



Nigerian youths of Bakin Ciyawa, Plateau State, prepare to defend their town with locally produced hunting rifles and other weapons in May 2004.
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A Constant Threat

ARMED GROUPS IN WEST AFRICA

INTRODUCTION

With these militias, the government unleashed a monster. It now has to be fed.

—United Nations official in Darfur, Sudan¹

By referring to militias as ‘monsters’ the United Nations official in Darfur highlighted a central challenge facing the world today: armed groups, typically unaccountable and often unpredictable, will fight to sustain themselves, even when that entails changes in the group’s nature or objectives. The number of conflicts involving one or more armed groups has eclipsed those involving only states. In 2004, all 19 of the world’s ‘major armed conflicts’ (those causing more than 1,000 battle-related deaths in a year) could be characterized as ‘intra-state’, meaning they involved one or more armed groups (SIPRI, 2005, pp. 121–33).

State security forces have heavy weapons, armoured vehicles, and aircraft at their disposal. Armed groups, on the other hand, are generally equipped mainly with small arms and light weapons.

This chapter provides an overview of the dynamics of small arms acquisition, management, and control by armed groups in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)² region, where the proliferation of armed groups is a phenomenon of particular concern.³ It then looks into control and reduction measures that can help to minimize the deleterious effects of conflict and prevent future fighting. What measures can be taken to address the problem of armed groups in West Africa? Normative moral persuasion,⁴ attempting to influence armed groups’ actions through an appeal to norms of behaviour, is an important but insufficient means of engagement. Experience from West Africa suggests that providing incentives (job creation, security sector reform, and so on), affecting, in particular, the demand for weapons, is more effective.

Examples from South-East Asia, Northern Ireland, and Colombia point to the truly global nature of the challenges posed by armed groups and complicate the picture of motives and methods among these diverse actors (THE LORD’S RESISTANCE ARMY). It is hoped the study’s findings will be useful to actors in West Africa and beyond.

The main findings of the chapter include the following:

- Many West African armed groups’ motivations, allegiances, and scope of activities shift over time.
- There is a robust market for small arms and light weapons in West Africa to which armed groups have easy access.
- Recirculation of small arms stockpiles among conflict areas (including leakage from government stocks, corruption, and craft production) remains substantial.
- Reducing supplies of ammunition is an underutilized means of limiting the deleterious effects of small arms conflict.

- Weapons collection programmes in West Africa have had some success, but the quality of weapons collected is questionable.
- A lack of alternative employment opportunities may drive demobilized ex-fighters to return to fighting in an armed group.
- Arms reduction efforts linked to development incentives show promise.
- Supply-side interventions alone will not curb groups' access to small arms, and efforts to reform the security sector are needed to address groups' willingness to arm.

ARMED GROUPS: AN OVERVIEW OF THE ISSUES

'Armed group': a definition

There is no single, universally accepted definition of 'armed group'. Labels with political connotations (such as 'freedom fighters', 'terrorists', and 'revolutionaries') are often used to channel debate. The ideological charge of such labels risks simplifying a group's nature and concealing changes in its goals or tactics. The advantage of a neutral definition lies in its ability to incorporate and describe those changes.

Several widely used definitions focus only on groups outside of state control. The International Council on Human Rights Policy (ICHRP), for example, defines 'armed groups' as entities that '*are armed and use force to achieve their objectives and are not under state control*' (ICHRP, 2000, p. 5, emphasis in original). Claude Bruderlein of the Harvard School of Public Health provides a similar definition. He stipulates that armed groups have 'a basic command structure'; use 'violence to achieve political ends'; and are independent 'from state control' (Bruderlein, 2000, p. 8). Some definitions, such as the one employed by Geneva Call, an NGO that campaigns for armed groups to sign pledges to adhere to international laws, prefer the term 'non-state actors' to 'armed groups'. By adding the stipulation that such actors operate 'outside of state control', however, this explanation falls into the same pattern of exclusion as the ICHRPs and Bruderlein's (GC, 2002).

The Small Arms Survey, however, favours a broader definition that includes groups linked to the state. This chapter focuses more on the effect these groups have on human security than on political considerations. Accordingly, even ostensibly 'pro-state' armed groups are of interest to our study. The chapter therefore employs a definition proposed by Pablo Policzer (2005): 'Non-state armed groups are challengers to the state's monopoly of legitimate coercive force.' As Policzer explains, 'this definition suggests focusing on the relationships between groups, states, and populations that determine the degrees of coercive monopolization. Such relationships are fluid, but the definition need not be' (pp. 8, 9).

A typology of armed groups

A typology assists us in identifying trends and changes, both at the level of individual groups and at the level of national or regional relations. Three main parameters characterize armed groups: their relationship to the state; the scope of their operations; and their motivations for taking up arms. Interpreting a group's motivations is an empirically fraught endeavour because it would require a comparison of a group's stated aims with its actions, which may differ from its aims or change as incentives arise. Instead, our typology, based on Policzer's definition, will use only the first two parameters: (a) the relationship of armed groups to the state, and (b) the geographic scope of the threat to

Table 10.1 A typology of armed groups in the ECOWAS region, active at some point during the period 2000–05

No.	Country	Armed group	Year formed	Type when formed	Subsequent type(s)
1	Côte d'Ivoire	New Forces	2003	REB-N	REB-N
2	Côte d'Ivoire	Group of Patriots for Peace (GPP/ CPP/FLN)	2002	PGM-N	PGM-N
3	Côte d'Ivoire	Front for the Security of the Centre-West (FSCO)	2002	PGM-SN	PGM-SN
4	Côte d'Ivoire	Front for the Liberation of the Great West (FLGO)	2002	PGM-SN	PGM-SN
5	Côte d'Ivoire	Young Patriots	2000s	PGM-N	PGM-N
6	The Gambia	Green Boys	1999	PGM-SN	PGM-SN
7	Guinea	Young Volunteers	2000	PGM-N	VG-N*
8	Guinea	Movement of the Democratic Forces of Guinea (RFDG)	1996	REB-N	REB-N
9	Liberia	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD)	2000	REB-N	VGN-SN*
10	Liberia	Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL)	2003	REB-N	VGN-SN*
11	Liberia	Government of Liberia militias	1997	PGM-N	PGM-N*
12	Nigeria	Bakassi Boys	1999	VG-SN	PGM-SN/VG-SN*
13	Nigeria	O'odua People's Congress (OPC)	1994	VG-N	VG-N
14	Nigeria	Arewa People's Congress (APC)	1999	VG-N	VG-N
15	Nigeria	Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA)	1998	VG-SN	VG-SN
16	Nigeria	Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF)	1998	VG-SN	VG-SN
17	Nigeria	Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV)	2000	VG-SN	PGM-SN*
18	Nigeria	Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF)	2003	VG-SN	REB-SN VG-SN*
19	Nigeria	Hisbah Groups	1990s	VG-SN	VG-SN PGM-SN*
20	Nigeria	Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC)	1997	VG-SN	VG-SN
21	Nigeria	Al-Sunna Wal Jamma	2002	REB-N VG-N	REB-N VG-N
22	Nigeria	Zamfara State Vigilante Service (ZSVS)	1999	PGM-SN VG-SN	PGM-SN VG-SN
23	Senegal	Movement of the Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC)	1982	REB-SN	REB-SN
24	Sierra Leone	Revolutionary United Front (RUF)	1991	REB-N	REB-N
25	Sierra Leone	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC)	1997	REB-N	PGM-N*
26	Sierra Leone	Civil Defence Force (CDF)	1990s	PGM-N	VG-SN*
27	Sierra Leone	West Side Boys (WSB)	2000	VG-SN	VG-SN

Key: PGM-N: pro-government militia with national ambitions; PGM-SN: pro-government militia with sub-national ambitions; REB-N: rebel group with national ambitions; REB-SN: rebel group with sub-national ambitions; VG-N: vigilante group with national ambitions; VG-SN: vigilante group with sub-national ambitions; **BOLD:** active in 2005

* Change in type

Source: Florquin and Berman (2005)

One-third of West African armed groups active at some point in 2000–05 changed type following their formation.

government authority (i.e. whether the group seeks to challenge the state's monopoly of force on a national or sub-national scale). Since groups can evolve along both these parameters, even groups that are not created in opposition to the state (such as paramilitaries or local defence forces) exercise coercive powers over a part of national territory and thus challenge the state's monopoly over the provision of public order.

