primarily aimed at reducing the capacity of individuals and groups to engage in armed violence and conflict. Transitional WAM also aims to reduce accidents and save lives by addressing the immediate risks related to the possession of weapons, ammunition, and explosives.”*

#### United Nations Integrated DDR Standards

The use of transitional WAM is seen when either there is no formal peace agreement, no central authority, or where there is an ongoing conflict. Alternatively, it is an option in scenarios in which there is a central governance structure, but the status of the armed group being dealt with is undefined, or explicitly defined in a way, which means the government cannot visibly or officially engage with them (i.e., terrorist groups). When implemented as part of a DDR process (either with or without a DDR programme), transitional WAM has two primary aims: (1) to reduce the capacity of individuals and groups to engage in armed conflict, and (2) to reduce accidents and save lives by addressing the immediate risks related to the illicit possession of weapons, ammunition, and explosives. By supporting better arms control and preventing the diversion of weapons, ammunition, and explosives to unauthorised end-users, transitional WAM can be a strong component of the sustaining peace approach and contribute to preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict (see IDDRS 2.40 on Reintegration as Part of Sustaining Peace). In settings where a peace agreement has been signed and the necessary preconditions for a DDR programme are in place, transitional WAM can also be used before, during and after DDR programmes as a complementary measure (see IDDRS 2.10 on The UN Approach to DDR). What this means in the short-term is that the purpose moves away (temporarily or permanently) from ultimate participation in DDR, and toward what can be immediately implemented in the pursuit of reduction of risk to civilians. When protection of civilians becomes the focus of the agenda, discussions can become technical to the point of negotiating which calibre of weapon is acceptable to use.

*“[In Libya] it has been proposed to certain militia groups to say; you’ve got weapons beyond a certain calibre that you don’t actually know how to control well because its impact is likely going to be larger than the target that you’re trying to hit. For example, when it comes to explosive weapons. So that transitional weapons and ammunition discussion may say “why don’t you put that weapon aside and limit your operations to, for example 14.7mm calibre” – which is a small arms calibre – something that is used in close combat scenarios. By introducing these types of*

478 United Nations. “The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects and assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons and collecting them.” 2020, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3864688>.

*measure, you are limiting the distance in which the armed group can deploy a certain calibre weapon ... they may have very limited control as to the sphere of impact where the explosion might take place beyond their intended target audience.”*

**Disarmament Expert Practitioner**

This represents not a diversification of the objectives of DDR itself, but a diversification of the ways in which the UN engages with non-state actors in certain scenarios. When, for example, the most imminent priority is the protection of civilians, engagement through DDR might be substituted for transitional arms and ammunition management control. This allows for engaging with terrorist and violent extremist groups which would not have been feasible nor desirable in the past.<sup>479</sup> The transitional WAM could consist of interim measures ranging from conducting an arms survey, to registering weapons, to storing weapons that are not required in a safe place, with the aim to reduce violence in a region whilst negotiations are still taking place or are yet to commence. It can also be seen as a trust building mechanism among the non-armed actors, including terrorist groups engaged in a conflict with the government.

New technologies in the manufacturing of SALW present additional complications for established disarmament and WAM processes. Developments in the use of polymers in the manufacture of weapons means that traditional stamping methods of weapon marking cannot be used once the weapon is already assembled, which leaves laser marking or a process known as micro percussion (the printing of individual dots which reproduce alphanumeric characters through compression) as the necessary solution.<sup>480</sup> The design of SALW has also seen developments with similar implications for both the illicit trading market and WAM processes. The necessary adaptability of weapons to varied combat environments for example has resulted in the increasing use of modularity in the design of military-style weapons. This means that rifles can consist of a core section onto which other parts can be attached to obtain different configurations. Modular weapons can therefore be fitted with multiple components, including ones from other weapons. This interchangeability allows for different serial numbers to appear on different parts of the same weapon which increases both the risk of misidentification and the disposability of those parts of the weapon which might have been marked. It also introduces the capability to change a weapon's calibre which is a fundamental characteristic of its identification.<sup>481</sup>

479 Interview with DDR Expert.

480 United Nations. "Recent developments in small arms and light weapons manufacturing, technology and design and implications for the implementation of the International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons." May 2014. [https://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/CONF.192/BMS/2014/1&referer=/english/&Lang=E](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/CONF.192/BMS/2014/1&referer=/english/&Lang=E).

481 Ibid.



**Figure 22.** Arms being destroyed in Côte d'Ivoire signifying the beginning of the reconciliation process, 2007.<sup>482</sup>

Currently, diversion, unauthorised transfer and/or re-transfer, battlefield recovery, looting of uncontrolled national arsenals, and illicit market purchases are the main sources of terrorist acquisition of SALW.<sup>483</sup> Craft production of weapons occurs on a much smaller scale in comparison and is limited mostly to IEDs. This is likely to remain the case while these methods are cheaper, easier, and require less effort than manufacturing an effective and reliable weapon independently. However, the innovation of 3D printing has the potential to invite new actors into the market of SALW production. As far back as 2012, the blueprints for working plastic guns have been online and can be utilised even with a low-end 3D-printer.<sup>484</sup> More recently designs have included printable AR-15 lower receiver systems, magazines for different types of rifles,<sup>485</sup> M1911 pistols,<sup>486</sup> and by late 2018, fully operational semi-automatic rifles, though these examples currently require high-end industrial printers.<sup>487</sup> The current

482 United Nations. "Handbook for United Nations DDR Practices: Effective Weapons and Ammunition management in a changing Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Context" *Department of Peacekeeping Affairs*, 2018, p. 29. [https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/effective\\_weapons\\_and\\_ammunition\\_management\\_ddr\\_handbook.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/effective_weapons_and_ammunition_management_ddr_handbook.pdf).

483 Reinier Bergema, Tanya Mehra, and Méryl Demuyneck. *The Use of Small Arms and Light Weapons by Terrorist Organisations as a Source of Finance*. The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT). September 2020, <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2020/09/SALW-Synthesis-Report.pdf>.

484 Andy Greenberg, "'Wiki Weapon Project' Aims to Create A Gun Anyone Can 3D-Print At Hme," *Forbes*, August 23, 2012, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/andygreenberg/2012/08/23/wiki-weapon-project-aims-to-create-a-gun-anyone-can-3d-print-at-home/?sh=278dcdc93860>.

485 Cyrus Farivar, "'Download this gun': 3D-printed semi-automatic fires over 600 rounds," *ars Technica*, January 3, 2013, <https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2013/03/download-this-gun-3d-printed-semi-automatic-fires-over-600-rounds/>.

486 Doug Gross, "Texas Company makes metal gun with 3-D printer," *CNN*, November 9, 2013, <https://edition.cnn.com/2013/11/08/tech/innovation/3d-printed-metal-gun/index.html>.

487 Noelle van der Waag-Cowling and Louise Leenen, *14<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Cyber Warfare and Security*

capability of 3D printing technology and its availability suggests that the traditional methods of SALW acquisition will endure for the time being. Yet, the continued advancement of this technology, and the inevitable decrease in costs and increase in quality of output, could mean that 3D printing becomes an alternative source of SALW acquisition for armed groups,<sup>488</sup> complicating WAM and disarmament processes further.

## 4.7. Concluding remarks

This again raises the question of how one measures the success of a DDR programme, which now has the accompanying question of whether widespread disarmament is, was, or can be, an objective of DDR programmes. Measuring DDR is not easy, its process has multiple aims and therefore multiple metrics against which to measure. Has a programme been effective in reducing community violence? Has it been effective in reintegrating former combatants? Has it been effective in reducing the number of weapons in circulation? Has it been effective in achieving peace and stability? It goes well beyond the scope of this project to answer these questions, but the various interviews conducted in this research show that, in many countries, the aim of DDR programmes has not been focused on disarmament or reducing the flow of weapons, nor have they achieved this, the processes have rather focused on the individual, their demobilisation, and their reintegration into society.

*“DDR is not seen as a tool for managing the weapons of terrorism or terrorists. It is a tool that is usually used to manage the weapons of signatory parties to a peace agreement and therefore, unless you bring these extremists movements onboard, it’s going to be very difficult to disarm and demobilise them.”*

**Disarmament Expert Practitioner**

Not only is it asserted that disarmament is not the main aim, it is also sometimes discounted as an aim altogether and considered that the reduction in SALW flow is an entirely incorrect metric by which to measure a DDR process’ success. In many programmes, reduction of the amount of weapons was not an objective.<sup>489</sup>

Effective WAM of national stockpiles can help to contain conflicts especially if it would involve more than just the physical security of national stockpiles and would focus on managing the entire life cycle of weapons. Despite the challenges technological advances poses to DDR process, DDR and in particular WAM as tool to manage the proliferation of SALW, especially in post-conflict settings is underestimated. Furthermore, the increasing use of transitional WAM appears to yield results and could help to reduce the flow of weapons owned by non-state actors, including terrorist groups.

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(Stellenbosch University, 2019).

488 United Nations. “Recent developments in small arms and light weapons manufacturing, technology and design and implications for the implementation of the International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons.” May 2014. [https://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/CONF.192/BMS/2014/1&referer=/english/&Lang=E](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/CONF.192/BMS/2014/1&referer=/english/&Lang=E).

489 Interview with Disarmament Expert.



# Combating the direct and indirect use of SALW by terrorist organisations as a source of finance

This chapter analyses the existing legal and policy frameworks that can be used to combat the direct and indirect use of SALW by terrorist organisations as a source of finance. Important to keep in mind is that legal and policy frameworks specifically designed to target the use of these weapons as a source of finance are currently lacking. This chapter will therefore explore different tools and lenses through which the acquisition and use of SALW by terrorist organisations may be addressed, including (5.1) arms control, (5.2) criminal justice and organised crime, and (5.3) combatting terrorist finance perspectives.

## 5.1. Arms control perspective

This section will first analyse various initiatives taken at international level to prevent the illicit proliferation of SALW in general and terrorist access to these weapons in particular. Afterwards we will analyse the EU initiatives to combat terrorist access within and outside the EU, followed by the regional initiatives taken in West Africa and the Middle East to prevent the illicit proliferation and trafficking of SALW and to combat terrorist access to such weapons.

### 5.1.1. International level

In recent decades, the UN has repeatedly called upon its Member States to refrain from supplying weapons to terrorists and from financing terrorist activities.<sup>490</sup> The 2006 UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the first agreement of all UN Member States to a common strategic and operational approach to fighting terrorism, contains provisions focused on terrorist financing<sup>491</sup> and illicit trafficking in SALW<sup>492</sup>. Also in recent years, the UN noted that terrorists can benefit from organised crime, whether domestic or transnational, such as illicit arms trafficking.<sup>493</sup> Resolution 2462 calls upon UN Member States to combat and criminalise terrorist financing and notes in this respect that terrorists raise funds through a variety of means, including the illicit trade in SALW.<sup>494</sup> Yet, while the UN repeatedly notes the close connection between international terrorism and transnational criminal activities such as illicit arms trafficking, there is currently no legal or policy framework at international level which specifically targets the direct or indirect use of SALW by terrorist organisations as a source of finance. At the international level, however, various actions were taken to prevent SALW ending up in the hands of undesired end-users in general and terrorists in particular. In its recent resolutions to combat terrorist financing and linkages between terrorism and organised crime, for example Resolutions 2462 and 2482, the UN Security Council limits its reference to SALW by referring to these already existing frameworks. Following sections will therefore give an overview of the most important legislative instruments, tools and policy initiatives at international level to prevent the direct and indirect use of SALW by terrorists: the Firearms Protocol and the UN Programme of Action on SALW which aim to enhance the combat against illicit trafficking in these weapons, the Arms Trade Treaty that regulates international transfers in conventional weapons, including SALW, and UN Security Council Resolution 2370 to prevent terrorist access to weapons.

490 See: United Nations Security Council. "Resolution 1373." September 28, 2001. <https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/resources/databases/recommended-international-practices-codes-and-standards/united-nations-security-council-resolution-1373-2001/>.

491 The Strategy, for example, states that UN Member States need to refrain from financing terrorist activities and to cooperate fully in the fight against terrorism, in accordance with international law, to find, deny safe haven and bring to justice, on the basis of the principle of extradite or prosecute, any person who supports, facilitates, participates or attempts to participate in the financing of terrorist acts.

492 The Strategy states that UN Member States need to strengthen coordination and cooperation among States in combating illicit trade in SALW and to step up national efforts and bilateral, subregional, regional and international cooperation to improve border and customs controls in order to prevent and detect the movement of terrorists and prevent and detect the illicit traffic in SALW.

493 See: United Nations Security Council. "Resolution 2482." July 19, 2019. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3813145>.

494 United Nations Security Council. "Resolution 2462." March 28, 2019. <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/sres24622019>.

Instrument	Ratifications	Main objective	Participating countries (Middle East)	Participating countries (West Africa)
Firearms Protocol	119 countries are party the Firearms Protocol. <sup>495</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Criminalise the illicit manufacturing and trafficking of firearms.</li> <li>• Improve marking and recordkeeping of firearms.</li> <li>• Establish an import, export, and transit licensing system.</li> <li>• Improve information-sharing and international cooperation</li> </ul>	5 countries have ratified the Firearms Protocol. <sup>496</sup>	12 countries have ratified the Firearms Protocol. <sup>497</sup>
UN Programme of Action	143 countries participated in the Third UN Review Conference of the PoA on SALW (RevCon3) in New York on 18-29 June 2018. <sup>498</sup> In 2018, 120 reports on the national implementation of the PoA and the International Tracing Instrument.	To prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in SALW by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing international measures to limit the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in SALW.</li> <li>• Improving cooperation at national, regional, and global level.</li> <li>• Raising awareness of problems associated with the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking of SALW.</li> <li>• Promoting responsible action by States with a view to preventing the illicit export, import, transit and retransfer of SALW.</li> </ul>	13 countries participated in RevCon3 of the PoA <sup>499</sup> and 8 countries submitted a national report for 2018. <sup>500</sup>	11 countries participated in RevCon3 of the PoA <sup>501</sup> and 13 countries submitted a national report for 2018. <sup>502</sup>
Arms Trade Treaty	104 countries have joined the ATT. <sup>503</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing common international standards for the regulation of the international trade in conventional arms.</li> <li>• Preventing and eradicating the illicit trade in conventional arms and prevent their diversion.</li> </ul>	Only Lebanon signed and ratified the ATT. Four other countries have signed, but not ratified or acceded. <sup>504</sup>	Only Gambia has not signed and ratified the ATT. <sup>505</sup>

**Table 3.** Overview of main objectives and participation to the main international instruments to prevent the illicit proliferation and trafficking of SALW

495 United Nations. "Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition." 12(c), May 31, 2001. [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=XVIII-12-c&chapter=18&clang=\\_en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XVIII-12-c&chapter=18&clang=_en).

496 Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman and Saudi Arabia.

497 Benin, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

498 United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. "Third Review Conference on the Programme of Action." July 6, 2018. <https://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/revcon3/>.

499 The following countries from the Middle East participated in RevCon3 of the PoA: Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey and United Arab Emirates.

500 The following countries from the Middle East submitted a national report for 2018: Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and United Arab Emirates.

501 The following West-African countries participated in RevCon3 of the PoA: Benin, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

502 The following West-African countries submitted a national report for 2018: Benin, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

503 97 countries ratified the ATT and 7 other countries acceded to the ATT.

504 The following countries have signed, but have not ratified the ATT: Bahrain, Israel, Turkey and United Arab Emirates.

505 The following countries have signed and ratified the ATT: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

## The firearms protocol and the UN programme of action on SALW

Since the mid-1990s, the international community was deliberating on the establishment of an instrument to combat illicit firearms trafficking and gun crime within the context of the fight against transnational organised crime. The negotiations for such an instrument were impeded by technical issues connected to imposing legally binding obligations on products that are not considered contraband.<sup>506</sup> After years of negotiations, the UN adopted the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition (Firearms Protocol) in 2001 as an additional Protocol to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC). The objective of the Firearms Protocol is to promote, facilitate and strengthen cooperation among States Parties to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition. It entered into force in 2005 and is a legally binding instrument for states that have ratified or otherwise formally expressed their consent. It was the first legally binding global instrument on SALW. Currently 119 states have become party to the Firearms Protocol.<sup>507</sup>

Although the Firearms Protocol does not specifically refer to terrorism, it is an important instrument for preventing terrorist access to firearms since the Firearms Protocol requires State Parties to adopt measures that criminalise illicit manufacturing and trafficking of firearms and to adopt measures that enable the confiscation and destruction of such firearms. To avoid diversion of firearms from legal possession and the legal market, State Parties are required, among other things, to establish good record-keeping of illicitly manufactured or trafficked firearms, to mark firearms at the time of legal manufacture and import so that they can be traced after confiscation, to take measures to prevent illicit reactivation of deactivated firearms, and to develop an effective licensing system for the international trade in firearms. To enhance the combat against illicit firearms trafficking, the Firearms Protocol also requires State Parties to exchange information on licit and illicit firearms activities, to cooperate at the bilateral, regional and international level (especially with regard to training and technical assistance) and to consider establishing a system for the regulation of arms brokers.

