

Diversion of Arms and Ammunition in Peace Operations

Observations based on Missions in Sudan and South Sudan

The deployment of United Nations (UN) Blue Helmets (comprising police and military personnel) has reached record highs, numbering at least 100,000. More than one in four Blue Helmets serving in the 16 current UN peacekeeping operations is deployed in South Sudan or Sudan. The Small Arms Survey recently reviewed the 11 peace operations¹ undertaken in these two countries from 2002 to 2014. It focused on those authorized by the African Union (AU) and the UN. As in other similar undertakings, peacekeepers in Sudan and South Sudan have worked in environments that are often hostile and in inhospitable terrain where there is little or no peace to keep. Given the nature of their operations, and despite carrying out their duties ably and professionally, these peacekeepers have lost² weapons and ammunition, often because of simply being in the ‘wrong place at the wrong time’.

This Research Note documents the scale and scope of arms and ammunition diverted from peacekeepers in missions in Sudan and South Sudan. It is based on research the Small Arms Survey has undertaken over the past ten years on arms proliferation and arms holdings in Sudan and South Sudan as part of its Human

Security Baseline Assessment (HSBA) project. The Note summarizes findings from the most recent HSBA study (Berman and Racovita, 2015; see Figure 1), and draws on a new Small Arms Survey Diversion Dataset that comprises information from various sources, including UN and AU reports, media articles, academic works, and more than 100 interviews with key informants. It seeks to help peace operations to be more effective by examining the little-studied issue of the diversion of their weapons and ammunition (see Berman and Racovita, 2013).

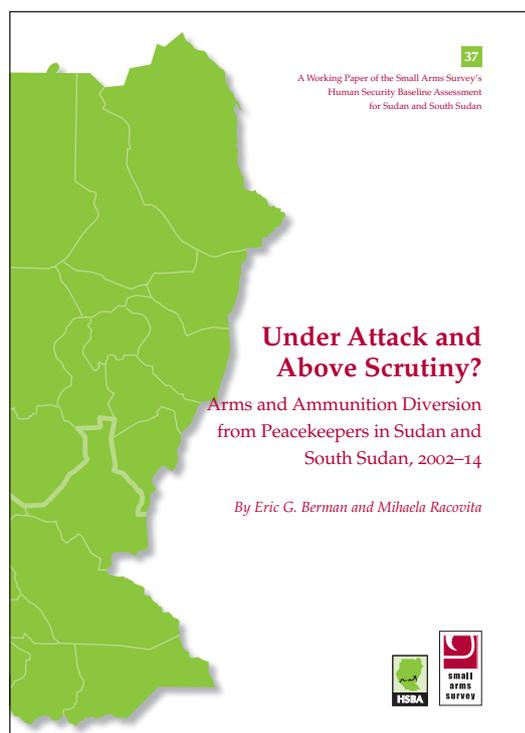
This Note uses a working definition of diversion as the ‘unauthorized change in possession or use of military materiel (arms, ammunition, parts, and explosives), from holdings or transfers, occurring domestically and internationally’. While recognizing that the diversion of other materiel such as communications equipment, uniforms, and vehicles can also have negative effects on force protection, the study does not address such losses.