Characterizing their relationship to the state yields three categories of groups. Groups that support the government or regime in power will be termed 'pro-government militias'. Those that oppose the government or regime in power will be classified as 'rebels'. Groups that operate without an explicitly pro- or anti-state agenda will be termed 'vigilante groups'. We can further refine the typology by dividing these groups into those that seek to exercise force nationally—throughout the entire country—and those whose ambitions are sub-national—that is, regional or local.

In the ECOWAS region, applying this typology enables an analysis of developments among particular groups as well as within the broader region. One-third of West African armed groups active at some point in 2000–05 changed type following their formation, with the shift most often concerning their relationship to the state.

Motivations for joining armed groups

In order to understand the dynamics of weapons acquisition and use in armed groups, it helps to probe the reasons why such groups form and take up arms. Some groups arise for political reasons, to either overthrow or protect a government. Other groups are primarily driven by economic motives. For example, arms may provide the necessary clout to control extraction of a natural resource or impose taxes on a local population. Some groups are motivated—or claim to be motivated—by ethnic or religious grievances. Commanders who draw on these 'selective incentives'

(Weinstein, 2004, pp. 9–10) to enlist recruits may thereby enable greater cohesion among fighters. Additional motivations, however, such as the material spoils that accompany force, or the political power that comes with inclusion in an eventual transitional government, render even relatively unified groups unpredictable.

Some armed groups may, at least initially, be sources of security rather than insecurity for their communities. William Reno (2003) has shown how, in some cases, armed groups can provide protection from a predatory state. Vigilante groups may come into existence because members see a market for their enforcement services in an area where state security organs are absent or ineffective. For



A LURD fighter poses with her weapon at a UN disarmament point in May 2004. Originally from Sierra Leone, she had been caught up in the war in Liberia.

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instance, the Bakassi Boys began as a vigilante group in Abia state, hired by local traders to provide security in the markets. They subsequently spread to provide similar services in Anambra and Imo states as well, and gained the endorsement of the three states' governors for their success in staving off robberies. In Nigeria, the police are a federal service, which state governors cannot control and often feel ill-served by.⁵ However, group control and leadership among the Bakassi Boys have waned, and their stated purpose of provision of security has often become a screen to justify extreme measures, such as extra-judicial killings and arbitrary arrest. On 4 August 2005 in Aba, Abia state, they arrested 37 people at the Orié Olabiam electronics market and locked them in a ten-feet-by-ten-feet cell; the following morning, 27 of the captives were found dead (Orji, 2005, p. 4). Attitudes towards them have shifted from respect to fear and disdain, and Abia is the only state in which the Boys have managed to maintain their role as purveyors of 'jungle justice' (immediate and summary trials and executions).⁶

Box 10.1 Children associated with fighting forces in the Mano River Union

Estimates of the total number of children associated with fighting forces (CAFF) serving worldwide range up to 300,000.⁷ The Mano River Union (MRU)—Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone—has been particularly plagued. Examining how these children were recruited, whether forced or voluntary, illuminates some of the motivations behind joining, as do the roles small arms played in their recruitment and their terms of service.⁸

Recruitment methods varied widely within the region.⁹ Though most of the children conscripted in Sierra Leone were forced into service at the point of a gun, this was not the case in Liberia or Guinea. However, in all three countries combined, 40 per cent of the children appeared fatalistic, and many went along and joined simply because 'that was the only thing to do' (Wille, 2005, p. 191).

Figure 10.1 Self-reported motivations for joining armed groups



Access to firearms and the power associated with being a member of an armed group seemed important to some of the children, as reflected in sentiments such as the following: 'When you are in possession of arms you can loot and get anything you want. You can say or do anything to anybody without fear.'¹⁰ The majority (91 per cent) of CAFF interviewed reported that they had access to firearms, particularly Kalashnikovs, which are lighter than many other assault rifles.

The widespread availability of weapons and ammunition in the MRU helps explain why armed groups there could afford to enlist large numbers of children (who may waste ammunition or be poor shots) without jeopardizing the groups' effectiveness.

Studying the recruitment of child soldiers in the MRU and the tasks they carry out shows that motivations vary, both in terms of trends among armed groups and among individual children. From the perspectives of the leadership of the armed groups, recruiting children enabled the adults to build on their own power bases as well as divest themselves of tasks they did not want to carry out.

Table 10.2 CAFF access to firearms

	CAFF with access to firearms	Percentage of total CAFF interviewed
Guinea	82	90
Liberia	94	94
Sierra Leone	72	91
Total	248	92

Source: Wille (2005, pp. 180–221)

At the level of individual fighters, multiple motivations probably enter into their decision to enlist in an armed group. In some cases, conscription may be forced, itself carried out at the point of a gun. In West Africa, the dearth of employment opportunities drives some to join an armed group. Exacerbating the dire poverty of the region, the population distribution leans heavily towards the young: in 2000, 45 per cent of West Africa's population was below the age of 15 (UN, 2004). Limited opportunities for schooling or other vocational training mean that many people have few avenues towards sustenance, let alone enrichment; even those who do obtain an education often lack means of supporting themselves. University students, who received arms and a payment of 5,000 CFA francs (approximately USD 9) from the government for their 'service', perpetrated extensive violence and vandalism in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, in November 2004 (ICG, 2005a, pp. 5, 10). Material incentives, whether provided upfront or promised, thus become powerful recruitment tools.

Fluidity in armed groups' command structures

The command structures of armed groups in West Africa vary greatly. For instance, Yan Daba and Almajiri, two Nigerian vigilante groups, have no centralized structure but rather exist as a loose network of cells, each with its own leader (Orji, 2005). Groups that have an 'activist' stance are more likely to be well-disciplined than groups that are more 'predatory'. However, the lack of accountability on the part of armed groups means that the extent of leaders' control over subordinates' actions may shift alongside changes of objectives, sources of support, or access to weapons and ammunition.

In northern Mali, Arab and Tuareg rebels fought a rebellion for greater autonomy from the central government. The conflict lasted from 1990 to 1996, and initially rebels actively sought public support for their cause. To do so, they located their bases outside of civilian areas so the Malian army would not harass the population, and punished fighters who mistreated civilians (Lecocq, 2002, p. 235). However, as the years of conflict wore on, the rebels began to splinter and with that development came a subsequent breakdown in discipline: by 1994, reports stated that various rebel groups had engaged in killings of civilians across tribal lines (2002, pp. 275–76, citing various press and Amnesty International reports¹¹).

Militias created to support standing governments provide some compelling examples of the unpredictability of armed groups. For instance, President Lansana Conté of Guinea established the Young Volunteers to counter attacks by Liberian rebels, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), and the Movement of the Democratic Forces of Guinea (Rassemblement des forces démocratiques de Guinée, RFDG) in 2000–01.¹² The Guinean military was in charge of recruitment (with assistance provided by local leaders such as the mayor of the town of N'Zérékoré) and provided the new fighters with weapons (ICG, 2003b, p. 18). The Guinean military and government also served as the leaders of the Young Volunteers. When the conflict ebbed and the need for the militia became less pressing, some were integrated into the army or into marching bands, while others returned to civilian life; however, as of 2003, more than a third (3,879 of 9,000) had yet to be demobilized (UNOCHA, 2003, p. 56). Some of these young fighters have organized themselves into gangs to intimidate and rob the population (UNOCHA, 2003, p. 56). Though the government adopted tough anti-crime measures to curb such banditry,¹³ militias continue to menace the population, particularly in the Forest Region bordering Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire; few of them have relinquished their guns (ICG, 2005a, p. 22).

