

Measuring Illicit Arms Flows: Somalia

Evidence of illicit weapons flows within and to Somalia points to multiple sources and end users, and indicates a vast array of weapons types forming such flows, from pistols and rifles to heavy machine guns and rocket-propelled grenade launchers (RPGs). While there has been some success in curbing illicit flows—with seizures and reductions in some supply routes—weapons and ammunition continue to proliferate among a range of non-state actors, including clan militias, opposition groups, and private citizens.

In recent years illicit arms flows have been given significant attention at the global level, culminating in September 2015 with the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and, more specifically, SDG Target 16.4, which commits states to significantly reduce illicit arms flows by 2030 (UNGA, 2015). As the Small Arms Survey has pointed out, the UN's proposed indicator for measuring progress towards achieving this target—Indicator 16.4.2¹—can be complemented with a range of additional indicators (De Martino and Atwood, 2015). In this context, this Research Note—the first in a series of four on measuring illicit arms flows in selected countries—addresses some of the dynamics of illicit weapons flows into and within the South Central region of Somalia ('South Central'),² which is an area of active armed conflict. In particular, it highlights opportunities to enhance stakeholders' knowledge about illicit weapons and ammunition trends through the regular collection of data on seizures to support progress towards the achievement of Target 16.4 in Somalia.

Arms trafficking in context

The UN Security Council imposed a complete weapons embargo on Somalia shortly after the collapse of its government in 1991 (UNSC, 1992). Currently, a partial lifting of the provisional rules of the embargo allow for the delivery of some weapons types that are intended to improve the capacity of the security forces of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) (UNSC, 2013a).³ While the FGS has made some progress towards the management of state stockpiles and their distribution to its security forces, illicit arms trafficking and

the diversion of FGS supplies remain grave concerns (UNIDIR, 2014).

Weak FGS security provision is one enabling factor of illicit weapons flows in South Central. It also allows for—and is perpetuated by—the existence of powerful clan militias and other non-state security providers engaged in illicit weapons transfers (Menkhaus, 2016). While clan militias and other armed groups compete for control of vast areas of territory in South Central, the government's political influence and territorial control is often tenuous at best (Felbab-Brown, 2015). For its part, al-Shabaab—the most prominent opposition group in Somalia—can move weapons within South Central and receive them from multiple locations in the region, as well as from the neighbouring regions of Puntland and Somaliland (UNSC, 2013c, p. 26). In this environment, FGS mechanisms to regulate weapons movements and usage are often irrelevant.

Sources of illicit arms

The Small Arms Survey defines illicit small arms as 'weapons that are produced, transferred, held, or used in violation of national or international law' (Schroeder, 2013, p. 284). This definition acknowledges the many different forms of illicit arms flows. In addition to cross-border trafficking, illicit weapons include black market purchases, legal holdings diverted from authorized users (for example, security agencies or private individuals), or other illegally produced weapons (for example, unlicensed 'craft' production). While a majority of illicit firearms in the country are Kalashnikov-pattern rifles, other types include pistols, non-AK-type automatic rifles, light and heavy machine guns, and other light weapons such as RPGs (Schroeder and King, 2012, p. 338; UNSC, 2014a; 2015).

Domestic arms flows and trade

Internal illicit weapons flows in South Central include deliberate leakage and the sale of state weapons to non-state groups, in addition to black market trading and battlefield seizures—the latter including weapons from FGS and African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) forces (UNSC, 2015; Aglionby, 2016).

A blurred separation between state and non-state forces in South Central underscores one of the many dilemmas facing the FGS. Members of the Somalia National Army (SNA) or Somali Police Force may also serve in a clan militia. This has resulted in the deliberate diversion of state supplies to non-FGS groups (UNSC, 2014a, p. 8). Desertion among security forces has also been problematic. Retention rates of trained police and soldiers were once as low as 20 per cent, with former security providers absconding with government weapons, ammunition, and uniforms (UNSC, 2008, p. 12; Bryden, 2013, p. 10). The irregular payment or non-payment of salaries to SNA troops has caused other desertions (Shabelle News, 2016).

Arms dealers continue to facilitate unregulated arms trading in parts of Mogadishu, and evidence shows that illicit weapons sold in markets include government supplies, some of which are believed to have been deliberately leaked (Florquin, 2013; UNSC, 2015, p. 254). Al-Shabaab has also used government weapons illicitly purchased in Mogadishu markets in attacks on civilian and government targets (UNSC, 2014a; 2015, p. 255).