The Firearms Protocol is rather limited in scope and content. This is because the negotiations to establish the Protocol ran parallel to the preparations for the UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects in July 2001. The goal of the drafters of the Firearms Protocol was to develop an instrument that would focus on crime prevention instead of arms control since they feared that a comprehensive agreement would be weaker and less enforceable. The organisers of the UN Conference on small arms, on the other hand, explicitly noted that the scope of their conference should not be limited to criminal breaches of legislation and procedures, but to all elements that can contribute to excessive and destabilising accumulation of SALW.<sup>508</sup> After difficult negotiations, the participating states of UN small arms conference in July 2001 adopted the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (UN PoA).<sup>509</sup>

The objective of the UN PoA is broader than the Firearms Protocol. The UN PoA aims to prevent, combat and eradicate illicit SALW trafficking by committing State Parties to adopt various measures at national, regional and global level such as developing an adequate legal framework, establishing national coordination bodies and national points of contact, taking legal action against individuals engaged in the illicit use of SALW, ensuring the effective stockpile management, destroying surplus

506 Sarah Parker and Markus Wilson, "A Guide to the UN Small Arms Process: 2016 Update," *Geneva: Small Arms Survey*, (June 2016) 27. [www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/Q-Handbooks/HB-02-Diplo-Guide/SAS-HB02-Guide-UN-Small-Arms-Process.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/Q-Handbooks/HB-02-Diplo-Guide/SAS-HB02-Guide-UN-Small-Arms-Process.pdf).

507 United Nations office of Drugs and Crime. "The Firearms Protocol." May 31, 2001. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/firearms-protocol/the-firearms-protocol.html>.

508 Sarah Parker and Markus Wilson, "A Guide to the UN Small Arms Process: 2016 Update," *Geneva: Small Arms Survey*, (June 2016) 37. [www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/Q-Handbooks/HB-02-Diplo-Guide/SAS-HB02-Guide-UN-Small-Arms-Process.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/Q-Handbooks/HB-02-Diplo-Guide/SAS-HB02-Guide-UN-Small-Arms-Process.pdf).

509 For a detailed reconstruction of the process behind the development of the UN PoA, See: Sarah Parker and Markus Wilson, "A Guide to the UN Small Arms Process: 2016 Update," *Geneva: Small Arms Survey*, (June 2016) 39-45. [www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/Q-Handbooks/HB-02-Diplo-Guide/SAS-HB02-Guide-UN-Small-Arms-Process.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/Q-Handbooks/HB-02-Diplo-Guide/SAS-HB02-Guide-UN-Small-Arms-Process.pdf).

weapons, and encouraging awareness-raising. In contrast to the Firearms Protocol, the UN PoA refers explicitly to the use of SALW by terrorists by noting the close link between terrorism and the illicit trade in SALW and by stating that this illicit trade fuels crime and terrorism. Specifically, with regard to the use of SALW by terrorists, the UN PoA further encourages State Parties to consider ratifying or acceding to international legal instruments against terrorism and transnational organised crime. The UN PoA also urges State Parties and relevant international or regional organisations to provide international assistance to combat the illicit trade in SALW linked to drug trafficking, transnational organised crime and terrorism. While the Firearms Protocol is a legally binding instrument, the UN PoA is a non-binding instrument. To implement the UN PoA, State Parties are asked to voluntarily submit national reports, convene biennial meetings, and hold review conferences. Despite their differences in approach, the implementation and further development of the Firearms Protocol and UN PoA have been closely linked since they feature the same types of measures, for example regarding information-exchange, marking and record-keeping requirements, and licensing systems and transfer controls.<sup>510</sup> The progress on the implementation of the Firearms Protocol, including challenges, trends and good practices is assessed during the Conference of the State Parties to the UNTOC. In the latest biennial meeting the links between trafficking in SALW, terrorism and transnational organised crimes was underlined and a growing concern was expressed with regard to emerging trends and challenges, including the illicit reactivation of deactivated firearms, the conversion of non-lethal weapons into real firearms, the unlicensed assembly of firearms from parts and components and the use of modern technologies to manufacture firearms without authorisation.<sup>511</sup> In addition, an open-ended intergovernmental Working Group on Firearms<sup>512</sup> was established to advise countries in the implementation of the Firearms Protocol. During the last meeting in May 2020, the focus was on how states and their legislation could respond to the new and emerging threats relating to manufacturing, design, and production of SALW such as conversion of alarm weapons, reactivating of deactivated firearms and 3D printed weapons. States also exchanged good practices on how to strengthen investigative and prosecutorial approaches in countering illicit trafficking in SALW, including through involving financial investigations.

While most countries from the West Africa and the Middle East participate in the politically binding PoA on SALW, a different picture emerges regarding the ratification of the legally binding Firearms Protocol by countries from the Middle East. Most countries from West Africa have ratified the Firearms Protocol, but only a handful of countries from the Middle East have done so (see table 3).

## Arms Trade Treaty

The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) regulates international transfers<sup>513</sup> of conventional arms, including SALW<sup>514</sup>, and aims to prevent and eradicate the illicit trade in conventional arms and their diversion. It was adopted in 2013 by the UN General Assembly and, after ratification by 50 signatory states, entered into force in December 2014. The ATT currently has 110 State Parties.<sup>515</sup>

The ATT requires its State Parties to prohibit arms transfers, for example, if this would violate UN arms embargoes, if this would violate relevant obligations under international agreements or if the State Party has knowledge at the time of authorisation that the weapons would be used in the

510 Sarah Parker and Markus Wilson, "A Guide to the UN Small Arms Process: 2016 Update," *Geneva: Small Arms Survey*, (June 2016) 38. [www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/Q-Handbooks/HB-02-Diplo-Guide/SAS-HB02-Guide-UN-Small-Arms-Process.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/Q-Handbooks/HB-02-Diplo-Guide/SAS-HB02-Guide-UN-Small-Arms-Process.pdf).

511 United Nations. "Convention Against Transnational Crime." November 1, 2018 <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/V18/073/99/PDF/V1807399.pdf?OpenElement>.

512 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. "Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime." See: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/organized-crime/intro/COP/working-groups.html>.

513 The Arms Trade Treaty does not apply to the international movement of conventional arms by, or on behalf of, a State Party for its use provided that the conventional arms remain under that State Party's ownership.

514 Ammunition takes up a special position in the ATT: while the scope of the Arms Trade Treaty does not fully cover these items, State parties do need to establish and maintain a national control system to regulate the export of these items, and to apply the same prohibitions and assessment criteria (as the 8 listed categories of convention arms) prior to authorising the export of these items.

515 At the time of writing this report (22 December 2020).

commission of genocide, crimes against humanity, grave breaches of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, attacks directed against civilian objects, or other war crimes. In addition to these prohibitions, the ATT also includes assessment criteria that a State Party needs to assess the potential that the arms export would contribute to or undermine peace and security, could be used to commit, or facilitate a serious violation of international humanitarian or human rights law or could be used to commit or facilitate an act constituting an offence under international conventions or protocols relating to terrorism to which the exporting State is a Party. State Parties to the ATT also need to take measures to prevent diversion, to maintain records transferred weapons, to report on authorised or actual arms exports, and to take appropriate measures to enforce national laws and regulations that implement the provisions of the ATT. State Parties are also encouraged to provide international cooperation and assistance for implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty.<sup>516</sup>

Important to stress in the context of this report is that the ATT aims to prevent the unauthorised use of internationally transferred weapons, including SALW by terrorists, by adopting common assessment criteria. Among other things, this requires State Parties to consider the risk that these weapons could commit or facilitate terrorist offences when making their assessment of export license applications for SALW.

The adoption of the ATT can be considered an important step forward in the regulation of transnational arms flows, especially since it has led to the implementation of arms transfer control systems in countries which were previously lacking such controls. Yet several weaknesses can still be identified. An often-heard criticism is that the ATT looks good on paper but has not changed the transfer policies of the major arms exporting countries. Several of these countries, such as the Russian Federation and the United States, have not signed or ratified the ATT, while other important arms exporting countries have ratified but continue to transfer conventional arms, including SALW, to undesired recipients. Of particular interest for this study is the observation that almost all West African countries have signed and ratified the ATT while only one country from the Middle East (Lebanon) has signed and ratified the ATT. This clearly illustrates a lack interest from countries in the Middle East to participate in the ATT. Another often-heard criticism is that the prohibitions and export assessment criteria of the ATT are considered too vague to make a real difference. NGOs have also pointed to the problem of enforcement of the ATT<sup>517</sup> and existing challenges for enhancing transparency and information sharing to prevent and eradicate diversion of conventional weapons to the illicit market.<sup>518</sup>

The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs has prepared a practical guide to assist states in the implementation of the ATT. Prevention of diversion is considered one of the cornerstones of the ATT. States are required to take a range of preventative measures that need to be adopted as exporting states, transit states and importing states.<sup>519</sup>

## United Nations Security Council Resolution 2370

In 2017, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2370 to prevent terrorist access to weapons.<sup>520</sup> In addition to reaffirming its decision from Resolution 1373 (2001) that all States shall refrain from providing any form of active or passive support, including the supply of weapons, to entities or persons involved in terrorist acts, Resolution 2370 contains various provisions UN Member States need to take into account in order to effectively prevent terrorist access to weapons, including SALW.

First, Resolution 2370 calls upon UN Member States to consider becoming party to the relevant

516 United Nations. "The Arms Trade Treaty." 13-27217, August 21, 2020, <https://thearmstradetreaty.org>.

517 Ben Knight, "UN's Arms Trade Treaty 'too weak to make a difference,'" *DW*, September 11, 2017, <https://www.dw.com/en/uns-arms-trade-treaty-too-weak-to-make-a-difference/a-40452550>

518 Control Arms Secretariat, *ATT Monitor 2020* (New York: Control Arms, 2020). [https://attmonitor.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/EN\\_ATT\\_Monitor-Report-2020\\_Online.pdf](https://attmonitor.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/EN_ATT_Monitor-Report-2020_Online.pdf).

519 United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. "Arms Trade Treaty Implementation Toolkit: Module 10 Preventing Diversion." Undated. <https://unoda-web.s3-accelerate.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/2015-08-21-Toolkit-Module-10.pdf>.

520 United Nations Security Council. "Resolution 2370." August 2, 2017. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1298311/usage>.

international and regional instruments to eliminate the supply of weapons to terrorists, and to fully implement their respective obligations. The Resolution also encourages UN Member States to take appropriate steps to prevent and disrupt activity that would result in violations of UN arms embargos. To prevent terrorists from acquiring SALW, in particular in conflict and post conflict areas, the Resolution also urges UN Member States to fully implement the PoA on SALW (see above) and the International Tracing Instrument.<sup>521</sup>

Second, Resolution 2370 calls upon UN Member States to enhance national systems for collection and analysis of detailed data on illicit trafficking of SALW to terrorists. It also calls upon Member States to develop adequate laws, regulations, and administrative procedures to exercise effective control over the production, export, import, brokering, transit, or retransfer of SALW, in line with the UN PoA (see above). The Resolution also urges Member States to undertake national measures to eliminate the supply of weapons to terrorists by taking appropriate legal actions against those who are knowingly engaged in providing terrorists with weapons; by ensuring proper physical security and management for their stockpiles of SALW; by encouraging the implementation of SALW marking and tracing procedures; by strengthening their judicial, law enforcement and border control capacities and developing their investigation capabilities of arms trafficking networks.

Third, Resolution 2370 underlines the importance of international cooperation to prevent terrorist access to various types of weapons, including SALW. The Resolution stresses the importance for UN Member States to particularly enhance their judicial and law enforcement cooperation. It encourages UN Member States to assist conflict-affected countries in monitoring and controlling SALW stockpiles. In addition, the Resolution also urges Member States to enhance international and regional cooperation regarding training on good practices, in coordination with Interpol and the World Customs Organization (WCO). Furthermore, the Resolution encourages UN Member States to strengthen cooperation and the exchange of good practices in combatting the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in SALW, including awareness raising, with civil society and the private sector.

Finally, the Resolution also emphasises the importance of enhancing cooperation and coordination among the relevant UN entities to prevent the supply of weapons to terrorists.

To conclude, Resolution 2370 includes a wide variety of actions UN Member States need to or are encouraged to take tackle the supply of weapons to terrorists, but remarkably the direct and indirect use of SALW by terrorist organisations as source of finance is not mentioned at all. The Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC), with the support of the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED) are responsible to monitor the implementation of the resolution. CTED uses the tool of country visits to seek information on the implementation. The reports of the country visits are rarely publicly available.

## 5.1.2. EU level

Although several EU and national actions were taken prior to 2001, the terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001 proved a turning point for EU counter-terrorism policy. Since 2001, a multitude of EU policy initiatives, programmes and legislation were adopted to prevent terrorist activities in the EU. The terrorist attacks in Madrid (2004) and London further accelerated the EU counter-terrorism policy. Since the perpetrators of these attacks were not linked to an international terrorist network but were home-grown, the EU perception of terrorism shifted from a mostly external threat to a security risk also coming from within the EU itself.<sup>522</sup> In response to these attacks, the

<sup>521</sup> The purpose of the International Tracing Instrument, adopted in 2015 by the General Assembly, is to enable states to identify and trace, in a timely and reliable manner, illicit SALW by setting out a number of minimum requirements for marking and record-keeping; to promote and facilitate international cooperation and assistance in marking, record-keeping and tracing; and to enhance the effectiveness of, and complement, existing bilateral, regional and international agreements to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects.

<sup>522</sup> For an overview of these developments, See: Nils Duquet and Kevin Goris, "Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE," *Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute*, (April 18, 2018), 33-43. [https://www.flemishpeaceinstitute.eu/safte/files/vrede\\_syntheserapport\\_safte\\_lr.pdf](https://www.flemishpeaceinstitute.eu/safte/files/vrede_syntheserapport_safte_lr.pdf).

Council adopted a Counter-Terrorism Strategy in December 2005. Two of the elements of this Strategy are combatting terrorist financing and preventing terrorist access to SALW. Although the EU has taken various actions to address both security phenomena, no policy initiatives were taken to specifically target terrorist financing by using SALW.

In the last two decades the EU has, however, taken various specific measures to prevent terrorist access to SALW and improve the fight against illicit trafficking of SALW both within and outside the EU. In the following sections, we will give an overview of the actions taken by the European Commission to combat the access to SALW by terrorists within the EU and by the European Council to combat the access to SALW by terrorists outside the EU.

## EU actions to combat terrorist access to SALW within the EU

In recent years, the European Commission identified illicit firearms trafficking and terrorist access to firearms as a major security threat for citizens. This became very visible in the aftermath of the series of terrorist attacks within the EU in 2015. Since many of them were carried out with firearms, these attacks strongly accelerated EU policy initiatives on illicit firearms trafficking. According to some observers, even a ‘firearms-terrorism policy nexus’ developed between 2015-2017.<sup>523</sup> A few days after the Paris Attacks in November 2015, the European Commission announced a multifaceted package of measures, many of which were already foreseen in the EAS. This package included legislative initiatives such as a proposal to revise the EU Firearms Directive and regulation on common technical standards for the deactivation of firearms. In December 2015, the European Commission also adopted an Action Plan against illicit trafficking in and use of firearms and explosives (2015 Action Plan) with four priorities: restricting access to illegal firearms and explosives, enhancing operational cooperation among the relevant authorities of Member States, improving the collection, and sharing of operational information through the optimal use of existing tools, and stronger cooperation with Third Countries.<sup>524</sup>

In July 2020 the European Commission updated its policy framework to combat illicit firearms trafficking into and within the EU by adopting the 2020-2025 EU Action Plan on firearms trafficking.<sup>525</sup> This update is motivated by Europol’s conclusion that the illicit trafficking, distribution and use of firearms remain a high threat, and that “the proliferation and availability of illegal firearms in the Member States increases the risk of their use by terrorist groups to carry out attacks in the EU.”<sup>526</sup> According to the European Commission only a unified action plan by the EU and its partners, particularly in south-east Europe, can provide a coherent framework for cooperation to intensify international cooperation due to the comprehensive and multidisciplinary nature of the threat of illicit firearms trafficking.<sup>527</sup>

The 2020-2025 EU Action Plan has four specific priorities that address remaining legal loopholes and inconsistencies in firearms control that hinder effective law enforcement responses. First, safeguarding the licit market and limiting diversion. The European Commission stresses the importance of implementation of the Firearms Directive and will actively follow up if the Firearms Directive and its corresponding delegated and implementing acts are correctly transposed and effectively enforced by all Member States. The European Commission will also conduct an impact assessment on the EU

523 Nils Duquet and Kevin Goris, “Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE,” *Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute*, (April 18, 2018), 52. [https://www.flemishpeaceinstitute.eu/safte/files/vrede\\_syntheserapport\\_safte\\_lr.pdf](https://www.flemishpeaceinstitute.eu/safte/files/vrede_syntheserapport_safte_lr.pdf).