Armed groups in West Africa are unpredictable.

Armed groups in West Africa are unpredictable, and even those that initially build public security can come to undermine it. 'Original "ideology" tends to evaporate rapidly in the face of temptations to engage in financial or political aggrandizement—usually at the point of a gun' (Florquin and Berman, 2005, p. 386). Indeed, some commanders

Box 10.2 Armed groups in South-East Asia: primed and purposeful

In contrast to West Africa, where unemployed youth can quickly become 'guns for hire', in South-East Asia many people who join armed groups (with the exception of opportunistic criminal gangs) are committed to a particular political end.

In Indonesia, three armed groups have engaged in struggles for independence or greater autonomy. The Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor spent 24 years in jungle warfare principally armed with decades-old US- and Portuguese-made firearms, craft-produced small arms, and what it could capture from the Indonesian army and its local militias. International intervention and a referendum in 1999 resulted in Indonesia granting independence to the half-island state of East Timor. The West Papua Independence Movement (Organisasi Papua Merdeka, OPM) has been fighting for the independence of West Papua since the mid-1960s. It is poorly armed and has been harshly repressed by the Indonesian military. Currently, OPM hopes for a negotiated settlement. The Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM) and its armed wing, the Tentara Nasional Aceh (TNA), were founded in 1976. After nearly 30 years of conflict, the GAM and the Indonesian government signed a peace accord in August 2005, which provided for limited autonomy for Aceh.¹⁴

In the Philippines, 'Moros' (an appropriation of the Portuguese slang for 'Muslim') have been fighting for the creation of an Islamic state in the southern region of Mindanao since the 1960s, citing centuries of grievance and the perceived illegitimacy of the island's conquest by the Spanish in the 16th century and the United States in the 19th century. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has considerable local support and controls territory in Mindanao. The group has an extensive network of camps and training facilities throughout the islands.

Thailand and Myanmar also host armed groups that have opposed their governments for nearly half a century. These conflicts have now involved several generations of fighters struggling for the same political goals as those who preceded them.

Source: Koorey (2005)

see personal enrichment as a legitimate aspect of war. Not allowing subordinates to loot would sap the leaders' legitimacy in the fighters' eyes, a state of affairs that reveals the tenuous command structures in many armed groups. As one Sierra Leonean commander, a veteran of three wars and five armed groups, told Human Rights Watch,

Anywhere you have rebel war you're entitled to get money . . . My boys were looting a lot at the port as well. A commander can't know all their secrets. After all, they're the ones who made me a commander. You have to let them do it or they could blow you off. (HRW, 2005a, p. 21)

Since many fighters cycle through the various conflicts in a region, any individual armed group's efforts to instil discipline can be undermined by bad habits already ingrained. Veterans who had served in multiple armed groups singled out Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) for its leadership's attempts to limit abuses by their ranks, but fighters' adherence to the rules was mixed (HRW, 2005a, pp. 35–36). In addition, in some instances the employment of foreign fighters in an internal conflict has led to an increase in attacks on civilians, reflecting the callous tactics of mercenaries, who have little at stake, within either the armed group or the communities that serve as battlegrounds (HRW, 2005a, p. 31).

SOURCES OF FIREARMS FOR ARMED GROUPS

In West Africa, armed groups' weapon supplies are most often a result of recirculation of stocks already within the region (Florquin and Berman, 2005). This section will first examine sources of weapons from within the country ('domestic') and then turn to external sources.

Domestic

Theft or seizure of official government-owned weapons is a primary source of armament for armed groups, whether via a strategic raid, the spoils of battle, or looting accompanying the chaos of war. Because stockpile management is rarely transparent, it becomes difficult to ascertain exactly what has been taken and to trace its whereabouts.

Guinea-Bissau's recent history provides a case in point. In 1998 Ansumane Mané, the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, formed a junta to overthrow the president. The ensuing conflict involved troops from both of the neighbouring countries, Senegal and Guinea (IISS, 1998). Allegations of Mané's support for a Senegalese armed group, the Movement for the Democratic Forces of Casamance (Mouvement des forces démocratiques de la Casamance, MFDC), was a main reason for his dispute with the central government (Evans, 2004, p.5; MALAO, 2003, p. 42). Weapons used by armed groups during the fighting came from three main sources: those looted from government stockpiles during the 1974 war for independence from Portugal, which fighters kept as symbols of their triumph; those distributed to civilians by the government in 1998–99 (mostly Kalashnikov assault rifles of Ukrainian and Bulgarian origin, and handguns) in an effort to create informal pro-government forces in communities; and those seized by the junta from government stockpiles in 1998–99.¹⁵ Thus, all three of these means of weapons acquisition originate in government stocks.

Similarly, in Côte d'Ivoire many rebel group weapons came from captured government armouries. The Patriotic Movement of Côte d'Ivoire (Mouvement patriotique du Côte d'Ivoire, MPCl), for one, claimed to have taken government stocks from Bouaké and Korhogo, as well as to have unearthed weapons hidden by deserting government soldiers in 2000 (ICG, 2003a, p. 11). A few hundred kilometres away in Sierra Leone, armed groups filled their weapons



Rebel troops patrol the jungle outside Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire, in October 2002. © Sven Torfinn/Panos Pictures

stocks from the holdings of the Sierra Leonean armed forces. In addition, the RUF captured hundreds of weapons from the Guinean, Kenyan, and Zambian troops who were taking part in the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone. Also in Sierra Leone, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council targeted the regional peacekeeping force, the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), seizing weapons from its Malian troops (Berman, 2000, pp. 6–7). These few examples are illustrative of the much wider problem of seizure and theft of government stockpiles.¹⁶

In West Africa, the practice of governments, creating and arming militias to shore up their hold on power or to counter rebel groups operating within their borders is widespread. Because these transfers of weapons from government stocks are of questionable legality, detailed records might not be kept, making it difficult to ascertain the strength and firepower of these pro-government militias.

The governments of Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Guinea, and Liberia have all created armed groups they expected would defend their hold on power. Since 2000, the government of Côte d'Ivoire has increasingly used militia groups to bolster its standing, suppress political activism, and fight the rebellion that arose in 2002. These pro-government militias engage in extortion, crime, and harassment of civilians, but enjoy impunity due to their relationship with the government. The government's ability to control even the groups' membership appears limited, however, as some militia members are common criminals. One UN official told a Human Rights Watch researcher, 'Half of the militias could be political bully boys and half freelancers out to make money. It is hard to distinguish between them' (HRW, 2005b, p. 20).

Government creation of and support for armed groups should not be undertaken lightly, as these groups are unpredictable and can quickly become uncontrollable, as the above example from Guinea illustrates. They have a tendency to outlive the period during which they were deemed politically useful and will reinvent themselves as the incentive arises. In the end, it is the local communities that suffer from these 'armed and aimless' young men's robberies and vigilantism (Florquin and Berman, 2005, p. 386).

Corruption is another important source of weapons for armed groups. Soldiers and officers' illegal sales of weaponry were a 'main source of arms supply' during the Malian rebellion (Florquin and Pézard, 2005, p. 53). Returning peacekeepers may also be prone to corruption. In Nigeria, for instance, many small arms in circulation were introduced by soldiers who had served in peacekeeping missions abroad; police officers and government soldiers have also been reported to sell their weapons on the black market (Obasi, 2002, pp. 76–77), or rent their firearms for short periods of time (Best and Von Kemedi, 2005, p. 36).