Foreign flows of illicit weapons

The UN-mandated Somalia and Eritrea Monitoring Group (SEMG) warns that al-Shabaab may increase its efforts to procure more sophisticated weaponry to counter escalating government and AMISOM efforts to contain and defeat it (UNSC, 2015, p. 295). SEMG reports highlight witnesses' accounts of al-Shabaab supply lines originating in Yemen, including deliveries of pistols, machine guns, RPGs, and ammunition to multiple receiving points on the Somali coast (UNSC, 2014a, p. 259; 2015). Puntland is a primary gateway for weapons and ammunition from Yemen—received by sea and air—and evidence has confirmed their retransfer to Mogadishu and other destinations in South Central (UNSC, 2015; Schroeder and King, 2012).

Furthermore, several UN member states have flouted UN notification requirements and delivered weapons and other military equipment directly

to non-FGS armed forces; these countries include Ethiopia and the United Arab Emirates (UNSC, 2014a; 2015, p. 266). Such deliveries undermine FGS efforts to comply with import-reporting requirements under the UN Sanctions Committee and, hence, inevitably complicate FGS efforts to mark, record, and trace weapons in areas outside of its control.

Measuring illicit arms flows

Measuring illicit arms flows is a challenge in any context, but through the collection of weapons seizures data and the tracking of firearms pricing in illicit markets, it is possible to both learn more about the current and evolving dynamics of illicit weapons proliferation, and measure progress towards the achievement of SDG 16.4.

Seizures

Tracking weapons and ammunition seizures data in Somalia can provide key information that helps stakeholders to understand illicit international and domestic flows of weapons. To help determine new trends and identify patterns, the information needs to be disaggregated by weapon type, model, and the circumstances of the seizure (De Martino and Atwood, 2015, p. 2).

The SEMG is the principal reporting mechanism to the UN Security Council on national and international compliance with the arms embargo on Somalia. Among other things, it reports on arms seizures and weapons diversions. Past reports have revealed actors—including business and political elites—involved in weapons trafficking and have uncovered transport routes, and the quantities and types of weapons trafficked. Where seized weapons have been successfully traced, SEMG reports present evidence of illicit transfers originating from Iran, Libya, North Korea, and Sudan (UNSC, 2013c, p. 26).

SEMG reports compiled between 2004 and 2011 recorded 445 instances of arms transfers or seizures involving nearly 50,000 weapons, including Kalashnikov-pattern assault rifles, PKM machine guns, Dushka heavy machine guns, RPG-2s and RPG-7s, and B-10 recoilless rifles (Schroeder

and King, 2012). A longitudinal analysis of this type of data can reveal new patterns in illicit weapons types, emerging supply routes, or tactical shifts among armed groups (Schroeder and King, 2012). However, there is no comprehensive or systematic collection of seizures data provided by all security forces in South Central, limiting SEMG reportage and invariably preventing the tracing of unrecorded or improperly managed captured weapons.

Large seizures at sea and on land in Somalia (BBC, 2012; Hiiraan Online, 2016) highlight the need to implement standardized procedures to collate and manage seizures data across forces and regions. However, among government, FGS-allied, and AMISOM forces, only one government agency is methodically doing this.

In 2016 the FGS's intelligence division—the National Intelligence and Security Agency—began implementing standard operating procedures to manage and record captured weapons.⁴ The SNA and AMISOM should do the same to enable more accurate accounting of captured weapons in South Central and thus better inform policies and strategies to reduce illicit weapons flows.

The SNA and AMISOM are required under Security Council Resolution 2182 to document and register captured military equipment—including weapons and ammunition—by recording weapons types, serial numbers, ammunition head-stamp data, and other relevant markings (UNSC, 2014b, para. 6). Further, the resolution calls on both forces to share this information with the SEMG and facilitate its inspection of captured weapons and ammunition prior to their redistribution or destruction (UNSC, 2014b, para. 6). However, SNA and AMISOM forces appear to be uncertain as to what their respective practices are regarding weapons captures (UNSC, 2015, p. 285).⁵ In this regard, better cooperation between the two forces and clear procedural roles will enhance their capacity to manage seized weapons.

The SEMG has recommended that additional training be provided to AMISOM and the SNA on weapons seizures and management (UNSC, 2015,

Table 1 Prices of selected weapons types and their ammunition, Bakara market, Mogadishu, 2011-12 and 2015

Weapon type	Price, 2011-12 (USD)	Price, 2015 (USD)	Price, ammunition round, 2011-12 (USD)	Price, ammunition round, 2015 (USD)
Dushka 108 mm (heavy machine gun)	7,995	25,000	0.50	6
PKM (general-purpose machine gun)	6,808	12,000	0.70	1.5
AK-pattern rifle	731 (avg. of all variations of AK types)	1,500-1,800 (original versions)	0.60	1.5
Makarov (pistol)	1,681	1,700	2.60	3*

* Conflict Armament Research provided 2015-16 data on 9 x 18 mm ammunition (used in Makarov pistols).⁶

Source: Florquin (2013, pp. 260-62); UNSC (2015, p. 256)

p. 287). Thus, with continued international support of the FGS's weapons-marking and record-keeping activities, efforts to monitor illicit weapons seizures and conduct tracing activity can be jointly coordinated among the FGS, the SEMG, AMISOM, and other UN member states to cooperatively achieve progress towards SDG 16.4.