524 European Commission. “Implementing the European Agenda on Security: EU action plan against illicit trafficking in and use of firearms and explosives.” December 2, 2015. [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-security/legislative-documents/docs/20151202\\_communication\\_firearms\\_and\\_the\\_security\\_of\\_the\\_eu\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-security/legislative-documents/docs/20151202_communication_firearms_and_the_security_of_the_eu_en.pdf).

525 European Commission. “2020-2025 EU action plan on firearms trafficking.” July 24, 2020. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0608&from=EN>.

526 Europol. “SOCTA 2017 - European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment: Crime in the age of technology.” February 28, 2017, 54. <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-serious-and-organised-crime-threat-assessment-2017>.

527 Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons and their ammunition in the Western Balkans by 2024, 10 July 2018.

legislation on controls for imports and exports of civilian firearms (Regulation 258/2012) and strengthen the capacity of partner countries to implement effective firearms controls and increase possibilities for tracing firearms. Second, building a better intelligence picture by encouraging Member States to systematically feed and use existing databases. To assist law enforcement authorities in identifying new trafficking trends and establishing risk profiles, the European Commission will also take action to establish a systematic and harmonised collection of data on firearms seizures and publish annual statistics on this. Special attention will also be given to develop a better intelligence picture on the use of darknet for illicit firearms trafficking. Third, increasing pressure on criminal markets by urging the Member States (who have not done so) to ratify the Firearms Protocol and to establish effective national Firearms Focal Points. The European Commission will also assess the need for establishing common criminal law standards on illicit manufacturing and trafficking of firearms and examine possibilities for enhancing more systematic tracing of seized weapons, for sharing intelligence ballistic data, and carrying out controlled deliveries. In addition, the European Commission will take actions to improve expertise and cooperation among law enforcement authorities, prosecutors, and forensics specialists and to enhance cooperation between law enforcement and parcel and postal operators. Fourth, strengthening international cooperation in line with the 2018 EU SALW Strategy (see below). Europol warned that various zones of armed conflict in the geographical periphery of the EU, such as Ukraine and Libya, have the potential to emerge as important sources of firearms illicitly trafficked into the EU.<sup>528</sup> While the Action Plan focuses heavily on international cooperation with countries in southeast Europe, it also stresses the importance of stepping up cooperation with non-European countries.

This overview illustrates that in the last decade the EU has significantly increased and diversified its activities to prevent and combat illicit trafficking of SALW into and within the EU, including measures to prevent the direct and indirect use of SALW by terrorists. In the same period, the EU has also strengthened its counter-terrorism policy, including focusing more attention on terrorist financing. These two developments were interconnected and in recent years, a nexus between firearms and terrorism policy in the EU can be observed. In 2019, Europol noted that observed links between organised crime and terrorist networks not only provide terrorists with opportunities to procure firearms to carry out their attacks, but that their involvement in organised crime may also allow them to finance terrorist activities.<sup>529</sup> Yet, while preventing and combatting terrorist financing and access to SALW - both considered key elements in a successful counter-terrorism strategy - the EU has not developed any specific actions to tackle terrorist financing through the direct or indirect use of SALW.

The 2015 Directive on preventing terrorist financing<sup>530</sup> and the 2016 Action Plan for strengthening the fight against terrorist financing, for example, do not include specific actions on terrorist financing through the direct or indirect use of SALW.<sup>531</sup> The 2017 Directive on combatting terrorism,<sup>532</sup> the main criminal justice instrument at EU level to counter terrorism, requires Member States to take the necessary measures to ensure that providing or collecting funds, directly or indirectly, with the intention that they (are to) be used to commit or contribute to terrorist offences is punishable as a criminal offence. Although the EU noted in the 2017 Directive that the illicit trade in various objects, including firearms, have become lucrative ways for terrorist groups to finance their activities and stresses that the increasing links between organised crime and terrorist groups in this context of illicit

528 Europol. "SOCTA 2017 - European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment: Crime in the age of technology." February 28, 2017, 54. <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-serious-and-organised-crime-threat-assessment-2017>.

529 Ibid., 55.

530 European Union, "Directive (2015/849) of the European Parliament and of the Council on the prevention of the use of the financial system for the purposes of money laundering or terrorist financing, amending Regulation No 648/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council," *Official Journal of the European Union*, (5 June 2015), L141/73.

531 European Commission. "Communication from the Commission to the European parliament and the Council on an Action Plan for strengthening the fight against terrorist financing." February 2, 2016. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:e6e0de37-ca7c-11e5-a4b5-01aa75ed71a1.0002.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:e6e0de37-ca7c-11e5-a4b5-01aa75ed71a1.0002.02/DOC_1&format=PDF).

532 European Union, "Directive (2017/541) of the European Parliament and of the Council on combating terrorism and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA and amending Council Decision 2005/671/JHA," *Official Journal of the European Union*, (March 31, 2017), L88/6.



trade constitute a growing security threat to the European Union, actions against terrorist financing through the use of firearms are not explicitly mentioned.<sup>533</sup> In its recent Counter-Terrorism Agenda (2020), the EU notes various actions that are needed to prevent terrorist access to firearms, which are in line with 2020-2025 EU Action Plan on firearms trafficking, and to combat terrorist financing, but it does not mention the need for specific action on the use of SALW by terrorists as source of financing.<sup>534</sup>

An important element that can explain the lack of specific EU actions to tackle terrorist financing through the direct or indirect use of SALW within the EU is likely that such cases of terrorist financing have not frequently been identified in Europe. Project SAFTE, a large-scale and in-depth analysis into terrorist access to illicit firearms markets in the EU, for example, only identified a very limited number of cases where terrorists use firearms, directly or indirectly, to finance their activities.<sup>535</sup> Terrorists in the EU are eager to acquire firearms, especially military-grade firearms, not to finance their activities, but rather to carry out lethal attacks. On illicit firearms markets in the EU, terrorists mainly take on the role of customers instead of traffickers searching for financial means. The European Commission has therefore not initiated specific actions to target the use of firearms by terrorists as a source of finance.

## EU actions to combat terrorist access to SALW outside the EU

The EU has not only taken actions to combat the illicit trafficking of SALW and its use by criminals and terrorists inside the EU, but also in third countries. Already in the early 2000s SALW became an important aspect of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).<sup>536</sup> In 2005 the EU adopted its Strategy to Combat the Illicit Accumulation and Trafficking of SALW and Their Ammunition (2005 SALW Strategy). In this Strategy the EU explicitly linked the illicit manufacture, transfer and circulation of SALW, and their excessive accumulation and uncontrolled proliferation, to a worsening of terrorism and organised crime. It noted that the abundance of SALW stocks, in particular those left over from the Cold War, facilitated access to these weapons by terrorists.<sup>537</sup> To counter this security threat, the EU stated that its reactive strategy had to be supplemented by preventive action to tackle illegal supply and demand, and by better controlling exports of conventional weapons. The 2005 SALW Strategy mainly focused on SALW transfers, especially from the existing stockpiles in eastern and southeastern European countries, to conflict areas outside the EU. The Strategy was implemented through a series of Council decisions targeting the illicit trade in SALW across the world.<sup>538</sup>

As an important global exporter of SALW the EU also focuses on its own arms export controls. To avoid terrorist access to SALW, the EU, first of all, applies restrictive measures such as arms embargoes by implementing UN Security Council Resolutions and by adopting its own embargoes.<sup>539</sup> Another

533 While the Directive does not contain specific provisions to prevent or combat illicit arms trafficking for purposes of terrorist financing, articles 7 and 8 note that Member States need to take the necessary measures to ensure that intentionally providing or receiving instruction on the making or use of firearms, explosives, other weapons or noxious or hazardous substances for the purpose of (contribution to) committing a terrorist offence is punishable as a criminal offence.

534 European Commission. "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A Counter-Terrorism Agenda for the EU: Anticipate, Prevent, Protect, Respond." December 9, 2020. [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/pdf/09122020\\_communication\\_commission\\_european\\_parliament\\_the\\_council\\_eu\\_agenda\\_counter\\_terrorism\\_po-2020-9031\\_com-2020\\_795\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/pdf/09122020_communication_commission_european_parliament_the_council_eu_agenda_counter_terrorism_po-2020-9031_com-2020_795_en.pdf).

535 Nils Duquet, (ed.) "Triggering Terror: Illicit Gun Markets and Firearms Acquisition of Terrorist Networks in Europe," *Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute*, (April 17, 2018), [https://flemishpeaceinstitute.eu/safte/files/boek\\_safte\\_bw\\_lowres.pdf](https://flemishpeaceinstitute.eu/safte/files/boek_safte_bw_lowres.pdf).

536 For information on the development of the EU SALW agenda in this period, See: Cédric Poitevin, "European Union initiatives to control small arms and light weapons: towards a more coordinated approach," *EU Non-Proliferation Consortium*, Non-Proliferation Papers, No 33. [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/EUNPC\\_no-33.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/EUNPC_no-33.pdf).

537 Council of the European Union. "EU Strategy to combat illicit accumulation and trafficking of SALW and their ammunition," January 13, 2006. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST%205319%202006%20INIT/EN/pdf>.

538 Cédric Poitevin, "European Union initiatives to control small arms and light weapons: towards a more coordinated approach," *EU Non-Proliferation Consortium*, Non-Proliferation Papers, No 33, (December 2013). [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/EUNPC\\_no-33.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/EUNPC_no-33.pdf); Nils Duquet, (2019), "The 2018 EU SALW Strategy: Towards and Integrated and Comprehensive Approach," *EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium*, Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Paper no. 62 (April 2019). [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/eunpdc\\_no\\_62\\_final.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/eunpdc_no_62_final.pdf).

539 For an overview the various (ongoing and ended) UN, EU and other multilateral arms embargoes, See: "Arms Embargoes,"

important aspect of EU policy to prevent SALW ending up in the hands of terrorists are its efforts to harmonise the national conventional arms export control policies of its Member States. Since the early 1990s, the EU has promoted cooperation between EU Member States and convergence in their arms export control policies. In 1991–92, the Council adopted eight common criteria on arms exports, which were into a politically-binding EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports in 1998. This instrument requires EU Member States to evaluate export license applications for conventional weapons, including SALW, on a case-by-case approach against eight assessment criteria. Two of these criteria explicitly mention the risk that the exported weapons might fuel terrorist violence: criterion six states that Member States, need to take into account the record of the buyer country with regard to its support or encouragement of terrorism and international organised crime, while criterion seven states that Member States need to take into account the risk of the arms being re-exported or diverted to terrorist organisations.<sup>540</sup> In 2008, this Code of Conduct was transformed into a legally binding Common Position (Council Common Position 2008/944/CFSP). With regard to the references to terrorist access to exported weapons criterion six remained identical, but criterion seven was slightly adapted and now states that Member States need to assess the risk that the weapons might be diverted to terrorist organisations *or to individual terrorists*.<sup>541</sup> In addition, the EU adopted Regulation 258/2012 on the control of international trade in ‘civilian’ firearms to third countries in 2012, as part of its ratification and implementation process of the UN Firearms Protocol (see above). This regulation does not explicitly mention terrorism, but states that Member States need to take into account all relevant considerations including, where appropriate: (a) their obligations and commitments as parties to the relevant international export control arrangements or relevant international treaties; (b) considerations of national foreign and security policy, including those covered by Common Position 2008/944/CFSP; and (c) considerations as to intended end use, consignee, identified final recipient and the risk of diversion.<sup>542</sup>

In 2018, the EU updated its SALW Strategy by adopting a new EU Strategy on illicit firearms, SALW and their ammunition (2018 SALW Strategy). The purpose of the 2018 SALW Strategy is “to guide integrated, collective and coordinated European action to prevent and curb the illicit acquisition of SALW and their ammunition by terrorists, criminals and other unauthorised actors.” Importantly, the 2018 SALW Strategy explicitly covers both civilian and military-grade firearms. The 2018 SALW Strategy also includes an important shift in focus: while the 2005 SALW Strategy mainly focused on the negative impact of the proliferation of SALW on third countries, the 2018 SALW Strategy starts from the observation that illicit trafficking in SALW continues to fuel instability, armed conflict and terrorist violence not only in third countries, but also within the EU and in its immediate neighbourhood. The 2018 SALW Strategy explicitly mentions the changing internal security situation and recognises that the nexus between organised crime and terrorism, notably in illicit firearms trafficking, has provided terrorists to carry out attacks on European soil. Like its predecessor, the 2018 SALW Strategy also aims to develop a comprehensive approach but while the 2005 SALW Strategy was developed by the Council without the involvement of the European Commission, the 2018 SALW Strategy is a single consolidated instrument that has been agreed on by the various EU entities. As a result, the 2018 SALW Strategy sets out priorities for dealing with illicit SALW proliferation in the EU as a whole. With this integrated approach, the EU and its EU Member States commit themselves to coordinate their actions and initiatives to combat illicit firearms and SALW proliferation. The various measures of the 2018 Strategy are grouped under four pillars: (a) strengthening the normative framework by supporting the Arms Trade Treaty, UN Firearms Protocol and UN PoA on SALW; (b) implementing

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Sipri, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/embargoed>.

540 The Council of the European Union. “Code of Conduct on Arms Export,” June 5, 1998. [www.poa-iss.org/RegionalOrganizations/EU/EU%20Code%20of%20Conduct%201998.pdf](http://www.poa-iss.org/RegionalOrganizations/EU/EU%20Code%20of%20Conduct%201998.pdf).

541 The Council of the European Union, “Council Common Position 2008/944/CFSP defining common rules governing control of exports of military technology and equipment,” *Official Journal of the European Union* L 335/99, (December 8, 2008).

542 The European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, “Regulation (EU) No 258/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council implementing Article 10 of the United Nations’ Protocol against the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (UN Firearms Protocol), and establishing export authorisation, and import and transit measures for firearms, their parts and components and ammunition,” *Official Journal of the European Union* L 94/1 (March 14, 2012).

norms in different life cycle phases of firearms/SALW (manufacturing, export, stockpile management and disposal); (c) increasing compliance through monitoring and enforcement, and (d) international cooperation and assistance.

Improving knowledge about the flows of SALW to non-state actors and their use of these weapons in acts of violence is considered a priority within the 2018 SALW Strategy. With the objective of identifying supply routes and diversion methods, the EU has in recent years supported several initiatives that monitor illicit SALW flows in conflict zones outside the EU. One of these initiatives is the iTrace project run by Conflict Armament Research (CAR). Within the framework of this project, CAR documents the weapons used in active armed conflicts and tracks their sources back through the chains of supply.<sup>543</sup> In recent years CAR has, for example, published extensive reports on SALW used in conflict zones in West Africa<sup>544</sup> and the Middle East.<sup>545</sup> The 2018 SALW Strategy reiterates the ambition of the EU to continue to fund research into the trafficking of SALW and to support national tracing capacities in conflict-affected areas.

As mentioned above, international cooperation and assistance are key elements of the 2018 SALW Strategy. This is not surprising since the EU has been a significant donor in SALW-control cooperation and assistance to other countries and regional organisations since 2005. The 2018 SALW Strategy focuses especially on priority regions “likely to pose a threat to the EU’s security and most likely to benefit from EU action.”<sup>546</sup>

The Strategy explicitly lists actions and activities to improve cooperation with countries in the western Balkans, which is a significant source region for illicit firearms trafficking into the EU, and in the eastern neighbourhood, especially Ukraine which is often considered a *potential* source region for illicit firearms trafficking into the EU. The cooperation with countries from these regions is also connected to the EU’s counter-terrorism policy: while firearms from the western Balkans have recently been used in terrorist attacks in the EU, the 2018 SALW Strategy explicitly mentions the aim of cooperation with Ukraine is to limit the risks that SALW end up in the hands of organised crime groups and terrorists. Other priority regions in the 2018 SALW Strategy include the MENA region.<sup>547</sup> The EU notes it will strengthen its dialogue and cooperation with regional organisations working on SALW control, by aligning its activities with regional strategies and action plans. In 2018, for example, the EU adopted a Council decision<sup>548</sup> to support the countries of the League of Arab States (LAS) in strengthening regional and national capacities to combat the illicit proliferation of SALW (see 3.3.2). The EU will also continue to support the African Union and relevant regional economic communities in their efforts against the illicit trade in SALW. Yet, also deeper bilateral cooperation is deemed necessary to combat the diversion and illicit trafficking of SALW in the MENA region, which also involves SALW produced by EU Member States. In its 2020-2025 EU Action Plan on firearms trafficking (see above) the European Commission specifies this international cooperation. While most focus is on cooperation with countries in south east Europe, the Action Plan explicitly states that particularly cooperation with countries in the MENA region needs to be stepped up and refers to cooperation with Tunisia,

543 For more information, See: <https://www.conflictarm.com/itrace/>.

544 See: Conflict Armament Research, “Nigeria’s herder-farmer conflicts: Domestic, regional, and transcontinental weapon sources” (2020), Conflict Armament Research, “Investigating cross-border weapon transfers in the Sahel” (2016), Conflict Armament Research, “The distribution of Iranian ammunition in Africa” (2014) and Conflict Armament Research, “Rebel forces in Northern Mali: Documented weapons, ammunition and related materiel - April 2012-March 2013” (2014).