Another important domestic source of small arms throughout the West African region is craft production, a practice that dates back to the introduction of iron working to the region several hundred years ago. Craftsmen in Ghana are particularly known for their skill. The government ban on the practice has not stopped the craft but rather resulted in sophisticated and secretive networks of gunsmiths throughout the country. The weapons produced are those for which ammunition (largely imported from abroad) is available on the open market. Currently, the most popular and prevalent types of ammunition include 12-bore shotgun shells and .410 cartridges. Reportedly, gunsmiths possess the skill to copy imported Kalashnikov assault rifles. Though gunsmiths in Ghana produce other implements, such as agricultural tools, guns are by far their most lucrative product (Aning, 2005, pp. 80–81). Individual sellers deal guns made in Ghana throughout the region, and reports indicate that Ghanaian gunsmiths have been invited to neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire to demonstrate their skills (Aning, 2005, p. 93). Craft-produced weapons have constituted a part of armed groups' arsenals in at least the following West African countries: Guinea, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Sierra Leone (Florquin and Berman, 2005, pp. 281, 321, 342, 362, 373).

Corruption is an important source of weapons for armed groups.

Regional and global

Shipments from suppliers from outside the region continue to take place despite the 1998 ECOWAS Moratorium (ECOWAS, 1998) and various UN embargoes on specific countries and regions. Illicit arms transfers from outside West Africa generally involve at least one of two strategies to avoid detection: false end-user certificates and use of a go-between country as a transshipment point.

Though targeting suppliers in other countries is important, looking at the regional dimensions of arms acquisition is arguably more relevant to West Africa. In Liberia, the two main rebel groups, LURD and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia, received most of their weapons from neighbouring states. The governments of Guinea¹⁷ and Côte d'Ivoire, respectively, imputed strategic value in arming these challengers to the government of President Charles Taylor. Some of the 81 mm mortar rounds LURD used in its June–July 2003 attacks on Monrovia were reportedly shipped from Iran to Guinea and then smuggled to LURD (HRW, 2003, p.15). In addition, LURD received arms and ammunition (such as United Arab Emirates-made mortar ammunition) directly from Guinean stockpiles (UNSC, 2002, para. 94; HRW, 2003, pp. 18–25).

The West African region is replete with instances of countries facilitating the armament of their neighbours' opponents. The government of Guinea-Bissau, for instance, reportedly provided weapons to the MFDC in Senegal. Côte d'Ivoire became a particularly tangled strategic web, with the Ivorian Popular Movement for the Great West (Mouvement populaire ivoirien du Grand Ouest) and the Movement for Justice and Peace (Mouvement pour la justice et la paix) armed and supported by the Charles Taylor government in Liberia, and the MPCJ backed militarily by Burkina-Faso. Most of these continually recirculating weapons were originally manufactured in far-off factories and shipped as legal state-to-state transfers.

Complementing regional leaders' provision of small arms to various armed groups is the steady trickle of weapons known as the 'ant trade', when arms bought, often legally, in one country are smuggled in small quantities into another country. Widespread insecurity fuels demand for these weapons, delivered via West Africa's highly porous, largely unpatrolled borders. This 'ant trade' is hard to document, as shipments are rarely intercepted. Available evidence suggests, however, that it is a significant source, sometimes linked to larger-scale trafficking operations. For instance, Warri, the capital of Delta state in Nigeria, is known as a centre of such trade, with smugglers from Guinea-Bissau, Gabon, and Cameroon reportedly purchasing arms from speedboats off the coast. Many of these guns then circulate throughout the region (Best and Von Kemedi, 2005, p. 25). In many instances, illegally bunkered crude oil (crude oil that has been siphoned illicitly) is bartered for the weapons (Orji, 2005, p. 8).

Box 10.3 Armed groups and MANPADS

Armed groups, whether pro-government militias, rebels, or vigilantes, are largely thought to be entirely reliant on small arms such as Kalashnikovs and assault rifles. Yet several armed groups in West Africa (MPCJ, RFDG, LURD, RUF) reportedly possessed man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS), and only a few have been recovered (Florquin and Berman, 2005, p. 387). The Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (Groupe Salafiste pour la prédication et le combat, GSPC) allegedly acquired surface-to-air missiles during a stay in Mali (Smith, 2004). The arsenals of seven West African countries (Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and Nigeria) contain these weapons (IISS, 2004), rendering effective stockpile management crucial. These weapons are highly lethal, capable of attacks on both military and civil aviation.

WEAPONS MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL WITHIN ARMED GROUPS

Depending on the group's territorial objectives, relationship to the government, and motivations, weapons control strategies vary widely. However, certain trends in weapon management are apparent when one takes the traits of armed groups into account.

During the 1990–96 rebellion in northern Mali, both weapons and ammunition were scarce. Some researchers contend that the insurgency was launched with a single AK-47 (Humphreys and ag Mohamed, 2003, p. 3). On the rebels' side, the early months of the rebellion were taken up with obtaining weapons, ammunition, and supplies—largely from government stockpiles. Even after they had stocked their arsenal with pistols, assault rifles, light and heavy machine guns, RPGs, and mortars,¹⁸ leaders' control over the weapons' use was strict. Except during states of alert, when each man was issued a weapon for defence, the weapons were kept under tight supervision. All weapons were the property of the movement as a whole, and one man in each base was given responsibility for accounting for their whereabouts.

Perhaps even more important than weapons control was control of ammunition. If ammunition was scarce, only those fighters with the best aim were given ammunition and were dispatched on a specific raid, such as to a police station, to obtain more. Moreover, when fighters could open fire was regulated: shooting in the air, for instance, was wasteful, an infraction punishable by temporary isolation (and being prohibited from going on mission), head shaving (considered a sign of shame), or even the infliction of severe pain (Florquin and Pézard, 2005, pp. 54–56).

Weapon and ammunition scarcity was not the only reason the Malian insurgents enforced strict control over their use. The Malian rebels had the focused political aim of greater autonomy, and weapon control was one facet of a broader strategy of employing strict rules of engagement and soliciting the civilian support they saw as critical to their mission.

Nevertheless, the specific policies and procedures the movement adopted early on to maximize the effectiveness of its (relatively) limited supplies clearly reflect the constraints imposed by its equipment. In such cases, one can point to a correlation between the availability of weapons or ammunition and the degree of control exerted over them (THE LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY).

The case of Liberia provides further evidence of such a relationship. The Liberian war was largely seen as an economic war of plunder rather than a conflict engendered by political ideals. Members of armed groups in Liberia engaged in looting and widespread terrorization of the population, as documented extensively by a number of human rights organizations and other observers.¹⁹ As described in the above section on sources of small arms, Liberian armed groups had access to deep reserves of both weapons and ammunition.

During their shelling of Monrovia in July 2003, LURD fighters were 'often untrained in mortar use and were seen to fire without making any effort to distinguish targets', with civilians bearing the brunt of this indiscriminate violence (HRW, 2003, p. 10).

One indicator of weapons availability within an armed group is whether arms are given to enlisted CAFF, who are often believed to be poor shots. In one study of former Liberian child soldiers, 94 per cent reported that they had access to a firearm, the majority of which were AK-47 assault rifles (Wille, 2005, pp. 198, 200). Despite the leaders' apparent laissez-faire attitude towards their subordinates' actions, control over weapons management could be exerted when scarcity rendered it necessary.²⁰

Weapons availability and the degree of control exerted over them are sometimes correlated.