Diversion of materiel is not infrequent or negligible

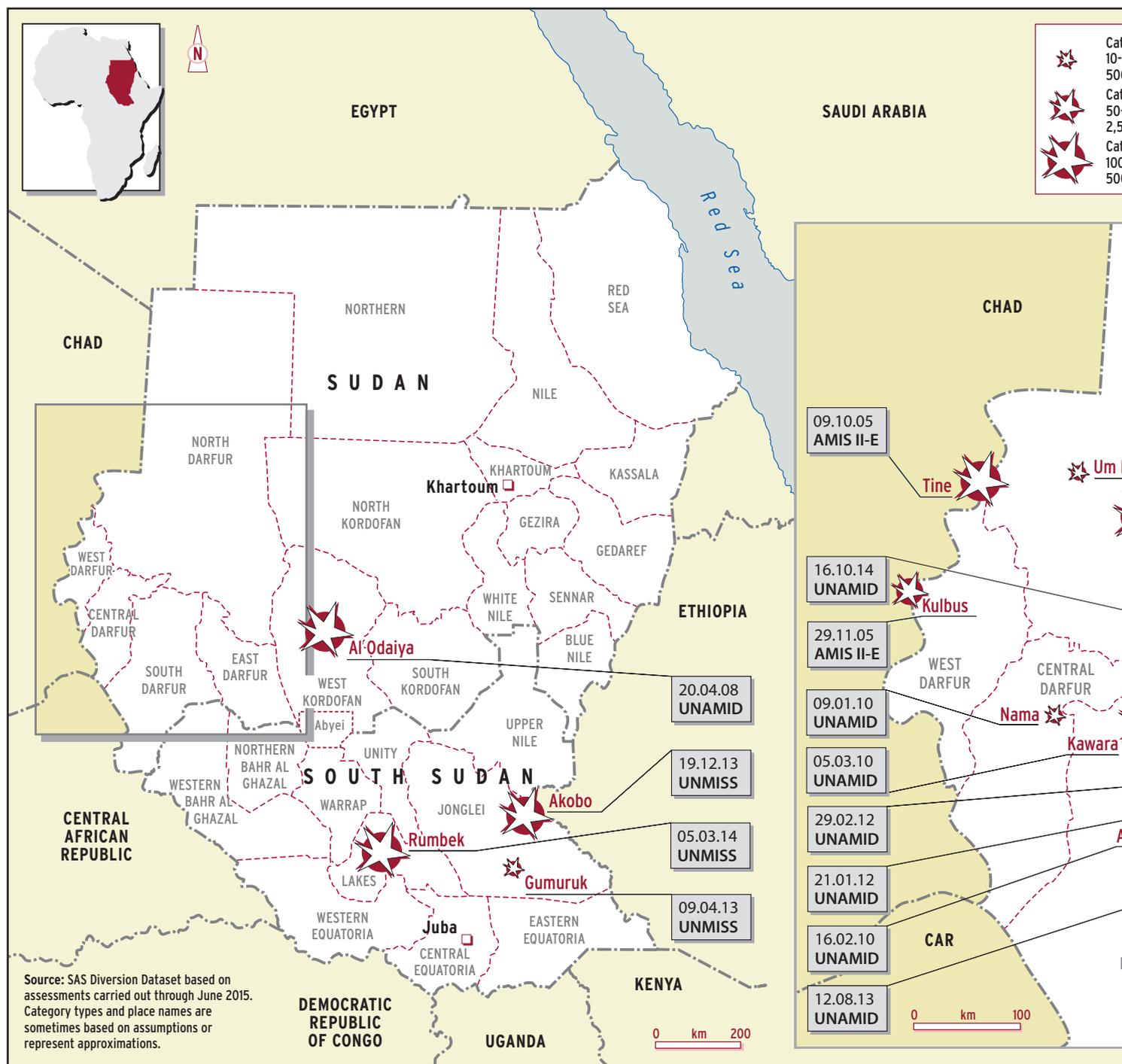
From 2004, when peacekeeping forces with arms and ammunition were first deployed in Sudan, through 2014, there were at least 22 notable incidents of diversion (see Map 1). Losses have occurred during patrols, convoys, and at fixed sites. This represents an average of one such event every six months. The study defines ‘notable’ as those cases in which peacekeepers lose ten or more firearms or 500 or more rounds of ammunition. These events are divided into three categories: Category I (10–49 firearms or 500–2,499 rounds of ammunition); Category II (50–99 firearms or 2,500–4,999 rounds of ammunition); and Category III (100 or more firearms or 5,000 or more rounds of ammunition).

Almost half of the 22 recorded notable incidents were Category II or III events. One such incident alone resulted in the loss of more than 500,000 rounds of ammunition. Four other incidents probably involved losses of at least 10,000 cartridges. The overrunning and mass looting of the AMIS II-E Haskanita base in 2007, for instance, almost certainly involved the loss of over 100,000 rounds of ammunition. Very little

Figure 1 HSBA Working Paper 37



Map 1 Notable incidents of arms and ammunition diverted from AU and UN missions in Sudan and South Sudan, 2005-14³



Source: SAS Diversion Dataset based on assessments carried out through June 2015. Category types and place names are sometimes based on assumptions or represent approximations.

Source: Berman and Racovita, 2015, pp. 66-67

equipment lost during these attacks has been recovered. The seizure by the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA)—and subsequent return in March 2014—of materiel (more than 50 firearms and 6,000 rounds of ammunition) taken from the UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS) is a noteworthy exception.

In the notable incidents documented, a total of more than 500 weapons and over 750,000 rounds of ammunition were seized. These items include pistols, assault rifles, machine guns (including

heavy machine guns), grenade launchers, anti-tank weapons, and mortars, as well as the ammunition and munitions for these weapons systems.