545 See for example: Conflict Armament Research, “Weapons of the Islamic State: A three-year investigation in Iraq and Syria” (2017), Conflict Armament Research, “Islamic State weapons in Kobane: Analysis of weapons and ammunition captured from Islamic State forces in Kobane” (2015), Conflict Armament Research, “Islamic State ammunition in Iraq and Syria: Analysis of small-calibre ammunition recovered from Islamic State forces in Iraq and Syria - October 2014” (2014) and Conflict Armament Research, “Islamic State weapons in Iraq and Syria: Analysis of weapons and ammunition captured from Islamic State forces in Iraq and Syria” (2014).

546 Council of the European Union, “Council Conclusions on the Adoption of an EU Strategy Against Illicit Firearms, Small Arms & Light Weapons & Their Ammunition,” 13581/18, 19 November 2018, 9.

547 Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on the Adoption of an EU Strategy Against Illicit Firearms, Small Arms & Light Weapons & Their Ammunition*, 13581/18, 19 November 2018.

548 Council of the European Union. “Council Decision (CFSP) 2018/1789 of 19 November 2018 in support of combating the illicit trade in and proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the Member States of the League of Arab States.” *Official Journal of the European Union* L293/24, 20 November 2018.

Lebanon, and Jordan with regard to tracing weapons and improvement of weapons control. The European Commission also calls on EU Member States to commit more personnel for technical assistance on SALW control to countries in the MENA. In Africa, particularly the Sahel region, the European Commission will encourage better physical security and stockpile management, record-keeping, and weapons control.<sup>549</sup>

This overview of EU legislative instruments and policy initiatives aimed at preventing SALW ending up in the hands of terrorists outside of the EU indicates that the EU is aware of the risks associated with the illicit proliferation, diversion, and trafficking of SALW. Interestingly, the direct or indirect use of SALW by terrorists is not explicitly connected to the problem of financing terrorism. By actively supporting the monitoring of illicit SALW flows and identifying the SALW that end up in the hands of terrorists across the world, the EU contributes to a better intelligence picture which allows for more effective SALW controls. Another key element of EU policy on both SALW issues as well as terrorism is strengthening International cooperation. With regard to SALW, international cooperation with regional organisations and countries in the Middle East and Africa continues to be a priority. In the following sections we will analyse the regional legislative and policy framework to prevent the direct and indirect use of SALW by terrorists in West Africa and the Middle East.

### 5.1.3 Regional level

#### West Africa

In its 2011 Strategy on the control of illicit proliferation, circulation and trafficking of SALW the African Union notes that these SALW issues are closely tied to terrorism and other forms of armed violence. To prevent, combat and eradicate these issues, the African Union states an integrated and holistic approach is necessary which involves carrying out education and public awareness programmes; strengthening national and regional capacities to implement measures against illicit activities with SALW; promoting cooperation, coordination and information exchange between stakeholders at various levels; and mainstreaming SALW control as a cross-cutting and multidimensional issue on achieving peace, security, development and stability in Africa. To achieve these objectives the African Union supports regional economic communities in different ways and promotes coordination among them.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is the regional political and economic union of 15 countries<sup>550</sup> located in West Africa. It was established in 1975 with as objective, among other things, to maintain of regional peace, stability, and security. In the second half of the 1990s, ECOWAS Member States noted that the proliferation of SALW was a destabilising factor and a threat to peace and security in the region. In 1998, ECOWAS therefore adopted a Moratorium on the import, export, and manufacture of light weapons<sup>551</sup> (Moratorium). The Moratorium was planned for a renewable period of three years and was renewed in 2001 and 2004. The effectiveness of the moratorium was undermined because the declaration was not legally binding, but also due to poor monitoring and weak government structures.<sup>552</sup>

To replace the Moratorium, ECOWAS adopted a legally binding Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, their ammunition and other related materials in 2006, which entered into force in 2009. It builds upon the 1998 Moratorium. The objectives of this convention are to prevent and combat

549 European Commission. "2020-2025 EU action plan on firearms trafficking." July 24, 2020. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0608&from=EN>.

550 Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cote D'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

551 Economic Community of West African States, *Declaration of a Moratorium on Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Light Weapons in West Africa*, Twenty-First Ordinary Session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government, Abuja, 30-31 October 1998.

552 Small Arms Survey, *Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)*, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/de/tools/ro-poa/profiles-of-regional-organizations/africa/ecowas.html>, consulted on 22 December 2020.

excessive and destabilising accumulation of SALW with the region, to continue the efforts for the control of these weapons, to promote trust between the Member States and to promote information exchange and cooperation among the Member States. The main idea is that international SALW transfers are banned with the exemption of transfers to meet legitimate national defence and security needs or transfers needed to participate in peace support operations. ECOWAS Member States therefore need to establish an effective licensing system for the import, export, and transit of SALW. Request for exemptions are examined by the ECOWAS Executive Secretariat and should include details on the transferred weapons, on the supplier and supply process, and on the final end use and the end use. If approved, the ECOWAS Executive Secretariat issues an exemption certificate that must accompany the application for a national export license. Article 6 notes that SALW transfers shall not be authorised if the weapons are destined to be used for carrying out, supporting, or encouraging terrorist acts. A transfer shall also not be authorised if it is likely to be diverted or re-exported to unauthorised users or into the illicit trade. Member States are required to establish national computerised registers and databases of SALW and need to register SALW under the ECOWAS Executive Secretary as a way of promoting confidence between the Member States. Member States also need to take the necessary measures to ensure the safe and effective management, storage, and security of their national stocks of SALW.<sup>553</sup>

Bearing in mind the linkages between terrorism and transnational organised crimes such as illicit trafficking in SALW, combatting the illicit aspects of SALW is considered a key element in the counter terrorism policy of ECOWAS. In 2013, ECOWAS adopted a political declaration and common position against terrorism. This declaration highlights that arms trafficking has presented conditions conducive to terrorism in West Africa and that its Member States continue to face a growing threat of terrorism intertwined with other criminal acts such as illicit arms trafficking. To prevent terrorist access to SALW it stipulates that Member States need to scrupulously implement all relevant instruments and decisions adopted by ECOWAS policy organs on preventing and combatting the illicit manufacture and development, acquisition or possession, proliferation, circulation, transfer, accumulation or stockpiling and use of SALW, including the 2001 Firearms Protocol and the 2006 ECOWAS Convention on SALW. The declaration also calls for the development of a West African database on terrorist activities, including terrorist groups, networks, their leaders, headquarters, movement, recruitment, communication, propaganda methods, training camps, means and sources of funding, and means of acquisition of arms and explosives. The declaration also urges its member States to act against corruption at border control points to render them more effective in detecting criminals and terrorist elements, including illicit arms and other unlawful activities.<sup>554</sup>

In 2018, the UN Security Council reiterated its serious concern over the threats posed by the linkages between terrorism and transnational organised crime, including arms trafficking, in West Africa. The Security Council welcomed UNOWAS and the successful holding of the Joint Summit of ECOWAS and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) on the fight against terrorism and violent extremism held in Lomé, Togo, in July 2018.<sup>555</sup> In the Joint Declaration following this meeting, the heads of state of the countries belonging to these two regional organisations committed to strengthening their security cooperation to counter illicit trafficking and proliferation of arms. They also agreed to strengthen the combat against the proliferation of SALW by accession and national implementation of the ATT, by adoption or revision of national regulatory frameworks for the acquisition and possession of light weapons by civilians, by improving the security of state stockpiles, and by respecting the ban on arms transfers to non-state actors. They also strongly condemned all types of illicit activities and

553 ECOWAS. *Convention on small arms and light weapons, their ammunition and other related material*, 14 June 2006. [www.poa-iss.org/RegionalOrganizations/ECOWAS/ECOWAS%20Convention%202006.pdf](http://www.poa-iss.org/RegionalOrganizations/ECOWAS/ECOWAS%20Convention%202006.pdf).

554 ECOWAS. "ECOWAS political declaration and common position against terrorism." February 28, 2013. [https://www.edup.ecowas.int/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Ecowas-CT-strategy\\_ENGLISH-Published.pdf](https://www.edup.ecowas.int/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Ecowas-CT-strategy_ENGLISH-Published.pdf).

555 United Nations Security Council. "Statement by the President of the Security Council." August 10, 2018. *S/PRST/2018/16*. <https://undocs.org/S/PRST/2018/16>.

trafficking from terrorist and mercenary groups operating in the Sahel from a neighbouring ECOWAS and ECCAS Member States, and the financing and all other forms of support for terrorist groups in general.<sup>556</sup>

The linkages between SALW and terrorism were also highlighted when the heads of state and government of ECOWAS Member States held an extraordinary session on terrorism in September 2019. This session resulted in a Priority Action Plan on combatting terrorism for 2020-2024. One of the eight priority areas is strengthening the control of arms and dual-use goods. In this regard, the Member States stated they will improve the security of their arms and ammunition stockpiles and to reinforce control of the acquisition, carrying and use of SALW and related ammunition by civilians. Another priority area is countering the financing of terrorism: ECOWAS Member States reaffirmed the urgent need to prevent, detect and suppress the financing of terrorism in West Africa by strengthening their national policies, improving technical compliance, enhancing international cooperation. Interestingly, the Action Plan states that Member States need “to step up the fight against organised cross-border crime, particularly trafficking in drugs, tobacco and fake drugs, in order to dry up the funding sources of terrorist groups.” While drugs and tobacco trafficking are explicitly connected to terrorist financing in this declaration, illicit arms trafficking is thus not mentioned in connection to terrorist financing.<sup>557</sup>

We can conclude that ECOWAS early on already directly linked illicit activities with SALW to terrorist access and use of these weapons, but it does not explicitly link the direct or indirect use of SALW by terrorists to the financing of terrorist activities. As mentioned in chapter 2, in addition to legacy weapons from previous armed conflicts, significant quantities of SALW from the state stockpiles of ECOWAS Member States, for example, continue to illicitly flow into the arsenals of non-state actors involved in violent conflict in neighbouring Member States. Such actors often source their SALW through battlefield capture from security and defence forces following attacks on posts and convoys, and to lesser extent, from corrupted officials. While ECOWAS Member States have identified the risk of direct and indirect use of SALW by terrorist networks and violent non-state actors and have committed to various actions to combat this security phenomena, the political reality is that in practice they generally do not have the means to significantly support and enforce such actions.

## Middle East

The LAS is a regional organisation in the Arab World with 22 Member States<sup>558</sup> from the Middle East and Africa. It was founded in 1945 to promote cooperation with regard to economic, cultural, and security policies. In 1998 it adopted the Arab Convention on Terrorism (Convention) which stipulates that its Member States shall not organise, finance, or commit terrorist acts. LAS Member States are required to prevent the use of their territories as base for planning, organising, executing, attempting, or taking part in terrorist activities, which explicitly includes arming and financing of terrorists. The Convention also stipulates that LAS Member States need to develop and strengthen systems for the movement, import, export, stockpiling and use of weapons, munitions, and explosives.<sup>559</sup> Member States also agreed to exchange information on the means and sources by which terrorist groups are funded and armed, and on the types of weapons, munitions and explosives used by these groups. In addition, the Convention stipulates Member States will confidentially provide other member States with any information or data in its possession that may lead to the seizure of any weapons, munitions or explosives or any devices or funds used or intended for use to commit a terrorist offence.<sup>560</sup>

556 ECOWAS. “Joint summit of ECOWAS and ECCAS heads of state and government – Lome Declaration on peace, security, stability and the fight against terrorism and violent extremism.” July 30, 2018. <https://www.ecowas.int/final-communique-joint-summit-of-ecowas-and-eccas-heads-of-state-and-government/>.

557 ECOWAS. “Extraordinary session of the authority of heads of state and government on terrorism, Ouagadougou – Final communique.” September 14, 2019. <https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-leaders-commit-to-eradicate-terrorism-in-the-region/>.

558 Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestinian Territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, UAE and Yemen. The membership of Syria is currently suspended.

559 League of Arab States. “The Arab Convention for the suppression of terrorism.” April 1998, Article 3.

560 Ibid., Article 4.

In the following years various national and regional measures were taken to combat the proliferation of SALW in the Arab region.<sup>561</sup> To assist its Member States in developing new or updating existing legislation the LAS, for example, developed the 'Arab Model Law on Weapons, Ammunition, Explosives and Hazardous Materials' in January 2002. Upon request by the LAS, the OSCE translated its Handbook on best practices on SALW into Arabic and in 2004 a LAS Regional Focal Point (RFP) was established. LAS encouraged and assisted its Member States to establish national focal points. In the following years annual meeting, national focal points were organised.<sup>562</sup> The objective of these meetings is to coordinate and share their experiences, to assess regional and international relevant developments, and to examine best ways to deal with such matters. In 2006 the LAS adopted Ministerial Council Resolution 6625 on Arab Coordination for Combatting the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons. This resolution entrusts the RFP to organise the annual meetings of the national focal points. It also invites national focal points to submit their report to the RFP on their achievements over the past five years and on their laws, regulations, and legislations on small arms. The resolution also invites national focal points to coordinate their positions before international meetings.<sup>563</sup> According to the Small Arms Survey, the LAS is an active participant at meetings in the framework of the UN PoA on SALW (see above).<sup>564</sup>

The EU has been actively supporting LAS actions aimed at combatting the proliferation of SALW in the Arab World. In November 2015, for example, the EU-LAS Strategic Dialogue on issues such as conflict prevention, counter-terrorism and non-proliferation of arms was launched.<sup>565</sup> In 2016, several working groups were established within this Strategic Dialogue, including a working group on Weapons of Mass Destruction and Arms Control. In line with the 2018 SALW Strategy and 2015 Action Plan, the Council of the European Union in 2018 adopted a decision to support the countries of the LAS in their combat against illicit trade and proliferation of SALW. This EU support is aimed at building national and regional capacities of the LAS and its members to combat the illicit proliferation of SALW, combat terrorism and enhance security in post-conflict situations, at strengthening national control over SALW at key stages of their life cycle (including international SALW transfer controls, stockpile management and processes of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration) and at enhancing the exchange of best practices. The technical implementation of this support is carried out by Small Arms Survey, assisted by Interpol and the WCO.<sup>566</sup> The WCO, for example, will provide training related to the detection of weapons at the border. The EU and LAS co-hosted a high-level conference in Cairo on combatting the illicit trade in and proliferation of SALW in the Member States of the LAS in June 2019 to officially launch this support.<sup>567</sup>

We can conclude that in the past two decades several initiatives were taken at regional level in the Arab world to improve the control on transfers and stockpiles of SALW and to combat illicit activities with these weapons. The LAS, with the assistance of the EU and its Member States, has played an

561 Gali Oda Tealakh, Atef Odibat, and Maha Al Shaer, "Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Arab Region: National and Regional Measures" (Amman: The Regional Human Security Center at the Jordan Institute of Diplomacy 2002).

562 Small Arms Survey, *League of Arab States (LAS)*, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/tools/ro-poa/profiles-of-regional-organizations/asia/las.html>, consulted on 22 December 2020.

563 League of Arab States. "Resolution (6625) on Arab Coordination for Combatting the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons." March 4, 2006.

564 Small Arms Survey, *League of Arab States (LAS)*, April 18, 2012. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/tools/ro-poa/profiles-of-regional-organizations/asia/las.html>, consulted on 22 December 2020.

565 Council of the European Union. "EU - League of Arab States relations: joint communiqué of the EU Political and Security Committee and the League of Arab States Permanent Representatives." January 23, 2019. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/01/23/eu-league-of-arab-states-relations-joint-communiqué-of-the-eu-political-and-security-committee-and-the-league-of-arab-states-permanent-representative>.

566 Council of the European Union, "Council Decision (CFSP) 2018/1789 in support of combating the illicit trade in and proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the Member States of the League of Arab States, Official Journal of the European Union" *Official Journal of the European Union* L293/24, (November 19, 2018); Council of the European Union, "Council Decision (CFSP) 2020/2142 amending Decision (CFSP) 2018/1789 in support of combating the illicit trade in and proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the Member States of the League of Arab States," *Official Journal of the European Union* L430/25, (December 18 2020).