INFLUENCING WEAPONS SUPPLY AND DEMAND

The previous sections document and flesh out the various strategies and characteristics of armed groups in relation to the small arms and light weapons they employ. This section investigates the strategies that are being used to control and reduce the stocks of weapons and ammunition supplies obtainable by armed groups. These strategies may target the supply of weapons and the demand for them. The two categories are not unrelated. Because many people in West Africa conclude they have good reason (such as a breakdown in public security, or unemployment) to acquire or retain weapons, supply-side efforts must be complemented by initiatives that address the motives underpinning weapons demand. In both cases, strategies involve creating incentives, both positive and negative, to influence actions.

Pure 'supply-side' measures

The first lesson that emerges from an analysis grounded in West Africa is that supply-side measures for weapons control are insufficient given that the region is already awash in guns (Florquin and Berman, 2005). The arms embargo imposed on both sides of the Ivorian conflict in November 2004 (and strengthened in February 2005) had important political value but, even if customs officials and UN inspectors had the capacity to enforce it rigorously (which they currently lack), UN officials recognize that the fighters already possess sufficient armament for the conflict to continue long into the future (HRW, 2005b, pp. 32–33). The laws of supply and demand ensure that these weapons will be recirculated from conflict region to conflict region as demand arises. Most of the armed groups currently active in West Africa were formed after 1998, and importation of weaponry to the area has continued in the years since.²¹

In terms of supply-side measures, a more promising tactic would be to target the provision of ammunition. Most countries in West Africa do not produce their own ammunition and are thus dependent upon imports. If ammunition is not stored properly, it quickly deteriorates (Small Arms Survey, 2005, p. 17). Without ammunition, weapons quickly lose their value.

LURD, preparing its 2003 assault on Monrovia, had an ample supply of British-made mortars from 1973 (HRW, 2003, p. 18), but had to postpone the attack while waiting for a new supply of mortar rounds. The craft weapons producers in Ghana do not bother to produce ammunition as it can easily be purchased new on the market. Instead, they produce weapons of the same calibre as the already available ammunition.

Box 10.4 Ammunition production in Tanzania

On 23 June 2005, the Belgian government decided—after some wavering—not to license a proposed Belgian-financed ammunition factory in Mwanza, Tanzania, on the shores of Lake Victoria (Small Arms Survey, 2005, p. 14). Tanzania claimed to want only to upgrade an existing facility; the Belgian government decided, based on equipment that had been imported, that the renovations in fact constituted an entirely new factory. Further, the Belgian government determined that Tanzania did not have an effective strategy in place for assuring that the ammunition did not end up in the hands of illegal users. International outcry over the planned development of the ammunition factory—including the threat of the stoppage of aid from the European Union to Tanzania—probably also contributed to the decision to scuttle the project (Mpinganjira, 2005). In addition, research by the Belgium-based Groupe de Recherche et d'Information sur la Paix et la Sécurité (GRIP) has repeatedly shown that Mwanza is a transshipment point for tonnes of weaponry, arriving on flights from Belgium, Latvia, the Czech Republic, Qatar, Slovakia, Israel, and Ukraine²² (Bilali, 2005).

Security sector reform

Reform of the formal security sector has implications for both the supply of small arms to non-state armed groups and these groups' demand for such weapons. As described above, weak oversight and control of official weapon stocks provides a steady source of weapons for many armed groups. At the same time, such groups often take up arms in response to the state's failure to provide public security. This section will briefly present examples of security sector reform (SSR) and show how they involve issues of both supply and demand (CAMBODIA).

At present, many militaries in West Africa lack the capacity to protect their stores of arms when they come under attack by armed groups. Moreover, government accounting for the weapons in their possession is currently weak in many countries. This gives rise to a number of challenges. Monitoring and control of groups armed by governments becomes difficult and, once these groups have outlived their intended purpose, it is hard to bring them under control or to ensure that all the weapons that have been handed out are returned.

Stockpile management is also undermined by corruption in many West African state security forces (Florquin and Berman, 2005, pp. 387–88). With oversight of stockpiles minimal, it becomes easier for armed groups to purchase weapons from corrupt officials. In addition, the failure of many armed forces to provide a basic standard of living for conscripts increases the temptation to engage in corrupt acts, and promotes the kind of disgruntlement that can lead to mutinies, coups, or related unrest. For example, the poorly remunerated military in Guinea used roadblocks to generate personal income. Though President Conté banned the roadblocks in 2003, by 2005 they had reappeared, showing how state security forces have the potential to operate as armed groups if economic incentives are sufficiently strong (ICG, 2005b, p. 16).

Targeted skills training for the security sector can also be helpful in areas plagued by conflict. Refugee-populated areas in Guinea, home to some 450,000 people, became militarized beginning in 2000. Many of the refugees were combatants from regional conflicts, and some used this foreign soil, and its effectively unpoliced refugee camps, to regroup (Milner, 2005). A training programme launched by Canada in 2003 involving the deployment of several Canadian mounted police to teach Guinean guards policing strategies and ethics, though far from solving all of the camps' problems, nevertheless resulted in greatly improved security for their inhabitants.²³

Targeted skills training for the security sector can improve human security.

Removing the tools and incentives for war

Given that significant numbers of small arms will remain in circulation for the foreseeable future, it becomes critical to consider why people take up arms and to develop incentives that create peaceful alternatives (Regehr, 2003, p. 4). Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programmes have been developed as one mechanism for transitioning former fighters back into productive and peaceful civilian lives. In West Africa, a lack of employment opportunities is one reason why people join armed groups, and so DDR policy-makers hope that, by trading in the fighting lifestyle for cash or training assistance, their demand for arms will decline.

In the ECOWAS region, DDR initiatives have been carried out in Liberia, Mali, Niger, and Sierra Leone, and programmes are planned for Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal. 'Weapons for Development' projects, voluntary gun collection projects, and other small-arms control initiatives have reached Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. The results of these programmes, however, have been mixed at best. Between 1998 and 2004 more than 200,000 small arms were collected in the West African region, with at least 70,000 of these subsequently destroyed. However, the quality of the weapons destroyed appears to have been quite poor, which suggests that better-quality models are still circulating throughout the region (Florquin and Berman, 2005, pp. 388–98). With the large number of programmes already

Box 10.5 Northern Ireland

In West Africa, economic incentives, such as the reintegration assistance that is part of DDR programmes, have been used to persuade people to lay down their arms. In Northern Ireland the incentives were political in nature.

On 28 July 2005 the Irish Republican Army (IRA) announced its intention to 'verifiably put its arms beyond use'. This promised an end to what had been one of the main stumbling blocks on the road towards peace in Northern Ireland: 'decommissioning' of paramilitary arms (disarmament). Two months later, on 26 September, the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning reported that it had observed and verified a 'full range of ammunition, rifles, machine guns, mortars, missiles, handguns, explosives, explosive substances and other arms' representing 'the totality of the IRA's arsenal', which were then destroyed by being covered with concrete (IICD, 2005, pp. 1–2). As of November 2005, the Loyalist paramilitary groups had yet to decommission, though some appeared to be taking steps towards doing so (BBC, 2005).

The debate on decommissioning as a prerequisite for political negotiations dates back to 31 August 1994, when the IRA announced a ceasefire. Weapons repeatedly stymied progress towards peace as they took on a symbolic and political value that far exceeded their physical worth, both in society and within the political process. The Westminster elections in June 2001 proved to be a turning point. Sinn Fein, the political party associated with the IRA, won a majority of the Nationalist votes and thus saw that it could rely on political processes to achieve its goals (Hauswedell and Brown, 2002, pp. 11, 12).

A lack of success at the polls alienated the Loyalists from the peace process. Two leading paramilitary groups, the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Ulster Defence Association, jockey for supremacy and cannot commit to disarmament without appearing to have surrendered. Following verification of IRA decommissioning by international monitors in September 2005, the Reverend Ian Paisley, leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, remained sceptical of IRA intentions.