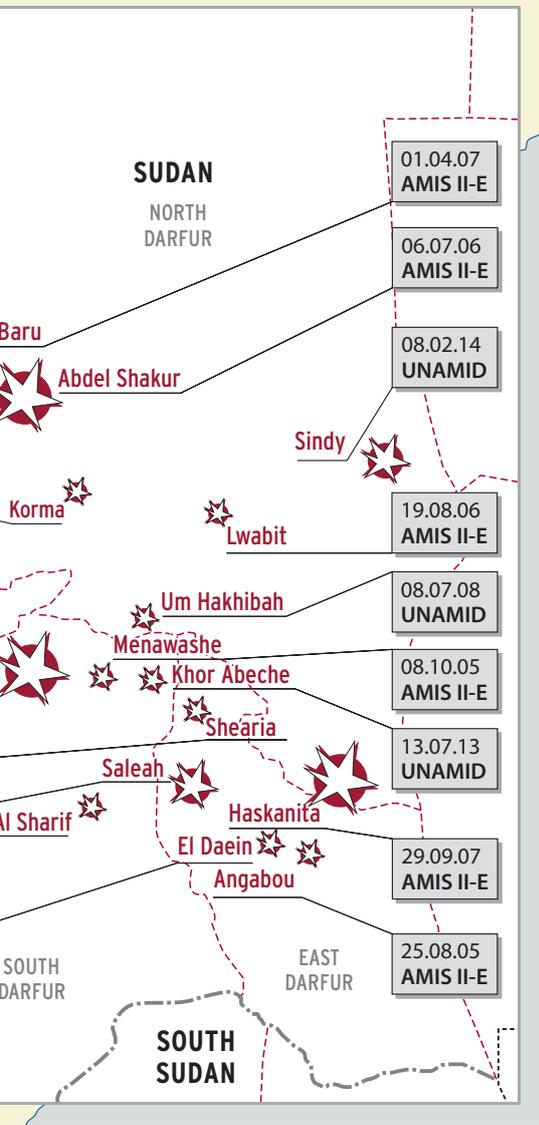
Recorded losses significantly underestimate true scale and scope

The number of notable incidents and lost materiel recorded in the Survey’s study significantly underestimate the true scale and scope of diversion from

peace operations in Sudan and South Sudan. The way in which information is reported can be as problematic as the tendency not to report. Imperfect record-keeping and a preference not to share information or publish details result in many such events remaining undocumented (see below).

Moreover, the number of small-scale non-‘notable’ incidents may result in significant cumulative losses. The Survey’s study highlights a ten-week period during which four attacks on AU/UN Hybrid Operation Darfur

Category I 1-49 weapons or 0-2,499 rounds of ammo	--- International boundary
Category II 50-99 weapons or 2,500-4,999 rounds of ammo	- - - State boundary
Category III 100+ weapons or 5,000+ rounds of ammo	⋯⋯⋯ Abyei
	□ National capital
<i>The higher category is selected even if only one criterion is met.</i>	



(UNAMID) forces resulted in the loss of at least four assault rifles, one light machine gun, 380 rounds of ammunition and two vehicles—and, most importantly, the lives of two peacekeepers. Every day AU and UN peacekeepers routinely undertake dozens, if not hundreds, of patrols, which amounts to many thousands each year. For example, between December 2008 and January 2009, when UNAMID's military and police were deployed at less than 60 per cent of full strength, the mission undertook more than 8,000

patrols—an average of more than five an hour (UNSC, 2009, paras. 2, 3, 22).⁴ Such patrols almost always occur without incident. But even if only one in a thousand patrols results in an altercation with an armed group, and one in ten of these altercations results in a loss of contingent-owned equipment (COE), this would suggest that hundreds of incidents that have included losses of various magnitudes go unreported. Even if none of these constituted a 'notable' incident, together they would represent a significant loss of materiel, including arms and ammunition. It would therefore be useful to develop a better understanding of the circumstances and frequency of attacks on patrols.

Obfuscation in reporting and problematic record-keeping

A tendency to obfuscation and imprecise use of terminology obscures the value of reporting. 'Ambush' is often used as a catch-all term, to the extent that it has lost any specific meaning. For example, in the course of its research the Survey found that 'ambush' has been used to describe an instance in which peacekeepers are accosted and asked to give up their weapons by a small and lightly armed foe with no tactical advantage. The same term is used to describe a large attacking force of heavily armed men on horseback and with vehicles fitted with machine guns—sometimes enjoying the advantage of higher ground. Furthermore, in the absence of greater detail, the word 'vehicle' can be used to minimize or understate the significance or existence of the materiel lost. Many non-armoured commercial vehicles serve as troop escorts or 'technicals' and are armed with medium or heavy machine guns, but specifics on such losses are seldom offered.