567 World Customs Organisation. "WCO Participate in Conference to launch Small Arms and Light Weapons training in the Middle East and North Africa region." July 23, 2019. <http://www.wcoomd.org/en/media/newsroom/2019/july/wco-participate-in-conference-to-launch-small-arms-and-light-weapons.aspx>.

important role in this field. The LAS explicitly wants to prevent terrorist financing and its first initiatives on combatting the proliferation and illicit transfers of SALW were developed in an attempt to restrict terrorist access to weapons. Yet, the LAS has in recent years not taken policy actions to specifically combat terrorist financing by the direct or indirect use of SALW. Despite the observation of increased policy attention and support from regional organisations to combat the illicit proliferation of SALW and terrorist access to these weapons, little progress has been made on the ground. As mentioned in chapter 3, weak state capacity, prolonged armed conflict and state-sponsorship of terrorist groups and other violent non-state actors continue to be the primary drivers of this proliferation. As long as these political problems are not tackled, regional attempts to tackle the illicit proliferation of SALW will not lead to success and terrorist groups will continue to use SALW, including for financing their activities.

## 5.2. Criminal Justice and Organised Crime Perspective

In recent years, attention to linkages between terrorist organisations and (transnational) criminal networks has increased. UNSC Resolutions 2462 (2019) and 2482 (2019) recognised that terrorist organisations can benefit from transnational organised crime as a source of financing. The recently adopted EU Security Union Strategy also acknowledges the linkages between terrorism and transnational organised crime and reports that firearms are often trafficked into the EU through its immediate neighbourhood.<sup>568</sup>

The main international legal instrument in combatting transnational organised crime is the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, also referred to as the Palermo Convention, which was adopted in 2000 and has been ratified by 190 countries.<sup>569</sup> General Assembly resolution 55/25 of 15 November 2000<sup>570</sup> recognises the growing links between terrorist groups and organised criminal networks. The Convention itself only refers to these linkages in the Preamble and not in the operative text itself. An ‘organised criminal group’ is defined as a structured group of three or more persons that exist for a period of time and jointly carry out activities in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or material benefit.

Despite the fact that the Palermo Convention has a near-universal status, the Convention continues to be an underutilised instrument, as many countries are facing difficulties with its implementation. The main aim of the Convention is to prevent and combat transnational organised crime more effectively. The Convention is applicable when serious crimes have been committed, which means an offence that is punishable by a maximum deprivation of liberty of at least four years or a more serious penalty. The Convention is also applicable when the following four crimes have been committed: participation in an organised criminal group, money-laundering, corruption, and obstruction of justice. It is important to note that the Convention is only applicable if the crimes are transnational. This means that the crime has been committed in different countries, is committed in one State but a substantial part of its preparation, planning, or control takes place in another State; it is committed in one State but involves an organised criminal group that engages in criminal activities in more than one State; or it is committed in one State but has substantial effects in another State. The Convention thus requires States Parties to criminalise these four offences in their domestic legislation. In addition, the Convention contains several procedural law measures such as: establishing jurisdiction (article 15), imposing appropriate sanctions for the offences taking the gravity of the offence into account (article 11), establishing long(er) statute of limitations (article 11), adopt measures that enable confiscation and seizure (article 12) and provide protection to witnesses and victims (article 24-25).

568 European Union. “Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, The European Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the regions on the EU Security Union strategy.” August 24, 2020. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1596452256370&uri=CELEX:52020DC0605>.

569 United Nations. “Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.” 12(a), November 15, 2001. [https://treaties.un.org/PAGES/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=XVIII-12-a&chapter=18&lang=en](https://treaties.un.org/PAGES/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XVIII-12-a&chapter=18&lang=en).

570 United Nations General Assembly. “United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.” January 8, 2001. [https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A\\_RES\\_55\\_25.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_55_25.pdf).



The Convention also contains several provisions dedicated to promoting international cooperation considering the transnational nature of organised crimes. These include extradition (article 16), mutual legal assistance (article 18), joint investigations (article 19), law enforcement cooperation (article 27), transfer of sentenced persons (article 17) and transfer of criminal proceedings (article 21).

Although the aim of the Convention is to prevent and combat transnational organised crime, it only contains one provision on prevention. Most of the provisions require legislative changes in domestic legislation. To assist States Parties in the implementation of the Palermo Convention a legislative guide has been developed.<sup>571</sup>

It took nearly a decade for the States Parties to agree to the terms of reference and scope of a review mechanisms. In 2018, during the Conference of the Parties to Palermo Convention a Mechanism for the Review of the Implementation of the Palermo Convention was formally established. The Review Mechanism is a peer review process and should help State Parties to effectively implement the Convention and gain insight on challenges and best practices of how other countries implement the Convention. The preparatory phase has been completed and in 2021 the substantive review will commence.<sup>572</sup>

Furthermore, in other international fora, framework documents have been developed to address the linkages between terrorism and transnational organised crime. The Global Counter-terrorism Forum (GCTF) has adopted The Hague Good Practices on the Nexus between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism<sup>573</sup> and endorsed in September 2020 the Addendum to The Hague Good Practices<sup>574</sup> focusing on the criminal justice responses to the linkages. This Addendum provides recommendations related to prevention, detection, investigation, prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration of terrorist-related offences with linkages to transnational organised crime. It contains practical recommendations also with respect to trafficking of SALW such as strengthening the role of customs or the use of controlled deliveries.

All countries, but in particular those in West Africa and the Middle East could benefit from more technical assistance in implementing the Palermo Convention. Considering its near-universal status, it is an important tool for law enforcement officials to combat transnational organised crime. Without casting any doubts on the importance of the Palermo Convention, however, it may not be the most useful tool to identify and detect when terrorist groups use SALW for funding purposes. The Addendum to The Hague Good Practices on the Nexus between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism contains more provisions relating to prevention and detection and may therefore be more useful to address the hidden purposes of the use of SALW by terrorist organisations.

### 5.3. Combatting Terrorist Financing (CFT) Perspective

When assessing Counter-Terrorism Financing (CTF) legislative frameworks, the European Commission continues to build off the established 2016 Action Plan for Strengthening the Fight against Terrorist Financing. Included within the 2016 strategy are structures aimed at detecting and preventing revenue streams of terrorist actors, while also establishing cooperation guidelines between EU member states,

571 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. "Legislative Guide for the Implementation of the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime." Undated. [https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/Legislative\\_Guide\\_2017/Legislative\\_Guide\\_E.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/Legislative_Guide_2017/Legislative_Guide_E.pdf)

572 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. "Commemorating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption by the General Assembly of the UNODC." 2020. [https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNTOC/COP/SESSION\\_10/Website/Practical\\_info/UNTOC\\_at\\_20.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNTOC/COP/SESSION_10/Website/Practical_info/UNTOC_at_20.pdf).

573 Global Counterterrorism Forum. "The Hague Good Practices on the Nexus between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism" September 21, 2018. [https://www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Framework%20Documents/2018/GCTF-Good-Practices-on-the-Nexus\\_ENG.pdf?ver=2018-09-21-122246-363](https://www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Framework%20Documents/2018/GCTF-Good-Practices-on-the-Nexus_ENG.pdf?ver=2018-09-21-122246-363).

574 Global Counterterrorism Forum. "Addendum to the Hague Good Practices on the Nexus between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism: Focus on Criminal Justice." September 30, 2020. <https://www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Framework%20Documents/2020/GCTF%20Addendum%20to%20The%20Hague%20Good%20Practices%20on%20the%20Nexus%20between%20TOC%20and%20Terrorism%20-%20Focus%20on%20Criminal%20Justice.pdf?ver=2020-09-30-102801-107>.

the United Nations, and the FATF.<sup>575</sup> Revisions to the 2016 directive in 2018 also establish the criteria for criminal offenses regarding the trafficking of SALW, munitions, and explosives, specifically in the context of asset freezing and confiscation orders.<sup>576</sup> The EU is also pursuing its 2020-2025 Action Plan on Firearms Trafficking to address the criminal and terrorist accumulation of weapons on the continent.<sup>577</sup> In coordination with the 2020-2025 Action Plan, the EU in its updated 2020 Counter-Terrorism Agenda reaffirmed its commitment to deny terrorists sources of SALW for armament acquisition, namely through creating universal flagging procedures for individuals attempting to acquire firearms in multiple EU member states.<sup>578</sup> Yet, these concerted efforts mostly address the procurement of SALW by terrorist actors and not explicitly the terrorist use of SALW as a source of financing.

Though not explicitly tied to its official CTF frameworks, the EU's End-User Agreements and Certificates legislation is worth consideration. Outlined in EU Common Position 2008/944/CFSP, the framework is designed to establish a level of regulatory oversight measures regarding conventional arms transfers, specifically to combat the acquisition of arms by unauthorised parties.<sup>579</sup> Although the legislation addresses the need to uphold End-User accountability to combat terrorist acquisition of diverted SALW, there is no mention of preventing end-user violations to respond to terrorist financing through SALW trafficking. However, as of January 2021, the Council of the EU is committed to revisiting and possibly enhancing its end-user guidelines in Common Position 2008/944/CFSP to adhere to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to reduce further illicit financial activity related to SALW trafficking.<sup>580</sup>

Outside of the EU, the FATF continues to maintain its 2012 International Standards on Combating Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism & Proliferation. While outlining recommendations, designation criteria, and other CTF/Anti-Money Laundering (AML) procedures, the FATF upholds the necessity to combat the supplying, transferring, and selling of arms on behalf of terrorist actors.<sup>581</sup> Though the FATF updated the 2012 framework in October 2020, there continues to be a lacking mentioning of the threat posed by terrorist financing through SALW sales. The FATF's CTF efforts are likely to be subjected to revisions in the coming years, specifically in addressing the intersection of terrorist financing and SALW trafficking. As Germany assumes the FATF's two-year Presidency, it is positioned to enhance CTF and AML protocols as they relate to illicit arms trafficking. Incoming FATF President Dr. Marcus Pleyer explicitly cited the necessity for addressing SALW trafficking as both a "predicate offense for money laundering [and] a source of terrorism financing."<sup>582</sup> This includes building upon previously established initiatives and frameworks of the FATF, while also enhancing the organisation's understanding of terrorist financing through illicit arms sales.<sup>583</sup> Therefore, member states will likely aim to revise their CTF strategies in the realm of terrorist financing through SALW in the near future

575 European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on an Action Plan for strengthening the fight against terrorist financing*, Brussels, Belgium: EU, 2016.

576 European Parliament and the Council of the European Union. "Regulation (EU) 2018/1805 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the mutual recognition of freezing orders and confiscation orders." 14 November 14, 2018. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018R1805>.

577 European Commission. "2020-2025 EU action plan on firearms trafficking." July 24, 2020. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0608&from=EN>.

578 European Commission. "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A Counter-Terrorism Agenda for the EU: Anticipate, Prevent, Protect, Respond." December 9, 2020. [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/pdf/09122020\\_communication\\_commission\\_european\\_parliament\\_the\\_council\\_eu\\_agenda\\_counter\\_terrorism\\_po-2020-9031\\_com-2020\\_795\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/pdf/09122020_communication_commission_european_parliament_the_council_eu_agenda_counter_terrorism_po-2020-9031_com-2020_795_en.pdf).

579 European Union. "Council Common Position 2008/944/CFSP of 8 December 2008 defining common rules governing control of exports of military technology and equipment" December 8, 2008. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32008E0944&from=EN>.

580 Council of the European Union. "Council Decision (CSFP) 2021/38 establishing a common approach on the elements of end-user certificates in the context of the export of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition." January 15, 2021. <https://euroalert.net/oj/92094/council-decision-cfsp-2021-38-of-15-january-2021-establishing-a-common-approach-on-the-elements-of-end-user-certificates-in-the-context-of-the-export-of-small-arms-and-light-weapons-and-their-ammunition>.

581 "International Standards on Combating Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism & Proliferation: The FATF Recommendations," *Financial Action Task Force*, 2012.

582 Dr. Marcus Pleyer, "Priorities for the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) under the German Presidency," *Financial Action Task Force*, (2020). [www.fatf-gafi.org/media/fatf/documents/German-Presidency-Priorities.pdf](http://www.fatf-gafi.org/media/fatf/documents/German-Presidency-Priorities.pdf).

583 Ibid.

to effectively adhere to the FATF's membership guidelines and obligations.

# Short- and long-term consequences for Europe

## 6.1. Introduction

This chapter analyses the various short- and long-term consequences that the possession and identified use of SALW by terrorist organisations as a source of finance in West Africa and the Middle East, as described in chapters 2 and 3, may have for Europe. We will analyse these consequences in light of the initiatives taken at an international and regional level to combat this phenomenon, as described in chapter 4 and chapter 5.

## 6.2. The consequences of SALW possession

### 6.2.1. Short-term consequences

First of all, on the short-term, SALW possessed by terrorist organisation can be used for organising and executing attacks on European actors and interests in West Africa and the Middle East. The French armed forces, for example, currently have about 5,100 troops deployed in the Sahel region as part of Operation Barkhane.<sup>584</sup> Although in much lower numbers, other armed forces from EU Member States, such as Estonia<sup>585</sup> and Sweden,<sup>586</sup> also have boots on the ground in the region through the Takuba Task Force. European soldiers have repeatedly been the target of Islamic militants. In Mali, for example, at least 50 French soldiers have been killed since 2013.<sup>587</sup> Often these attacks involve the use of IEDs,<sup>588</sup> but also other types of SALW have been used as instruments of violence against European soldiers in the region. In 2019, for example, a French helicopter was forced to land after it was hit by enemy fire from a 7.62mm calibre firearm.<sup>589</sup> In addition to these violent attacks on European soldiers, SALW have also been used to kidnap European citizens for ransom by al-Qaeda affiliated groups in the Sahel-Sahara region in the past two decades (see 2.3.1) Likewise, in the Middle East SALW have also been used as instruments by IS and other groups to carry out kidnapping of foreign nationals, including EU citizens, for ransom (see chapter 3).

Second, the use of SALW offers terrorist organisations the opportunity to plan and execute attacks on European soil. An in-depth investigation by Conflict Armament Research into the weapons of the Islamic State has demonstrated that this organisation possessed not only large quantities, but also a wide variety of SALW.<sup>590</sup> This terrorist organisation used its SALW to control large territories in Iraq and Syria and to finance its activities (see chapter 3). This has also enabled the organisation to plan and organise terrorist attacks on European soil. Various law enforcement investigations have revealed in recent years that the Paris attack in November 2015 and the Brussels attack in November 2016 as well as the foiled attack on the Thalys train between Belgium and France in July 2015 were organised and coordinated by ISIS members in Syria.<sup>591</sup> Europol further warned that foreign terrorist fighters

584 Sylvie Corbet, “France seeks strategy change to reduce troops in West Africa”, *AP News*, January 7, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/ndjamena-chad-paris-summits-france-5a27ec73a69390e2ccf4dab80651a6db>.

585 Estonian Defence Forces, *Operations abroad*, <https://mil.ee/en/defence-forces/operations-abroad/#t-barkhane>, last updated: December 22, 2020.

586 Swedish Armed Forces, *Swedish Special Forces to Mali*, 7 September, 2020, <https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/en/news/2020/09/swedish-special-forces-to-mali/>; Swedish Armed Forces, *Mali (Task Force Takuba)*, January 13, 2021, <https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/en/activities/current-international-missions/mali-task-force-takuba/>.

587 “Sahel conflict: Two French soldiers killed in Mali”, *BBC News*, January 3, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55522236>.

588 See for example: “Two French soldiers killed during operation in Mali”, *France24*, January 2, 2021, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210102-two-french-soldiers-killed-during-operation-in-mali>.

589 “French Helicopter Shot Down Over Mali: The Story of A Daring Rescue”, *Defense-Aerospace.com*, June 24, 2019, <http://www.defense-aerospace.com/articles-view/release/3/203801/a-daring-rescue-after-french-army-gazelle-is-shot-down-in-mali.html>; “French Gazelle that force-landed in Mali was hit by enemy fire”, *DefenceWeb*, June 26, 2019,

<https://www.defenceweb.co.za/aerospace/military-helicopters/french-gazelle-that-force-landed-in-mali-was-hit-by-enemy-fire/>.