Sinn Fein's president, Gerry Adams, explained the move toward decommissioning: 'I think that violence is a response to particular political conditions. When there was no alternative to armed struggle, I defended the use of armed struggle' (Solomon, 2005, p. 13). In the Northern Ireland case, mediators put political pressure on the IRA to lay down their weapons while also including them, and taking their concerns seriously, in the peace process.

A man and child stand on a railing in front of a large Loyalist mural in north Belfast, Northern Ireland, October 2001.

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completed, and several envisaged for coming years, it is important to look at the factors underpinning the success or failure of these DDR efforts.

Mali underwent a disarmament programme from 1995 to late 1997. In all, some 12,000 ex-armed group members benefited from the effort, which relied on the voluntary return of arms.²⁴ At the Timbuktu Flame of Peace ceremony in 1996, 3,000 weapons were set ablaze in front of 10,000 spectators, an event both symbolic and practical that has been repeated elsewhere in the years since. However, former combatants from all sides of the conflict argue that only a minority of the weapons destroyed were actually used in the rebellion; many people turned in old, barely usable rifles, and others who had not fought turned in some armament just so they could qualify for the reintegration assistance. In the end, some of the weapons used in the Malian conflict made their way to other conflict zones.²⁵ The borders with neighbouring Mauritania and Côte d'Ivoire are particularly permeable for the purposes of arms trafficking. Within Mali itself, the peace process did not initially bring an end to insecurity (armed banditry was on the rise), and many ex-combatants and local leaders opted to retain their weapons as a 'wait-and-see' tactic. On a positive note, Mali's DDR programme was apparently successful in a way few such endeavours can claim to be: the reintegration component, which consisted of three payments of 100,000 CFA francs (approximately USD 200) to start small businesses, which were in some cases supplemented with micro-credit loans, worked. According to UNESCO, by 2000, three years after the end of the programme, 90 per cent of reintegrated former combatants continued to earn a living from the employment they entered as a result of the reintegration initiative (Boukhari, 2000).

The Liberian DDR experience is particularly instructive. In December 2003, less than five months after a peace agreement ended Liberia's civil war that had lasted for more than a decade, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) began a DDR programme in the country. The programme was rushed through without proper planning, and the first few weeks of its operation were marked by violence as thousands more ex-combatants presented themselves than organizers had anticipated.

After this inauspicious beginning, the disarmament and demobilization phase of the programme officially ended on 31 October 2004. All told, 102,193 people went through the screening process, more than two and a half times the expected number (38,000). Partly, this disparity can be explained by the fact that armed factions failed to provide UNMIL with any lists or tallies of the number of fighters to expect, and the DDR team thus had to make do with best estimates.²⁶ In addition, the screening process was insufficient: it was carried out by local NGO staff, who lacked the training and authority to identify and disqualify from the programme those who, rather than being ex-combatants, simply showed up with an old firearm or some ammunition (only 150 rounds was required for entry) so as to qualify for the promised reintegration benefits (Nichols, 2005). Programme participants turned in 27,804 weapons, many of which were of poor quality, and more than ten per cent of which were old shotguns. Faction leaders' promises to turn in larger weapons, such as those used during the August 2003 siege of Monrovia, went unfulfilled (NCDDRR, 2004). Demobilization consisted of five days spent at a cantonment site, a duration too short to engender any substantive behavioural or attitudinal change. Commanders were in effect in control of the process. For instance, when rioting broke out among disgruntled ex-combatants in Tubmanburg, UNMIL officials had to call in a LURD commander to calm the men down.²⁷ In both Sierra Leone and Liberia, commanders restricted access to the DDR programme to those fighters (and civilians) who would return a portion of the benefits to their superiors (HRW, 2005a, p. 50).

What lessons can be drawn from the Liberian experience of disarmament and demobilization? First, it was an enormous and complicated undertaking, and so the fact that the process occurred without any major setbacks aside from the December 2003 troubles is fortunate. Planning was insufficient, and policies were unclear during the duration

of the programme. In addition, there was a lack of regional coordination. Part-way through the process, Côte d'Ivoire announced its forthcoming DDR programme, which would offer more lucrative reintegration assistance than the Liberian one, raising speculation that Liberian ex-combatants would wait and hand in their weapons across the border. Because programme officials in Liberia gave insufficient credence to the volatile regional dynamics, the moment they started offering cash for weapons they created a market in guns and ammunition. Because the screening process was flawed and several times the expected number of people participated in the disarmament–demobilization phase, funds for the reintegration portion were inadequate, leaving many frustrated ex-combatants without expected assistance (Nichols, 2005).



A former LURD combatant surrenders weapons at a disarmament point set up by the Pakistani contingent of the United Nations Mission in Liberia in April 2004.
© Tim A Hetherington/Panos Pictures

Box 10.6 An investigation of amnesties for armed groups: Colombia

In recognition of the fact that, without some concessions, armed conflict has the potential to drag on interminably, recent years have seen a number of amnesty laws designed to entice combatants to lay down their guns. For instance, both Uganda and Algeria have passed laws providing clemency for ex-armed group members. One of the longest-running conflicts in the Western hemisphere has been in Colombia (COLOMBIA) and, with the aim of bringing hostilities to an end, the government has negotiated an amnesty for the approximately 20,000 paramilitaries who operate throughout the country in the loose confederation known as the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, AUC). Tied to disarmament and demobilization, the Colombian Justice and Peace Act offers concessions that may in the end undermine long-term peace. In particular, the Colombian law does not address the issue of dismantling the paramilitary networks, which, like armed-group structures in West Africa, have a tendency to transform themselves (in this case into criminal narcotic syndicates) in such a way that their continued survival is assured.

The Colombian government helped form the paramilitaries more than 20 years ago to combat the leftist guerrillas that have been fighting the government since the 1960s. Though the paramilitaries were officially deemed illegal in 1989, they have continued to benefit from government military logistical support (Isacson, 2005, p. 1). The negotiation of an amnesty, which critics have labelled a 'negotiation among friends', has taken several years, largely because of disagreements over the so-called 'framework law', which provides an outline of the demobilization and reintegration process, a planning step the international donors who will fund the estimated USD 250 million project insisted upon. The 'framework law' eventually agreed upon by the two sides has drawn criticism from many observers, who argue that its narrow timelines for any prosecutions for the estimated thousands of civilian murders perpetrated by the paramilitaries in effect means none will be brought to justice.

Given the weak 'framework law' it is likely the paramilitary groups will remain intact, though they will officially go through a demobilization process. Since the turn of the present century many have shifted from resembling typical paramilitaries, with uniforms and heavy weapons, to Italian-style mafias, that is, regional crime syndicates powered by drug money and corrupt politics (Isacson, 2005, pp. 4, 7).

Neither the Justice and Peace Act nor the associated 'framework law' addresses this change in paramilitary organization. Both measures operate at the level of the individual—providing for some reintegration assistance—while failing to address the issues of the group's structure and how to eliminate them from society. As one 'demobilized' paramilitary told Human Rights Watch researchers, 'The demobilization...is a farce. It's a way of quieting down the system and returning again, starting over from another side' (HRW, 2005d, p. 1). This failure could be ominous given that the paramilitary groups, whatever their current incarnation, have vast resources at their disposal in the form of land they have commandeered and the profits from narcotics trafficking. As of mid-August 2005, 8,804 paramilitaries had been disarmed, with 5,843 weapons recovered (MAPP-OEA, 2005, p. 6).