Imperfect reporting and record-keeping are another contributing factor. There is a noticeable and understandable reluctance to share bad news. Communication is sometimes made more difficult when peacekeepers are tasked with filing reports in a language that is not their mother tongue, which can reduce useful detail and nuance.

A shortage of computers and telecommunications equipment in the AU Mission in the Sudan (AMIS) made it harder for the AU to be kept informed of incidents of diversion.

Oversight of recovered weapons a 'grey area'

Peacekeepers' record-keeping and oversight of weapons recovered are also considered problematic. The recording of materiel recovered during formal and mandated disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) exercises is usually fairly rigorous (even if not particularly effective in terms of weapons tracing). Yet there is often little record-keeping or oversight of weaponry and ammunition recovered outside DDR programmes. The handling of weapons recovered in cordon and search operations, engagements with hostile forces, or raids on arms caches, is often conducted ad hoc. Some items are returned to the armed group from which they were taken, some are redistributed to local authorities, while others may be destroyed or retained for safe keeping. (This laissez-faire approach is apparently not limited to peace operations covered in the study.) In this respect, the UN Security Council's recent reaffirmation of the mandate of the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) to destroy the arms and ammunition it confiscates is an important development.

Conclusion

This Research Note and the study on which it is based do not seek to exaggerate the scale of the diversion of arms and ammunition during peace operations. The Survey is aware of the political sensitivities and calculations involved in fielding peace operations, and has sought to be conservative in its estimates and transparent in its methodology. The research does not suggest that diversion from peacekeeping operations poses a vast challenge or that it is more important than addressing other ways in which armed groups obtain materiel. While it is impossible to make a precise estimate

of the total 'pie' of illicit weapons and ammunition held by armed groups, the research suggests that those obtained from peacekeepers represent a relatively small 'slice'. The study does, however, reveal that losses of materiel are neither infrequent nor negligible, and that record-keeping, reporting, and oversight could be improved. It also seeks to address some of the political sensitivities that may impede the reporting of diversion incidents. Given the likelihood that peacekeepers will be required to undertake more complex missions in areas of greater insecurity, it is also more likely that they will be exposed to attacks. Addressing concerns about diversion may, therefore, become more pronounced and timely. ■

Abbreviations and acronyms

AMIS	AU Mission in the Sudan
AMIS II-E	AMIS II-Enhanced
AU	African Union
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration
HSBA	Human Security Baseline Assessment
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
UN	United Nations
UNAMID	AU/UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur
UNMISS	UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan

Notes

- 1 In this Research Note and the main research study, the Survey uses 'peace operations' to encompass all forms of multilateral engagement that include the deployment of uniformed police or military personnel, armed and unarmed, except for military engagements that seek to overthrow governments. These missions include, but are not limited to, 'peacekeeping operations', 'peace support operations', 'peace enforcement operations', and 'stabilization operations'.
- 2 Although this Research Note uses the terms 'loss' and 'diversion' interchangeably, the study notes that the loss of weapons or ammunition does not necessarily imply an incident of diversion. In some cases, peacekeepers lose materiel in ways (such as drowning in a river) that make it unlikely that the items will re-enter circulation.

- 3 AMIS I, the fourth of the 11 peace operations to serve in Sudan or South Sudan, was the first mission to deploy with arms and ammunition. The first incidents of diversion were recorded in 2005, under AMIS II-E.
- 4 According to the UN, the mission undertook 8,694 patrols in December 2008 and January 2009, of which the military component conducted 3,552 (1,325 confidence-building, 1,748 village, and 479 escort patrols) and the police component was responsible for 4,142 patrols (3,806 inside camps of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 1,336 outside these camps) (UNSC, 2009, para. 22). This represents an average of just over 140 patrols a day.

References

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For more information about the Sudan and South Sudan HSBA, please visit: <http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org>

About the Small Arms Survey

The Small Arms Survey is a global centre of excellence whose mandate is to generate impartial, evidence-based, and policy-relevant knowledge on all aspects of small arms and armed violence. It is the principal international source of expertise, information, and analysis on small arms and armed violence issues, and acts as a resource for governments, policy-makers, researchers, and civil society. It is located in Geneva, Switzerland, at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies. For more information, please visit:

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About the HSBA project

Through the generation and dissemination of timely, empirical research, the Human Security Baseline Assessment (HSBA) for Sudan/South Sudan supports violence-reduction initiatives, including DDR programmes, incentive schemes for civilian arms collection, as well as security-sector reform and arms-control interventions across Sudan and South Sudan. The HSBA also offers policy-relevant advice on addressing insecurity.

Publication date: September 2015

Credits

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