591 Mark van Eeckhout, “Met de zegen Abdelhamid Abaaoud”, *De Standaard*, November 17, 2020.

(FTFs) returning to Europe from countries like Syria and Iraq pose a significant security threat, among others because they have increased their proficiency for carrying out attacks, either under direction or independently, through their combat experience and military training in the use of weapons and explosives.<sup>592</sup>

## 6.2.2. Long-term consequences

A potential long-term consequence of the possession and use of SALW by terrorist organisations in the West Africa and the Middle East, is the increased risk that some of these weapons will eventually be trafficked into Europe. In its most recent Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment, Europol added that “various conflict zones in the periphery of the EU have the potential to emerge as major sources of firearms trafficked to the EU.”<sup>593</sup> A recent UNODC report noted that, although such illicit arms flows are currently rather exceptional, the potential risks of future illicit firearms flows into the EU from neighbouring conflict zones, including several countries in the Middle East and North Africa, should not be underestimated.<sup>594</sup> The illicit proliferation of SALW in Libya has especially raised serious concerns for the internal security of the EU. Chapter 2 of this reports not only describes how SALW from Libya have ended up in the hands of terrorist organisations and other non-state actors in West-Africa, but also indicates that some arms flows have reduced—and may have even reversed, with weapons now flowing back into Libya due to increased domestic demand. Chapter 3 moreover warned that goods are sometimes also trafficked from Libya across Egypt, through the Sinai region, into the Middle East, and through the Mediterranean into southern Europe. These findings confirm that the armed conflicts in the country have transformed Libya into the epicentre of illicit firearms trafficking in the region,<sup>595</sup> and underline the potential risk of seeing some of the SALW currently possessed by various terrorist and non-state armed actors active in West and North Africa eventually finding their way into Europe through Libya. In this regard, Europol has noted that “some firearms originating from the conflicts in Syria, Libya and Mali are already available on the European black market and these countries may emerge as major sources of illegal firearms trafficked to the EU.”<sup>596</sup> As mentioned in chapter 5, the EU has recently announced that, in line with the 2018 EU SALW Strategy, it would step up its international cooperation with countries in North Africa and the Middle East with regard to combatting illicit firearms trafficking.<sup>597</sup>

Finally, it is important to stress that combatting the direct and indirect use of SALW as a source of financing for terrorist organisations and targeting such a crime-terror nexus outside of the EU is not only beneficial for peace and stability in the countries involved, but on the long term also beneficial for the internal security situation within the EU. Very often SALW end up in terrorist hands after being possessed and traded by criminals. Yet, this crime-terror nexus can also be inversed. Our analyses suggest that the risk exists that SALW currently in the hands of terrorist organisations outside of Europe might eventually be trafficked into the EU and end up in illicit local gun markets where they can be used by criminals as well as Europe-based terrorists. In the EU, terrorists tend to rely on their criminal connections to acquire weapons for carrying out their attacks.<sup>598</sup> While illicit gun markets in

592 Europol, *TE-SAT 2017: EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report*, (The Hague: Europol, 2017), 14, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/tesat-report>.

593 Europol, *SOCTA - European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment: Crime in the age of technology*, (The Hague: Europol, 2017) 54, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/socta-report>.

594 UNODC, *Illicit Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts, Components and Ammunition to, from and across the European Union: Regional Analysis Report*, Vienna: UNODC, 2020: 22. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/firearms-protocol/publications.html>.

595 Francesco Strazzari and Francesca Zampagni, “Illicit firearms circulation and the politics of upheaval” in: Duquet, N. (ed.), *Triggering terror: Illicit gun markets and firearms acquisition of terrorist networks in Europe*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, (2018): 435-460, [https://flemishpeaceinstitute.eu/safte/files/project\\_safte\\_eu\\_neighbourhood\\_north-africa.pdf](https://flemishpeaceinstitute.eu/safte/files/project_safte_eu_neighbourhood_north-africa.pdf).

596 Europol, *Exploring tomorrow's organised crime*, (The Hague: Europol, 2015), 41, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-documents/exploring-tomorrow%E2%80%99s-organised-crime>.

597 European Commission, *2020-2025 EU action plan on firearms trafficking*, 24 July 2020, COM (2020) 608 final, [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-security/20200724\\_com-2020-608-commission-communication\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-security/20200724_com-2020-608-commission-communication_en.pdf).

598 Nils Duquet and Kevin Goris, “Firearms acquisition by terrorists in Europe: Research findings and policy recommendations of Project SAFTE,” *Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute*, 2018, [https://flemishpeaceinstitute.eu/safte/files/vrede\\_syntheserapport\\_safte\\_](https://flemishpeaceinstitute.eu/safte/files/vrede_syntheserapport_safte_)

the EU are traditionally ‘closed markets’ with restricted access for people outside criminal networks and rather limited access to military-grade firearms or light weapons,<sup>599</sup> the potential increase in trafficking of such weapons into the EU from Africa or the Middle East could significantly accelerate access to these weapons and lead to an increase in use and circulation of these weapons within the criminal underworld in the EU and therefore also make it easier for terrorists to carry out more sophisticated and more lethal attacks within the EU.

*“Individuals who are inspired by or have some kind of loose connection to ISIS getting their hands on illicit arms to carry out attacks in the main portion of Europe...Illicit arms are moving through criminal networks and those criminal networks could provide it to a ISIS sympathiser.”*

**Middle East expert based in North America**

The possession and use of SALW by terrorist organisations as a source of finance can also impact the long-term efforts deployed to prevent and counter the spread of violent extremism. While the EU has an important role to play in both the short- and the long-term establishment of peace and stability in the West Africa and the Middle East, the direct and indirect use of SALW as a source of financing by terrorist organisations clearly undermines this in both regions. The illicit proliferation of SALW has a conflict-igniting effect since easy access to these – generally easy to use – weapons significantly facilitates the possibility of carrying out terrorist attacks and engaging in armed combat. The proliferation of such weapons not only contributes to the risk of an outbreak of violence, but also tends to intensify and sustain existing armed conflicts and violence. The continued presence of these weapons in post-conflict situations also threatens this fragile situation by increasing the risk of returning to conflict and violence.

### 6.3. A greater European involvement

Aware of these threats the EU has committed to preventing and curbing the illicit trade in SALW not only within Europe, but also in other regions around the world through various actions in its 2018 EU SALW Strategy (see chapter 5).<sup>600</sup> This EU SALW Strategy complements the EU Global Strategy (2016), which underlines the need for a comprehensive and integrated approach to conflicts (both multidimensional as well as multilevel) and the need to strengthen international cooperation in the field of counter-terrorism. While the EU SALW Strategy explicitly includes a number of actions in the Africa and the Middle East, these actions are actually rather limited. As mentioned in chapter 5, the EU approach to combatting illicit proliferation of SALW and the use of these weapons by terrorist organisations in West Africa and the Middle East is mainly focused on supporting regional organisations in their actions to combat illicit SALW proliferation. Our analysis has indicated that several initiatives have been taken by these regional organisations, but that their impact generally remains limited due to the complex reality of power struggles within the region, which are sometimes connected to illicit or grey transfers of SALW between neighbouring countries. To be effective the EU should continue its efforts to contribute to peace and stability in these regions by strengthening the relevant regional organisations, whilst remaining realistic about its potential impact.

### 6.4 Tightening SALW exports

An important aspect of the illicit proliferation of SALW in West Africa and the Middle East that the EU can have a direct impact on is the export of such weapons from the EU to these areas and the neighbouring regions. Various EU Member States are significant producers and exporters of SALW: according to the Small Arms Survey: Italy, Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Spain, Croatia and Belgium belong to the ‘top exporters’ of small arms worldwide (with a value of more than 100 million

lr.pdf.

599 Ibid.

600 Council of the European Union, “Council Conclusions on the Adoption of an EU Strategy Against Illicit Firearms, Small Arms & Light Weapons & Their Ammunition,” *European Union*, 13581/18, November 19, 2018, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13581-2018-INIT/en/pdf>.

USD in 2017).<sup>601</sup> Both the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and the EU Common Position 2008/944/CFSP on arms export urge countries to take into account the risk of diversion of SALW into terrorist arsenals. The ATT stipulates that, prior to the authorisation of a conventional arms export, State Parties need to assess the potential that the weapons could be used to commit or facilitate an act constituting an offence under international conventions or protocols relating to terrorism to which the exporting State is a Party (Article 7). The EU Common Position stipulates that, in their assessment of applications for arms export licenses, Member States need take into account the behaviour of the buyer country with regard to terrorism (Criterion 6) and to consider the risk that the weapons might be diverted to terrorist organisations or individual terrorists (Criterion 7).

While direct exports of SALW from EU Member States to terrorist organisations have not been documented, the previous chapters have demonstrated that terrorist organisations also possess and use EU-made SALW. These weapons are generally diverted into the arsenals of terrorist organisations long after original export from the EU. Given that SALW are durable goods with generally a very long lifecycle, many opportunities of diversion can exist at various phases during their lifecycle. Chapter 2, for example, notes that marksman rifles observed in West Africa have been traced back to exports from Eastern European countries to Libya in the late 1970s. Yet, the diversion of EU-made SALW into the arsenals of terrorist organisations can also occur much more rapidly. Chapter 2 also underlines that assault rifles possessed by terrorist and other armed groups in West Africa had been produced between 1951 to as recently as 2017. The previously mentioned report by Conflict Armament Research moreover demonstrated that unauthorised retransfer is a significant source of weapons for IS. These weapons mainly consist of Warsaw Pact calibre weapons and ammunition, purchased by the United States and Saudi Arabia from EU Member States in Eastern Europe. In some cases, this type of diversion happened within a very short time frame. Conflict Armament Research, for example, documented a case of diversion of an advanced anti-tank guided weapon manufactured in the EU that was legally exported to the United States, subsequently illegally supplied to a party in the armed conflict in Syria and eventually ended up in the arsenal of IS forces in less than two months after its initial export from the EU.<sup>602</sup>

## 6.5. Conclusion

Previous analyses have shown that exports of SALW and ammunition from the EU have fuelled the illicit proliferation of these weapons across the globe for several decades, which has resulted in an unknown number of these weapons ending up in the hands of terrorist organisations.<sup>603</sup> Despite the illicit proliferation of SALW in West Africa and the Middle East, and the observed unintentional and intentional diversion of SALW into the arsenals of terrorist organisations, notably through battlefield capture and state-sponsorship, EU Member States have continued to export to both regions, as well as countries that have carried out unauthorised retransfers. In 2019, for example, EU Member States granted export licenses for firearms destined for the Middle East for 63.2 million euros.<sup>604</sup>

The illicit proliferation of SALW in West-Africa and Middle East therefore not only pose significant security risks on the short term in these regions, but also significantly impacts the prospects for peace and stability in these regions and poses some long-term security risks for Europe as well.

601 Nicholas Florquin, Elodie Hainard, and Benjamin Jongleux, "Trade update 2020: An Eye on Ammunition Transfers to Africa," *Geneva: Small Arms Survey*, (2020): 21, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/S-Trade-Update/SAS-Trade-Update-2020.pdf>.

602 "Weapons of Islamic State: A three-year investigation in Iraq and Syria," Conflict Armament Research, 2017, <https://www.conflictarm.com/reports/weapons-of-the-islamic-state/>.

603 Nils Duquet, "The 2018 EU SALW Strategy: Towards an integrated and comprehensive approach," *Brussels: EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium*, 2019. <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2019/eu-non-proliferation-and-disarmament-papers/2018-eu-salw-strategy-towards-integrated-and-comprehensive-approach>.

604 Council (2020), *Twenty-Second annual report according to Article 8(2) of Council Common Position 2008/944 CFSP defining common rules governing the control of exports of military technology and equipment*, *Official Journal of the European Union*, 11 December, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/NL/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AAOJ.C\\_.2020.431.01.0001.01.NLD&toc=OJ%3AC%3A2020%3A431%3ATOC](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/NL/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AAOJ.C_.2020.431.01.0001.01.NLD&toc=OJ%3AC%3A2020%3A431%3ATOC).

## Conclusions and Recommendations

This final chapter provides an overview of the main findings on the nexus between Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and terrorist financing. First, it explores similarities and dissimilarities identified in terms of SALW possession and its use as a means of generating terrorist financing in West Africa and the Middle East. It then discusses some of the main dynamics observed throughout this research, including the importance of diversion as a SALW supply source, the conflict-igniting impact of SALW and their illicit proliferation, the crime-terror nexus, as well as the potential impact of ongoing technological developments on SALW acquisition and use as a financing tool by terrorist organisations. Based on these findings, this chapter finally considers the scope for improvement and presents ten policy recommendations for the EU to take a step forward in addressing this phenomenon.

### 7.1. Comparisons between West Africa and Middle East

#### 7.1.1. What types of SALW do terrorist groups possess in West Africa and the Middle East?

Despite the presence of a wide range of armed actors across West Africa, including various al-Qaeda and Islamic State-affiliated terrorist organisations, little difference can be observed in terms of their armament. Most of these groups, whether located in the Sahel or the Lake Chad Basin, seem to rely on what some experts labelled as “a homogeneous pool of material from the immediate region” mainly comprised of automatic assault rifles, with AK-pattern representing by far the most common weapon used by terrorist groups, and a smaller proportion of machine guns, and rocket-propelled grenade launchers, as well as some designated marksman rifles, handguns, and submachine guns.

In the Middle East, the most well-equipped terrorist organisations seem to be ISIS and Hezbollah. In the region, notably Iraq, Syria, Libya and Lebanon, the most common weapons used by terrorist groups are also AK rifles which are at least thirty years old. Most of the weapons were made by China, Romania and Russia. According to the data of CAR, some 10% of the weapons recovered in the Middle East can be classified as light weapons such as mortars, heavy machine guns and rocket launchers. The AQAP, ISY and the Houthis also have access to rocket launchers.

The types of SALW generally possessed and used by terrorist organisations active in both regions seems to be quite similar, with the majority consisting of assault rifles, in particular AK-pattern weapons. The difference may rather lie in the ratio between SALW and heavy weaponry, with West African groups having access to a limited set of heavy weapons as compared to some violent extremist groups operating in the Middle East, especially IS in Syria and Iraq.

#### 7.1.2. How do terrorist groups acquire SALW in West Africa and the Middle East?

Diversion is the most common method for terrorist groups to acquire weapons in both West Africa and the Middle East. The type of diversion does however differ between regions. Terrorist groups have obtained weapons in both regions through battlefield capture, theft, armed raids and attacks of national stockpiles. While corruption seems to play a role in diverting weapons to terrorist groups in West Africa, many interviewees underlined that it most likely represents a marginal source as compared to arms captured through attacks, whereas in the Middle East, state-sponsored diversion is very common.

Another common source of SALW for terrorist organisations is linked to conflicts, past or present, that fuel flows of SALW. Past conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d’Ivoire, as well as rebellions in Mali and Niger, among others, are all examples of conflicts that have contributed to the proliferation of SALW in the West African region. Similarly, several high-profile events form the core of the acquisition



and use of SALW by terrorist organisations in the Middle East. The Syrian Civil War and the ongoing war in Yemen have had an outsized impact on the proliferation of SALW in the region. Within the Syrian Civil War, the rise of the Islamic State deserves specific scrutiny for its impact on SALW proliferation, as does the collapse of Libya. Even though Libya is not part of the two researched regions, it is inextricably linked to SALW circulation in both West Africa and the Middle East. Neighbouring Egypt also plays a role, and will thus merit additional evaluation, although not to the same extent as Libya.

### 7.1.3. Do terrorist groups (directly or indirectly) use SALW as a source of financing?

The use of SALW as a source of terrorist funding seems to be predominantly indirect.<sup>605</sup> While some experts and stakeholders interviewed mentioned instances in which terrorist organisations may have directly engaged in SALW trafficking, evidence that would point to a structural involvement of such actors in illicit arms trade is lacking for both regions. Moreover, many argued that the incentives for terrorists to engage in the sale of SALW, which represent strategic operational means, are probably very limited. Even in cases where terrorist organisations have acted as arms providers, it remains unclear--and for many unlikely--whether these transfers represented a source of funding or rather a way to build and maintain alliances.

Apart from proceeds derived from the direct sale of SALW, terrorist organisations however appear to have plenty other ways of ‘cashing in on guns’. While information gathered as part of this research does not allow to draw definitive conclusions on the extent to how much terrorist groups profit financially from their implication in SALW trafficking, these weapons clearly appear as essential tools used to conduct most of the income-generating activities these groups rely upon. Both in West Africa and the Middle East, SALW provide violent extremist actors with the coercion power required not only to carry out various criminal activities, such as kidnapping for ransom or robberies, but also to establish and maintain their control over territories, thereby providing them with opportunities to extort local populations and levy taxes on the movements of goods and people within areas under their control. Holistically, it is evident that terrorist financing via SALW remains an extremely multifaceted phenomenon requiring continued comprehensive and diligent monitoring.

### 7.1.4. Links between the regions

As regards potential links between the two researched regions, there have been cases where countries in the Middle East serve as a conduit for weapons-for-gemstones deals. In late 2000 and through 2001, Lebanon was a hub for African conflict diamonds to be traded in exchange for weapons that were sent to rebel groups in Sierra Leone.<sup>606</sup> There were other connections between West Africa and the Middle East. Liberian warlord Charles Taylor acquired weapons from Iran and maintained linkages with Lebanese, Israeli, and Libyan criminals, who also helped him secure SALW.<sup>607</sup>

More recently, research on arms circulating in the Sahel has pointed “to possible links or commonalities of supply sources between Islamist fighters in West Africa and those operating in Iraq and Syria.”<sup>608</sup> Conflict Armament Research has indeed documented in the region some “Iraqi-origin assault rifles and a batch of Chinese rifles manufactured in 2011 whose serial numbers interleave with matching rifles that Syrian Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) seized from IS[IS] fighters in Syria in 2015.”<sup>609</sup> There is still little clarity on potential transfers of weapons and/or of skill sets to produce sophisticated

605 Reinier Bergema, Tanya Mehra, and Méryl Demuyneck, *The Use of Small Arms and Light Weapons by Terrorist Organisations as a Source of Finance*, The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague, September 2020, p.7.