Many of Colombia's citizens have accepted the amnesty in the hope that it will bring some peace and end the persecution they have faced from these armed groups (Forero, 2005). Whether it will bring an end to the armed groups, however, remains to be seen. Though amnesty laws achieve some good by providing an avenue for combatants to lay down their arms, it is important that they nevertheless address all the dimensions of combatants' potentialities for violence.

DDR initiatives are an important part of a transition from conflict to peace, as they represent best efforts to deal with the large number of armed ex-fighters who find themselves unemployed and back among their communities. However, several paradoxes immediately emerge as such programmes are being planned. First, with DDR, the international community is essentially rewarding those who took up arms with cash, training, or other assistance, while the civilian population—which often suffered at the hands of these same armed groups—is left with nothing.²⁸ Commanders have been known to recruit fighters using the prospect of eligibility for an eventual DDR programme as a carrot (HRW, 2005a, pp. 24, 49). Second, voluntary DDR programmes inevitably interfere with whatever small arms and ammunition market already existed, often artificially raising prices or creating new markets. Third, DDR programmes often neglect the close links many armed groups have with local communities. The bond between commander and fighter may prove stronger than that of a traditional army (HRW, 2005a), raising the spectre of future conflict if conditions change.

Box 10.7 An investigation of disarmament in Rivers State

Violence has plagued Rivers State, Nigeria, since the 2003 elections, when militias and cult groups arose to influence the outcome. The dialogue that began in September 2004 between the Nigerian government and leaders of the two largest militia groups, the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and the Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV), began amidst an atmosphere of hope: rather than the violence that usually characterized both sides' tactics, discussion flowed into solid commitments. The leaders of the NDPVF and the NDV agreed to disband their militias and to disarm totally while maintaining a strict ceasefire. Under the terms of the disarmament agreement, militia members would receive cash for turning in weapons voluntarily; however, if they refused, they would face legal sanctions. The state government, led by Dr Peter Odili, offered USD 1,800 for an assault rifle; it is unknown how this figure was reached, but it appears inflated, and it quickly boosted the small arms market. In practice there was some variation in the amounts disbursed. The total number of weapons collected between October and December 2004, when the programme was in operation, is not known. The government figures and the totals claimed by the militia leaders do not match; the lack of transparency as guns were collected—with only a portion destroyed—means that the real numbers will probably never be known. The effects, however, are clear.

For one thing, the large amounts of cash being offered meant that an arms trade quickly sprang up: militia leaders and cultists sourced arms from elsewhere and sold them back to the government, pocketing a sizeable profit. Alhaji Asari Dokubo, the leader of the NDPVF, allegedly collected and sold two rocket launchers in this manner. Some government members of the disarmament programme, too, profited from their involvement, using it as a way to strengthen their own armed groups.

In addition to augmenting the local arms trade, the cash incentives created rifts within the armed groups, as members accused their leaders of keeping all the money for themselves rather than sharing it among the rank and file. Some of these disgruntled fighters took their grievances to the government, demanding their own payments under threat of increased violence, while others, notably Boma George of the NDPVF, formed breakaway groups and confronted their former leaders.

By removing arms from communities, the disarmament programme was supposed to bring peace. However, the fragile ceasefire lasted only one month, and violence returned to Rivers State in early November 2004. In the period since, gang-related violence has been continual. Murder, rape, robbery, and extortion are common occurrences. Government arrests of some leaders resulted in further splintering of the armed groups, with periodic battles for supremacy among them. Fighters remain well-armed, with Kalashnikovs, grenades, and other armaments. In the end, then, the disarmament programme offered few positive results; instead, the various armed groups were strengthened, as were some government officials and their militia, by the surging arms trade, and violence continues to engulf the region.

Source: NDPEHRD (2005)

DDR programmes aim to transition combatants back to civilian life, taking away their guns and replacing them with more productive tools. Such programmes can be an important way to calm the immediate post-conflict situation, but they are only the first step in assuring long-term peace: civilian demand for weapons, too, must be addressed. Arms for development (AfD) programmes aspire to do just that. Some community-based voluntary disarmament programmes have had success, notably those that take account of the needs and inputs of particular communities.

Sierra Leone's AfD programme is often cited as a model. In addition to initiatives aimed at improving border security and countering illegal trafficking, each chiefdom established a Project Management Committee to oversee the collection of arms and development projects. These local leaders, chosen through input from all community members, created 'dropping centres' where residents could drop off their weapons, which were then registered and taken to a secure stockpile (the residents are able to apply for the return of the weapon and a proper license at a later date). Once all the weapons in the community have been turned in, the police (monitored by UNDP) conduct a verification search of a random sample of 30 per cent of the village's households. If no weapons are found, the community is issued a 'gun-free' certificate and can then determine the development projects it would like to implement, with the support of UNDP, such as a health centre, school, or market. By mid-2005, 18 chiefdoms had been declared 'weapons free', and the programme was on track to reach 25 by the end of the year (UNDP, 2005). Though

it is too early to tell whether there has been a decrease in small arms violence nationwide, there have been no gun incidents in the chiefdoms involved with the programme. Also, 'communities in arms-free chiefdoms are more inclined to report sight of small arms to the police as such behaviour is no longer regarded as acceptable by the communities' (Werthein and Widmer, 2005, p. 3).

The success of such programmes points to the need for dialogue in communities about steps that can be taken to stop the spread of guns and violence. In West Africa, where many ex-combatants report that they were driven to join an armed group due to the impossibility of finding alternative employment, it seems that a broadening of economic opportunity would lead to a reduction in violence. The large numbers of young people, especially men, with some kind of connection to an armed group, whether dormant or active, and the continuing youth bulge mean that creating incentives linked to lowering weapons supply and demand will be of utmost importance in the coming years (ANGRY YOUNG MEN).

INFLUENCING BEHAVIOUR

This section looks at some of the strategies employed by humanitarian organizations and others on the ground to curb weapon misuse by armed groups and to bring them into compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL) and other international norms.

In their 2004 study *Roots of Behaviour in War*, Munõz-Rojas and Frésard of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) found that combatants generally have an understanding of IHL. Although they may or may not refer to IHL as such, it is widely believed that civilians should be spared the effects of violent conflict. However, when it comes to action, combatants are motivated by peer pressure and adherence to authority rather than principles. Normative moral persuasion on its own, the authors found, has little effect on conduct, because combatants generally act in accordance with what they are told and what those around them are doing. Their conduct is not based on particular principles, even if they acknowledge and believe such principles to be important.

Combatants are motivated more by peer pressure than principles.

Human Rights Watch conducted interviews with ex-combatants in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone that provide further evidence of the importance of commanders' orders:

[T]he degree of effective command and control, and discipline maintained in the different armed groups played a key role in the kind and frequency of violations observed and perpetrated by the interviewees while fighting outside their own countries. (HRW, 2005a, p.31)

In their interviews, fighters singled out LURD for its attempts to instil some respect for civilians, but the broader culture of impunity meant that these efforts were 'inconsistent and often unsuccessful' (2005a, p.31). Indeed, the leadership of all of the armed groups represented within the HRW report tacitly approved of or explicitly ordered such war crimes as attacks on civilians, looting, and pillaging. Ending the culture of impunity that currently benefits the leadership of many armed groups could convince them of the importance of reining in their subordinates and curbing attacks on the civilian population.

Another strategy for engaging with armed groups involves working with the policy-makers and diplomats who, though far from any particular conflict, can exert an influence on its course by 'naming and shaming'. That is, by drawing international attention to an armed group's abuses and raising the spectre of sanctions or other punishment,

a change in that armed group's methods of warfare can be engendered. Naming and shaming has been seen to be quite effective in some instances, but it has limitations. In particular, in order to induce a change in behaviour it must be tied to rewards and punishments. Also, 'only some groups care about their international reputations and/or international legitimacy, while others often lack the organizational capacity to even know they are being shamed' (Armed Groups Project, 2003, p. 3).