Prices

The regular monitoring of illicit weapons and ammunition pricing can also allow for the identification of real-time changes in illicit market and security dynamics. Illicit weapons prices are typically higher in countries where control measures are strong and lower in countries where firearms regulations or law enforcement is inadequate. A sudden drop in weapons prices may indicate an increased risk of conflict or a deteriorating security environment, whereas a sharp increase may be indicative of higher demand for self-protection purposes (Florquin, 2013). Whatever the cause of pricing fluctuations, awareness of unusual price changes can prompt the timely investigation of the causes of these changes.

Table 1 provides a pricing list of weapons and ammunition found in Mogadishu's Bakara market in 2011-12 and 2015. It captures price fluctuations that are in part attributable to changing security and arms control dynamics. The data for the period 2011-12 was collected during a critical time in Mogadishu when control of the Bakara market was changing from al-Shabaab to the government. As al-Shabaab lost influence in the capital, arms and ammunition prices stabilized, interrupting months of steady, demand-driven price increases

(Florquin, 2013, pp. 264, 271). The data for 2015 was collected after the FGS asserted greater authority in the city and limited black market trading in weapons and ammunition. It should be emphasized that the data sets were collected by different sources and are not necessarily comparable. Table 1 nevertheless suggests across-the-board (but unequal) price increases between 2011-12 and 2015 that are potentially the result of better controls over the market in the face of continuing demand. The fact that prices for larger types of equipment (such as Dushka heavy machine guns) increased most markedly may further reflect the difficulties of trading large weapons systems now that government control is more firmly established. By contrast, prices for more easily concealable weapons increased less significantly. While the establishment of more systematic data collection mechanisms would lead to firmer conclusions, the information that is available illustrates the utility of collecting regular and detailed pricing data in order to capture both price variations and changes in the availability of and demand for particular types of weapons.

Conclusion

Since the UN arms embargo was partially lifted in 2013, the FGS in South Central Somalia has legally received more than 17,500 weapons and nine million rounds of ammunition (UNSC, 2015, p. 39). In addition, other actors in Somalia have imported an unknown quantity of weapons and ammunition; these actors include regional governments and opposition groups. This Research Note has illustrated the

challenges of measuring illicit small arms flows within and to Somalia, focusing on two possible indicators: firearms seizures data and the prices of illicitly sold firearms. In the context of the arms embargo, the work of the SEMG is the primary purveyor of open-source data on firearms seizures, providing many insights into trends related to the types of weapons seized and their points of origin. Evidence is also widely available on domestic illicit flows, including black market prices and the diversion of state stockpiles. These efforts are not sufficiently systematic, however, and would need expansion and adaptation to fully meet the expectations related to record keeping and tracing as they are currently set out in the proposed SDG Indicator 16.4.2. Continued international support to further advance the progress of the FGS in this regard is important, and cooperation among national and international actors is essential to ascertain how the capacity to collect data on, record, and trace seized weapons can inform the development and monitoring of sound policies. ■

Notes

- 1 'Proportion of seized small arms and light weapons that are recorded and traced, in accordance with international standards and legal instruments' (UN Statistical Commission, 2016, para. (d); IAEG-SDGs, 2016, p. 58).
- 2 Somalia is divided into three principal political regions, South Central (with Mogadishu as its capital), Puntland, and Somaliland, each with its own government administration, firearms laws and judicial systems, security forces, and non-state armed groups. What happens in South Central is not the case for Somaliland or Puntland. The UN recognizes only the Mogadishu-based government, and not the

- governments of Somaliland or Puntland, complicating the question of how the UN arms embargo applies to the latter two regions.
- 3 Resolutions 2093 (UNSC, 2013a) and 2111 (UNSC, 2013b) list several categories of military equipment that are permitted to be delivered to the FGS with UN Sanctions Committee approval. The items include surface-to-air missiles; guns, howitzers, and cannons with a calibre greater than 12.7 mm, together with their ammunition and parts; mortars with a calibre greater than 82 mm; and anti-tank guided weapons.
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 - 5 Author email correspondence with CAR, 20 September 2016.
 - 6 Author email correspondence with CAR, 20 September 2016.

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For more information on illicit arms trafficking, please visit the Global Partnership on Small Arms website. The website hosts a library of resources on illicit small arms and light weapons flows and control measures.

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.

The Survey has an international staff with expertise in security studies, political science, law, economics, development studies, sociology, and criminology, and collaborates with a network of researchers, partner institutions, non-governmental organizations, and governments in more than 50 countries.

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