606 Douglas Farah, *Blood From Stones: The Secret Financial Network of Terror*, New York: Broadway Books, 2004, pp.72-75.

607 Douglas Farah, “Fixers, Super Fixers, and Shadow Facilitators: How Networks Connect,” in Michael Miklaucic and Jacqueline Brewer, *Convergence: Illicit Networks and National Security in an Age of Globalization*, Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, April 2013, p.81.

608 Conflict Armament Research. *Investigating Cross-Border Weapon Transfers in the Sahel*. November 2016, p.8.

609 Conflict Armament Research. *Investigating Cross-Border Weapon Transfers in the Sahel*. November 2016, p.8.

craft-weapons from parent organisations located in the Middle East to West African affiliates, but this dynamic certainly deserves to be closely monitored, according to some experts interviewed.

As regards potential conduits for arms trafficking between the two regions, the Sinai land routes and the maritime routes linking Yemen to the Horn of Africa appear as two possible points of transit which would thus require further attention.

## 7.2. Concluding remarks and observations

### 7.2.1. Diversion and terrorist organisations' SALW procurement

Diversion from national stockpiles is the most common source for terrorist groups to acquire their weapons. The Arms Trade Treaty does not provide a definition of diversion, although one of the main objectives of the treaty is to prevent and eradicate the illicit trade in conventional arms and their diversion. In the Preamble of the ATT, reference is made to “Underlining the need to prevent and eradicate the illicit trade in conventional arms and to prevent their diversion to the illicit market, or for unauthorized end use and end users, including in the commission of terrorist acts”. A sub-working group within ATT has been tasked to look into this, but due to COVID 19, the work has been delayed.

As diversion can take many different forms and happen during the different stages of the life cycle, it is moreover often difficult to determine when and how diversion happened. In a study carried out by CAR, it was able to trace the point of diversion in the supply chain in less than 10 percent of the cases of diversion in its database (1092 of the 11093). Although diversion can take place during all stages of the life cycle, it tends to take place towards the middle or end of the transfer chain. 33 percent were manufactured by states parties to the Arms Trade Treaties.<sup>610</sup>

Understanding how diversion took place is however crucial to determine which measures need to be taken to prevent it. For the purposes of this report, a distinction can be made between intentional and unintentional diversion (see Table 4). Unintentional diversion can take place following the collapse of a government and its control over national stockpiles. Examples include the aftermaths of the collapse of Gaddafi regime in Libya but also the breakout of Tuareg insurrection in Mali 2012 or the dissolution of security forces in Syria and Yemen. Other forms of unintentional diversion are accidental leakage of national stockpiles, and unintentional retransfers that come down to negligence. The relevant authorities may have signed an end-user agreement many years ago, but did not keep document and store these agreements and a newly appointed official may transfer these weapons without knowing it violated an end-user agreement.

SALW can also be intentionally diverted by either non-state armed actors including terrorist organisations (unauthorised end-users), or by security personnel or state officials (authorised users). It thus includes weapons which have been obtained by terrorist groups during fighting, through so-called battlefield capture (i.e., looting of national stockpiles through armed attacks, raids on military positions and ambushes on convoys). But it also encompasses the intentional diversion through an active involvement of state officials. This can involve a certain level of corruption among military personnel that facilitate the diversion of weapons, as observed notably in the Sahel. It can also take the form of state-sponsored diversion, which is among the most common forms of diversion in the Middle East, and includes direct state backed supply of weapons and unauthorised retransfers in violation of end-user agreements. Iran, several Gulf States, and Turkey have actively been supplying their proxies with weapons and ammunition.

610 Conflict Armament Research. “Diversion Digest.” August 2, 2019. <https://www.conflictarm.com/digests/diversion-digest-issue-2/>.

Unintentional diversion	Intentional diversion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accidental retransfer (negligence)</li> <li>• Loss of weapons dues to state collapse</li> <li>• Accidental leakage of national stockpiles</li> </ul>	<p><b>Intentional diversion by the unauthorised end-user</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Battlefield capture: armed raids, attacks, ambushes, theft from national stockpiles</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Intentional diversion by the authorised user</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corruption</li> <li>• State-sponsored diversion:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a direct supply of weapons, ammunition, and skills</li> <li>• intentional retransfers of weapons with or without an end user agreement</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

**Table 4.** Forms of diversion.

## 7.2.2. Conflicts fuelling flows of SALW to and from terrorist groups

Due to the low threshold to access and use SALW, their illicit proliferation has a conflict-igniting effect. Moreover, such proliferation tends to intensify and longer sustain existing armed conflicts and political violence in a broader sense. The continued presence of SALW also increases the risk of a return to conflict and violence in post-conflict societies. The legacy of previous conflicts contributes to the circulation of SALW from and to terrorist groups. Considering the involvement of terrorist groups - whether designated internationally, regionally, or nationally - in the various conflicts in either West Africa and Middle East, and the fact that many terrorist groups have acquired weapons in a conflict or post-conflict situation, peace building measures should also address the flow of weapons.

The shift in focus in DDR programmes demonstrates a gap between DDR in policy as originally conceived, and DDR in practice as utilized today. As mentioned earlier, the process was originally intended to take place after combat had ended, or at least act as the first step in the reconciliation process. However, the particular complications which terrorist and violent extremist organisations bring, compounded by the fact that these groups cannot under traditional DDR principles act as signatories to peace agreements, means that often the fighting continues throughout the process and DDR has had to be amenable enough to exist alongside these developments.

DDR programmes are increasingly focussed on community violence reduction and are being implemented without a concluded peace agreement. As discussed in Chapter 4, transitional weapon management can hence be an effective tool prior to, during, or instead of DDR programmes. Although the aim is not necessarily to reduce the flow of weapons, but to reduce violence, through various temporary measures ranging from documenting and marking the weapons, storing weapons securely, deactivating weapons that are not 'needed', it can thus reduce the number of weapons in circulation. As such, the interim measures of transitional weapon management can overlap with the objectives to control the flow of SALW, in particular when the activities, type of measures and target group are similar. In such situations, the transitional WAM and arms control can reinforce each other.

## 7.2.3. Crime-terror nexus

In both regions, the crime-terror nexus is prevalent but not necessarily always easy to identify. In some cases, terrorist groups and criminal networks might incidentally cooperate out of opportunism, whereas in other situations the nexus is more structural and can be viewed as a tactical marriage of convenience.

In an interview with an expert on conflict in Libya, the interviewee spoke at length about what he labelled a "huge nexus" from the Sahel into southern Libya that follows well-established smuggling routes, as well as irregular migration routes. He went on to say that these major highways are bringing arms, drugs, migrants, etc. into North Africa, with the potential to move into southern Europe. Some

trafficking and smuggling routes into Libya emanate in West Africa and sneak up through the Sahel and across Libya's southwest border. From there, criminal networks smuggle illicit products across the Mediterranean into southern Europe. Growing instability in the Sahel and the continued use of countries such as Mauritania, Mali, Niger, and Chad by criminal networks could lead to an increase in smuggling and trafficking Europe. A major drug trafficking route transits Libya on its way to Egypt before moving up through the Balkans and into Europe.<sup>611</sup>

Although it is difficult to document whether terrorist groups are using the smuggling and trafficking of SALW to finance their organisations, it does not mean it does not happen. Another way of identifying and detecting the indirect financing through SALW is approaching it through the organised crime lens. According to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (Palermo Convention), the aim of a criminal network is to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit.<sup>612</sup> When terrorist groups are carrying out activities to fund their operations, this could fall under the scope of the Palermo Convention. Although the Palermo Convention has reached near universal status, many countries struggle to implement the Convention and thus operationalise the benefits it offers in particular to combat organised crimes. Whilst the Palermo is useful for combat organised crime, other non-binding documents such as the Addendum to The Hague Good Practices on the Nexus between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism could be useful to understand, identify and detect the linkages between terrorist groups using SALW as a source of funding.

Any efforts aimed at addressing criminal activities and illicit trafficking should however take due account of the potential impacts for local communities. Disrupting illicit flows and blocking regional smuggling routes may not only lead to further violence from the part of criminal actors willing to defend their businesses, but could also deprive local (border) communities from a vital livelihood in areas where black economies have often provided an income to populations with very limited alternative economic opportunities and prospects.<sup>613</sup>

## 7.2.4. Technology

Like other illicit markets, SALW trafficking is adapting in the digital age. The presence of SALW sales via digital applications in Yemen and Syria, notably Telegram, reflects the fluid nature of SALW marketability in regional conflict zones. Not only does the presence of SALW in the digital sphere allow arms dealers to expand its consumer pool, but it now also provides terrorist organisations with the additional mechanisms to expand the acquisition and possible sale of SALW across demographics and geographic areas. With terrorist organisations enhancing their technical fluency with exploiting digital platforms in these conflict zones, states with declining legitimacy and enforcement capabilities will likely continue to struggle in combating the presence of a digital-SALW marketplace. Consequently, this will likely pose challenges for arms control efforts aiming to address the emerging marketability of SALW in cyberspace and the implications for the acquisition and sale of arms by terrorist organisations.

The use of Telegram by arms traders not only in Yemen, but also in other conflicts in the region is gaining popularity. As noted before, ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliated groups are known to utilise Telegram to engage in the illicit arms trafficking market within Syria.<sup>614</sup> Similarly, research has underlined the emergence of illicit arms markets online and increasing sale of weapons via different social

611 The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, and RHIPTO. *Libya: A Growing Hub for Criminal Economies and Terrorist Financing in the Trans-Sahara*. Policy Brief, May 11, 2015, p.3, [https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/TGIATOC-Libya\\_-a-growing-hub-for-Criminal-Economies-and-Terrorist-Financing-in-the-Trans-Sahara-web.pdf](https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/TGIATOC-Libya_-a-growing-hub-for-Criminal-Economies-and-Terrorist-Financing-in-the-Trans-Sahara-web.pdf).

612 See United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. "United Nations Convention Against Organized Crime and the Protocols Thereto." 2004. <https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNTOC/Publications/TOC%20Convention/TOCebook-e.pdf>.

613 Mark Micallef, Raouf Farrah, Alexander Bish, and Victor Tanner. *After the Storm: Organized crime across the Sahel Sahara following upheaval in Libya and Mali*. Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2019. <https://globalinitiative.net/after-the-storm/>.

614 Adam Rawnsley, Eric Woods, and Christiaan Triebert, "The Messaging App Fueling Syria's Insurgency," *Foreign Policy*, November 6, 2017. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/11/06/the-messaging-app-fueling-syrias-insurgency-telegram-arms-weapons/>.

mediaplatforms in Libya.<sup>615</sup> Terrorist groups exploit the internet for terrorist purposes and can remain relatively anonymous on the Dark web. This platform facilitates the flow and circulation of illegal weapons but can also serve as a source of diverting legally owned weapons. Firearms appear to be the most common product on the Dark web. While it may impose significant challenges to law enforcement to detect and identify purchases by terrorists on the Dark web, purchased weapons would need to be shipped and delivered, which could be tracked by effective traditional law enforcement and border security.<sup>616</sup>

The Internet, in particular the Dark web, is not just a place where weapons can be purchased, but also to acquire skills ranging from how to make weapons and IEDs, but also how to activate deactivated weapons or convert alarm weapons into lethal weapons. This skills transfer is very difficult to trace, but can help to build the capabilities and technical knowledge of terrorist groups to acquire and use other types of weapons which can become a commodity and source of funding.

### 7.3. Policy recommendations

The possession and use of SALW by terrorist organisations as a source of finance can impact the long-term efforts deployed to prevent and counter the spread of violent extremism, as described in chapter 6. While the EU has an important role to play in peace and stability in the Middle East and West Africa on both the short- and the long- term, the acquisition and subsequent direct and indirect use of SALW as a source of finance by terrorist organisations clearly undermines the possibilities for peace and stability in both regions.

Authors recognize that a significant share of the responsibilities to address the nexus between SALW and terrorist financing in West Africa and the Middle East lies with national governments and regional organisations of these two regions, thereby limiting the role that the EU can reasonably play in combating this phenomenon. Findings however underscore two main areas that the EU and its member states can contribute in helping these countries to mitigate risks and challenges posed by the acquisition and use of SALW by terrorist organisations. First, the EU may pursue its efforts to support local initiatives to counter the illicit proliferation of SALW, including by strengthening regional organisations' capacities. Second, as an organisation regrouping several of the most important arms manufacturing and exporting countries globally, one aspect on which the EU may also act more directly--and perhaps with more significant results--is by tightening its control over exports of SALW to these conflict-affected regions.

The EU should take steps to:

1. Strengthen its arms export policy, for example by taking more into account the diversion record of recipients and by following a more restrictive interpretation of the relevant assessment criteria of the Arms Trade Treaty and EU Common Position 2008/944/CFSP. This should help to ensure that no weapons are exported that could be easily re-transferred to countries that violate international humanitarian law and international human rights law:

- through carrying out comprehensive and in-depth pre-export risk assessment on potential violations;
- through monitoring end-user agreements, including through enhancing pre-existing post-delivery checks and on-site inspections;
- through taking more into account diversion record of recipients;

615 Rim Dhaouadi, "Social media and the sale of arms in Libya," *ENACT*, April 12, 2019. <https://enactafrica.org/research/trend-reports/social-media-and-the-sale-of-arms-in-libya>. See also: Gabriel Gatehouse, "Weapons for sale on Facebook in Libya," *BBC News*, April 6, 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-35980338>.

616 "International Arms Trade on the Dark Web." *Rand Corporation* (undated), <https://www.rand.org/randeurope/research/projects/international-arms-trade-on-the-hidden-web.html>.

- through the introduction and effective implementation of post-shipment control measures for SALW; notably hardened post-delivery checks and on-site verification mechanisms.
2. Encourage States that are manufacturing weapons to ratify the ATT, since the majority of weapons being diverted are manufactured by countries that are not members of the ATT, and enhance measures to prevent diversion and carrying out export assessments.
  3. Provide technical and financial assistance to countries in the Middle East and West Africa to improve the management of national stockpiles. This includes not only improving security measures of weapons depots, but also marking, recordkeeping, tracing and destruction of weapons. Work to ensure that the technical and financial assistance is sustainable, and not a “one off,” so that progress can be expanded over time, minimizing setbacks and pitfalls.
  4. Assist the countries in the respective regions to develop an effective WAM not only as a tool to address the arms flow but also to prevent and resolve conflict.
  5. Build confidence and engage with terrorist groups through the use of transitional WAM in a rule of law compliant manner to manage the use of arms during conflict.
  6. Encourage information sharing and closer cooperation between DDR practitioners and SALW control bodies, in order to coordinate and strengthen each other’s work, and drawing lessons - including - from previous DDR programmes on the disarmament efforts in conflicts involving terrorist groups.
  7. Assist the countries in the respective regions to mitigating the threat posed by IEDs through training, resources and equipment which would enable the government to identify, dispose and mitigate the threat posed by IEDs.
  8. Assist conflict-affected countries in improving the capabilities of their law enforcement authorities, border agencies and prosecutors to detect, analyse, and respond to new(er) technological developments - such as 3D printing and advances in the manufacturing, trafficking and use of SALW.
  9. Carry out more research into the crime-terror nexus in the respective regions to obtain a better understanding of, and develop risk indicators to recognize, the links between terrorist groups and criminal networks when trafficking in SALW.
  10. Strengthen the capabilities of the countries to carry out financial investigations and devote resources and funding to training programs to assist countries in the two regions in building the capacity to conduct their own evidence gathering and investigations.

## Annex I: Glossary

Term	Definition
<b>Acquisition</b>	Obtaining - both legally and illegally - of arms by governments and non-state armed actors, such as terrorist organisation. Within this situation report, acquiring, obtaining and sourcing are used interchangeable.
<b>Alarm Weapons</b>	“Blank-firing firearms, also known as alarm guns, starter pistols, or gas guns, are typically noise- and flash producing replicas of real firearms” (Ferguson and Williams, 2014, p. 3). From <i>Replica to Real: An Introduction to Firearms Conversions</i> , Small Arms Survey.
<b>Ammunition / Small Arms Ammunition</b>	<p>“A complete device, (e.g. missile, shell, mine, demolition store etc.) charged with explosives, propellants, pyrotechnics, initiating composition or nuclear, biological or chemical material for use in connection with offence, or defence, or training, or non-operational purposes, including those parts of weapons systems containing explosives.” (Article 3.8 International Ammunition Technical Guideline, Glossary of Terms, Definitions and Abbreviations, UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, 2015.)</p> <p>“Small arms ammunition (less than 20mm calibre) consists of cartridges used in rifles, carbines, revolvers, pistols, submachine guns, and machine guns and shells used in shotguns.” Article 3.261 International Ammunition Technical Guideline, Glossary of Terms, Definitions and Abbreviations, UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, 2015.)</p>
<b>Assault Rifles</b>	<p>“A rifle that is usually capable of single-shot, semi-automatic, or fully automatic fire. It is a military-style small arm, predominantly used as an infantry weapon, and not generally recognized as suitable for or readily adaptable to sporting or hunting purposes.” (<a href="#">Sarah Parker with Marcus Wilson. A Guide to the UN Small Arms Process: 2016 Update. Small Arms Survey</a>)</p> <p>“is a selective fire rifle with a detachable magazine. It is capable of firing in different modes (both fully automatic and semi-automatic fire) and is typically the standard infantry weapon in the armed forces” <a href="https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13250-2015-INIT/en/pdf">https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13250-2015-INIT/en/pdf</a>.</p>
<b>Arms control</b>	“The imposition of restrictions on the production, exchange and spread of weapons by an authority vested with legitimate powers to enforce such restrictions.” ( <a href="#">Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards, Glossary: Terms and Definitions, UN DDR Resource Centre, August 2006.</a> )
<b>Arms Embargo</b>	“A bilateral or multilateral policy prohibiting the movement of weapons into or out of a country” (OCHA Glossary of Humanitarian Terms)
<b>Arms exports</b>	“The sending of weapons, guns and ammunition from one country to another, often closely monitored and controlled by governments” ( <a href="#">Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards, Glossary: Terms and Definitions, UN DDR Resource Centre, August 2006.</a> )
<b>Arms Flow*</b>	Steady, continuous stream of weapons.
	* <i>Within this report the terms circulation and flow are used interchangeable.</i>

<b>Arms Trade</b>	As per the Arms Trade Treaty and relating specifically to arms: “the activities of the international trade comprise export, import, transit, trans-shipment and brokering.” (Article 2(2) Arms Trade Treaty, 2013.)
<b>Arms Transfers</b>	“Any transaction resulting in a change of title to, and/or control over, any arms defined in Article 1, and any physical movement of any arms defined in Article 1 from one jurisdiction to another. Such transfers include those conducted in return for direct payment, credit, foreign aid, grants, and goods received as a result of off-set or barter arrangements. They also include transfers of expertise, information, designs, technology or goods under licensing and co-production agreements, leasing arrangements, and arms deliveries in return for which the supplier receives no financial compensation, goods or services. Logistical and financial support for any of the above arrangements are also included.” Article 2(a) International Code of Conduct on Arms Transfers, 2000)
<b>Battlefield Capture</b>	The procurement of armaments and munitions as a result of kinetic operations. Can occur during or after an armed engagement or when the group successfully occupies territory.
<b>Converted Arms</b>	“Any arms such as blank firing, air-soft, paintball or air cartridge that is adapted or modified to enable a shot, bullet or other projectile to be discharged that is capable of lethal injury.” ( <a href="#">UNODC. Arms seized by condition.</a> )
<b>Craft-Produced SALW</b>	“Weapons that are fabricated outside state control, by hand, in small quantities, and with a reduced capability, as opposed to their industrially manufactured counterparts” (Small Arms Survey, Handmade and Deadly, Briefing Paper, June 2018, p4)
<b>Demobilisation</b>	“Demobilization is the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces or other armed groups. The first stage of demobilization may extend from the processing of individual combatants in temporary centres to the massing of troops in camps designated for this purpose (cantonment sites, encampments, assembly areas or barracks). The second stage of demobilization encompasses the support package provided to the demobilized, which is called reinsertion” (Secretary General, note to the General Assembly, A/C.5/59/31, May 2005). (Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards, <i>Glossary: Terms and Definitions</i> , UN DDR Resource Centre, August 2006.)
<b>Disarmament</b>	“Disarmament is the collection, documentation, control and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives and light and heavy weapons of combatants and often also of the civilian population. Disarmament also includes the development of responsible arms management programmes” (Secretary-General, note to the General Assembly, A/C.5/59/31, May 2005). (Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards, <i>Glossary: Terms and Definitions</i> , UN DDR Resource Centre, August 2006.)



<b>Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR)*</b>	<p>“A process that contributes to security and stability in a post-conflict recovery context by removing weapons from the hands of combatants, taking the combatants out of military structures and helping them to integrate socially and economically into society by finding civilian livelihoods.” (Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards, <i>Glossary: Terms and Definitions</i>, UN DDR Resource Centre, August 2006.)</p> <p><i>*Also see separate entries for ‘disarmament’, ‘demobilization’ and ‘reintegration’</i></p>
<b>Diversion</b>	<p>“The ATT does not provide a definition of diversion. In general terms, diversion is the transfer of items from an authorized owner/user to an unauthorized user” (<a href="#">Arms Trade Treaty Implementation Toolkit, Module 1 Preventing Diversion</a>)</p>
<b>Dual-Use Equipment</b>	<p>Materials and products capable of being utilised for both civil and military purposes.</p>
<b>End-User Agreements</b>	<p>Contracts designed to “help ensure that legally transferred small arms and light weapons reach their authorized end-user, are used in a manner consistent with their authorized end-use, [and] are not diverted to the illicit market.” (“Small Arms: End-Use Verification.” United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs.)</p>
<b>Firearm</b>	<p>“Any portable barrelled weapon that expels, is designed to expel or may be readily converted to expel a shot, bullet or projectile by the action of an explosive, excluding antique firearms or their replicas” (<a href="#">Article 3 (a) Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime Treaty Series, 2001</a>)</p>
<b>Handguns</b>	<p>Smooth-bore weapons with a calibre of less than 20 mm, other arms and automatic weapons with a calibre of 12,7 mm (calibre 0,50 inches) or less and accessories, as follows, and specially designed components therefor: (a) Rifles and combination guns, handguns, machine, sub-machine and volley guns (Defined as an ML1 weapon in the Common Military List of the European Union: equipment covered by Council Common Position defining common rules governing the control of exports of military technology and equipment.)</p> <p>Defined as a short firearm: 'short firearm' means a firearm with a barrel not exceeding 30 centimetres or whose overall length does not exceed 60 centimetres ; Annex 1, IV(a Council Directive on the control and acquisition of firearms, European Commission.</p> <p>“a firearm designed to be held and fired in one hand and not dedicated to be shouldered” <a href="https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13250-2015-INIT/en/pdf">https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13250-2015-INIT/en/pdf</a></p>

<b>Illicit Manufacturing</b>	<p>“The manufacturing or assembly of firearms, their parts and components or ammunition: (i) From parts and components illicitly trafficked; (ii) Without a licence or authorization from a competent authority of the State Party where the manufacture or assembly takes place; or (iii) Without marking the firearms at the time of manufacture, in accordance with article 8 of this Protocol Licensing or authorization of the manufacture of parts and components shall be in accordance with domestic law” (<a href="#">Article 3 (d) Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime Treaty Series, 2001.</a>)</p>
<b>Illicit Trafficking*</b>	<p>“The import, export, acquisition, sale, delivery, movement or transfer of firearms, their parts and components and ammunition from or across the territory of one State Party to that of another State Party if any one of the States Parties concerned does not authorize it in accordance with the terms of this Protocol or if the firearms are not marked in accordance with article 8 of this Protocol” (<a href="#">Article 3 (e) Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime Treaty Series, 2001.</a>)</p> <p><i>* Within this situation report, the terms illicit trafficking and smuggling are used interchangeably</i></p>
<b>Illicit Transfers</b>	<p>A transfer of arms is deemed illicit if “They (the arms) are transferred in violation of arms embargoes decided by the Security Council in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations” or if “They are transferred without a licence or authorization by a competent national authority” (Article 6 (b) and (e) of the International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons, Small Arms Review Conference, 2005. )</p>

<b>Improvised Explosive Devices / Anti-personnel mines</b>	<p>“A device placed or fabricated in an improvised manner incorporating explosive material, destructive, lethal, noxious, incendiary, pyrotechnic materials or chemicals designed to destroy, disfigure, distract or harass. They may incorporate military stores, but are normally devised from non-military components.” Article 3.140 International Ammunition Technical Guideline, Glossary of Terms, Definitions and Abbreviations, UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, 2015.)</p> <p>“Due to the lack of an internationally agreed definition of the term IED and the broad use of this term to describe a range of weapons spanning from improvised rockets and mortars to improvised anti-personnel mines and remotely controlled explosive devices, there has been some confusion about which IEDs fall within the definition of anti-personnel mines” Views and Recommendations on Improvised Explosive Devices Falling within the Scope of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention   ICRC</p> <p>"Anti-personnel mine" means a mine designed to be exploded by the presence, proximity or contact of a person and that will incapacitate, injure or kill one or more persons. Mines designed to be detonated by the presence, proximity or contact of a vehicle as opposed to a person, that are equipped with anti-handling devices, are not considered anti-personnel mines as a result of being so equipped.” <a href="#">Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, 18 September 1997, Article 2(1)</a></p>
<b>Loss from Stockpiles</b>	<p>The loss of small arms and light weapons from state-owned stockpiles through force, theft, or pilferage.</p>
<b>Man-portable air defence systems (MAN-PAD)</b>	<p>Short-range surface-to-air missile systems intended for attacking and defending against low-flying aircraft. (Berman and Leff, 2008, p. 16 (<a href="#">Sarah Parker with Marcus Wilson. A Guide to the UN Small Arms Process: 2016 Update. Small Arms Survey</a>))</p>
<b>Machine Gun</b>	<p>Heavy machine guns are capable of firing calibres ranging from 12.7 mm up to but not including 20 mm, the size of the smallest cannon munitions. They are man-portable but are typically mounted on vehicles or ground mounts as antipersonnel and anti-aircraft weapons. They are effective against personnel, light armoured vehicles, low- and slow-flying aircraft, and small boats (Berman and Leff, 2008, p. 21) (<a href="#">Sarah Parker with Marcus Wilson. A Guide to the UN Small Arms Process: 2016 Update. Small Arms Survey</a>)</p> <p>“A fully automatic light weapon with a calibre of 12.7 mm up to but not including 20 mm.” (<a href="#">Sarah Parker with Marcus Wilson. A Guide to the UN Small Arms Process: 2016 Update. Small Arms Survey</a>)</p> <p>“is a firearm that fires rapidly and repeatedly without Automatic Weapon requiring separate pressure on the trigger each time The gun will continue to fire until the trigger is released or the supply of ammunition exhausted” <a href="https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13250-2015-INIT/en/pdf">https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13250-2015-INIT/en/pdf</a></p>

<b>Mortar</b>	<p>Mortars are generally smooth-bored, indirect-fire support weapons that enable users to engage targets outside their line of sight, such as behind hills, while minimizing their exposure to direct enemy fire. The Small Arms Survey recognizes three types of mortars in the light weapons category: ‘light’ (up to and including 60 mm), ‘medium’ (61 mm to 82 mm), and ‘heavy’ (83 mm to 120 mm). (Berman and Leff, 2008, p. 26)</p> <p><a href="#">(Sarah Parker with Marcus Wilson. A Guide to the UN Small Arms Process: 2016 Update. Small Arms Survey)</a></p>
<b>Neutralised Weapons*</b>	<p>“To alter the state of a piece of ammunition or munition so that it cannot explode, for example by replacing safety devices such as pins or rods into an explosive item to prevent the fuze or igniter from functioning.” Article 3.183 International Ammunition Technical Guideline, Glossary of Terms, Definitions and Abbreviations, UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, 2015.)</p> <p><i>*Neutralization does not make an item completely safe as removal of the safety devices will immediately make the item active again.</i></p>
<b>Proliferation</b>	<p>“The increase or spread of weapons and ammunition to users” (<a href="#">United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. Guide to the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines. UN Safeguard, 2015.</a>)</p>
<b>Reactivated Arms</b>	<p>“Any weapon previously deactivated by the competent authority with a view to rendering it permanently inoperable and that has illegally been returned to working condition.” (<a href="#">United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Arms seized by condition.</a>)</p>
<b>Reintegration</b>	<p>“Reintegration is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open time-frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility, and often necessitates long-term external assistance” (Secretary-General, note to the General Assembly, A/C.5/59/31, May 2005). (Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards, <i>Glossary: Terms and Definitions</i>, UN DDR Resource Centre, August 2006.)</p>
<b>Retransfer</b>	<p>“The sale or transfer of weapons that were originally imported from another state to a different end user within or outside the importing state; the latter case is also known as re-export.” (<a href="#">Sarah Parker with Marcus Wilson. A Guide to the UN Small Arms Process: 2016 Update. Small Arms Survey</a>)</p>
<b>Rifle</b>	<p>“a long-barrelled firearm that expulses projectiles through a grooved or ‘rifled’ barrel and that is designed to be fired from the shoulder. Rifles are a common type of civilian and military small arm.” (<a href="#">Sarah Parker with Marcus Wilson. A Guide to the UN Small Arms Process: 2016 Update. Small Arms Survey</a>)</p>

<b>Rocket(-Propelled Grenade) Launchers</b>	<p>Bombs, torpedoes, rockets, missiles, other explosive devices and charges and related equipment and accessories, as follows, and specially designed components therefor: (a) Bombs, torpedoes, grenades, smoke canisters, rockets, mines, missiles, depth charges, demolition-charges, demolition-devices, demolition-kits, "pyrotechnic" devices, cartridges and simulators (i.e. equipment simulating the characteristics of any of these items), specially designed for military use; (b) Missile or rocket nozzles and re-entry vehicle nosetips. Defined as an ML4 weapon in the Common Military List of the European Union: equipment covered by Council Common Position defining common rules governing the control of exports of military technology and equipment.</p>
<b>Seizure</b>	<p>"munitions consisting of a rocket motor and a payload, which may be an explosive warhead or other device." (Article 3.238 International Ammunition Technical Guideline, Glossary of Terms, Definitions and Abbreviations, 2015)</p> <p>"Temporarily prohibiting the transfer, conversion, disposition or movement of property or temporarily assuming custody or control of property on the basis of an order issued by a court or other competent authority" (<a href="#">Article 2 (f) United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2000.</a>)</p>
<b>Small Arms and Light Weapons</b>	<p>"Small arms and light weapons range from clubs, knives and machetes to, for example, mortars below the calibre of 100 mm. They are manufactured to military specifications for use as lethal instruments of war. Broadly speaking, small arms are those weapons designed for personal use, and light weapons are those designed for use by several persons serving as a crew." (Small arms and light weapons (SALW)   Migration and Home Affairs) (<a href="https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/e-library/glossary/small-arms-and-light-weapons-salw_en">https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/e-library/glossary/small-arms-and-light-weapons-salw_en</a>)</p> <p>'The authors have adopted the EU's definition of small arms (i.e. revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, sub-machine guns, assault rifles, and light machineguns) and light weapons (i.e. heavy machine-guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers of anti-tank missile and rocket systems, portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems, mortars of calibres of less than 100 mm, ammunition and explosives, cartridges (rounds) for small arms, shells and missiles for light weapons, mobile containers with</p> <p><a href="https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/e-library/glossary/small-arms-and-light-weapons-salw_en">ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/e-library/glossary/small-arms-and-light-weapons-salw_en</a></p>
<b>State-Sponsored Diversion Stockpile</b>	<p>Situation where a State supported the diversion of - intentionally or unintentionally of unauthorized weapons to authorized end-users or authorized weapons to unauthorized end-users.</p> <p>"The full range of ammunition stockpiles in a country under the control of separate organisations such as the police, military forces (both active and reserve), border guards, ammunition producing companies" (Article 3.180 International Ammunition Technical Guideline, Glossary of Terms, Definitions and Abbreviations, 2015)</p>
<b>(Suicide) Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices</b>	<p>"An improvised explosive device placed inside a car or other vehicle and then detonated. It is commonly used as a weapon of assassination, terrorism or guerrilla warfare, to kill the occupants of the vehicle, people near the blast site, or to damage buildings or other property." (The United States Homeland Security Market Research)</p>

<b>Surplus of Weapons</b>	“Firearms, ammunition and other related materials rendered surplus, redundant or obsolete through the re-equipment or re-organisation of armed forces or other state bodies” (Article 10 of the SADC Protocol on the Disposal of State Owned Firearms 2004. )
<b>Transfer</b>	“the physical movement of materiel from one state to another or within a country” (Parker, 2009, p. 64). ( <a href="#">Sarah Parker with Marcus Wilson. A Guide to the UN Small Arms Process: 2016 Update. Small Arms Survey</a> )
<b>Unauthorised Retransfer*</b>	“Supplies of weapons by states in violation of agreements made with original supplier governments” Conflict Armament Research p31 (rsi.ch)
	<i>*See the definition of end-user agreements</i>

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