An extensive, institutionalized measure to implement a naming and shaming policy for those groups that employ child soldiers was adopted by the UN Security Council on 26 July 2005. Security Council Resolution 1612 will establish a 'monitoring and reporting system' that will target those parties, both armed groups and governments, who exploit children in conflict. Those offenders who fail to develop and carry out 'action plans' to address their abuses of children will be subject to 'targeted and graduated' UN sanctions, such as 'a ban on the export and supply of small arms and light weapons and of other military equipment and on military assistance' (UNSC, 2005, paras. 7, 9).

While it remains to be seen how its mechanisms for punishment will be deployed in practice, on paper the UN resolution constitutes a significant advance in international efforts to curb the use and abuse of children in war. By punishing the groups that are 'named and shamed', the resolution aims at deterring the offending behaviour. Still, punishments such as arms embargoes or account freezing must be fully monitored or else risk irrelevance to the leaders using child soldiers; the violation of past arms embargoes in West Africa suggests some commanders in the region see more benefit in continuing conflict than adhering to UN resolutions.

By working to reduce violence through targeting behaviour during conflict, 'naming and shaming' is an important tool for influencing armed groups, particularly when combined with punitive measures designed to coerce compliance, as in the resolution on CAFF. However, the weakness of normative moral persuasion in West Africa lies in the difficulty of enforcing consequences in settings characterized by widespread impunity. Though some groups, such as the Malian rebels, employ their own rules of engagement, 'spoilers' can mask criminality with the chaos of conflict in a region where state security forces lack the capacity to provide public order, undermining any single group's norms of behaviour. In this context, incentives influencing weapon demand outside of conflict, such as development assistance to 'gun-free' communities, appear a more promising means of arresting the cycle of violence that has beset the West African region with the proliferation of armed groups.

CONCLUSION

Armed groups—'challengers to the state's monopoly of legitimate coercive force'—constitute a persistent threat worldwide. In West Africa, the challenges arising from the diversity of such groups, from pro-government militias to rebel groups and vigilantes, is matched only by their unpredictability, with allegiances, geographic ambitions, and motives likely to change over time. In such an impoverished region, even groups that are not self-serving (motivated by real ideologies and grievances) can quickly become 'predatory', feeding on the communities they once called home. The great variety of armed groups makes blanket approaches to their control problematic.

Controlling the supply of the weapons armed groups rely upon—namely, small arms and light weapons—is one important means of reining them in. As government-owned stocks are a key source of weapons for many armed groups, more rigorous stockpile management is one obvious priority. Moreover, in a region already awash with small arms, controlling the (largely external) supply of ammunition is at least as important.

Using normative moral persuasion, the international community often seeks to influence the behaviour of armed groups during conflict for the purpose of protecting civilians. The weak command and control structures of many West African armed groups, however, tend to undermine the persuasive power of norms. Incentives, targeting fighters as individuals as well as their leaders, that address the underlying motivations for armed violence seem more likely to engender changes in fighters' actions. In the West African context, given armed groups' nature and motivations, those incentives will more often be economic in nature than political.

As yet the promise of incentive-based strategies remains unfulfilled. In order to reduce demand for weapons, future disarmament efforts need to develop meaningful ways of generating post-conflict employment, both for ex-combatants and for the members of the communities they live in. Successfully tackling the problem of armed groups requires in-depth analysis of specific local and regional dynamics, an arduous process for which funding and time are often limited. Nevertheless, this challenge will define human security in West Africa in the coming years. ■

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AfD	arms for development	LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
AUC	Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia		
CAFF	children associated with fighting forces	MANPADS	man-portable air defence system
CFA	Communauté financière d'Afrique	MFDC	Mouvement des forces démocratiques
DDR	disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration	MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front de la Casamance
ECOMOG	ECOWAS Monitoring Group	MPCI	Mouvement patriotique du Côte d'Ivoire
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States	MRU	Manu River Union
GAM	Gerakan Aceh Merdeka	NDPVF	Niger Delta People's Vigilante Force
ICHRP	International Council on Human Rights Policy	NDV	Niger Delta Vigilante
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross	OPM	Organisasi Papua Merdeka
IHL	international humanitarian law	RPG	rocket-propelled grenade
IRA	Irish Republican Army	RUF	Revolutionary United Forces
		SSR	security sector reform
		UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
		USD	United States dollars

ENDNOTES

- 1 Quoted in Moorehead (2005, p. 57).
- 2 ECOWAS comprises 15 member countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.
- 3 See also Nicolas Florquin and Eric G. Berman, eds., 2005, *Armed and Aimless: Armed Groups, Guns, and Human Security in the ECOWAS Region*. Geneva: Small Arms Survey, upon which this chapter is based.
- 4 The author thanks Pablo Policzer for contributing the term 'normative moral persuasion' in his review of this chapter.

- 5 For instance, the federal government withdrew the police from Anambra state in 2004, apparently due to displeasure with the state's governor, Chris Ngige (Onyeozili, 2005, pp. 48–49). Human Rights Watch has documented the pervasiveness of torture and lack of respect for the law on the part of the Nigerian police (HRW, 2005c; 2006, pp. 146–47). Chevigny (1995) shows that in the Americas a culture of police violence and impunity has given rise to violent vigilantism, raising important questions for West Africa.
- 6 Written correspondence with Dickson Orji, Country Director, Nigeria Action Network on Small Arms, 9 November 2005.
- 7 The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers uses the figure 300,000 (<http://www.child-soldiers.org/childsoldiers/some-facts>), while the former UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict's count comes to 250,000 (Otunnu, 2005). Some question the empirical basis of such statistics and believe the actual number of CAFF to be much lower (see Human Security Centre, 2005, ch. 3).
- 8 Normative moral persuasion might be more effective at stopping children from joining armed groups than it is for adults. One study highlights the role parents play in keeping their children from joining armed groups, including the importance of 'changing attitudes to stop children wanting to join the fighters' (SC, 2005, p. 11).
- 9 This data is drawn from interviews with 270 CAFF: 100 in Liberia, 91 in Guinea, and 79 in Sierra Leone (Wille, 2005).
- 10 Interview 118, cited in Wille (2005, p. 191).
- 11 See also Florquin and Pézard (2005, p. 57); Humphreys and ag Mohamed (2003, p. 27).
- 12 Confidential interviews with Guinean military officials, Ministry of Social Affairs representatives, and UNICEF officials, Conakry, March 2004, cited in Milner (2005, p. 280).
- 13 Confidential interview with UN officials, Conakry, March 2004, cited in Milner (2005, p. 283).
- 14 By 19 December 2005, GAM had handed over all 840 weapons it agreed to surrender under the terms of the peace agreement. On 27 December, it officially demobilized the TNA. The Indonesian government fulfilled all its obligations under the peace accord by 5 January 2006, marking the end of armed conflict in Aceh (UNORC, 2006, p. 1).
- 15 Written correspondence with Robin Edward Poulton, International Consultant and Senior Research Fellow at the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 5 May 2004, cited in Florquin and Berman (2005, p. 289).
- 16 For more information, see Florquin and Berman (2005, p. 387).
- 17 In Guinea's case, the transfers occurred through a single 'mid-level functionary in the agriculture ministry, who worked in conjunction with European arms dealers, [and] was responsible for issuing 80 per cent of the documentation for illicit arms fuelling West Africa's regional war in the 1990s' (ICG, 2005b, p. 16).
- 18 Focus group discussions with Malian ex-combatants, Bamako, 2–3 September 2004, cited in Florquin and Pézard (2005, p. 52).
- 19 Government of Liberia soldiers were equally, or more, culpable of atrocities against civilians (HRW, 2005a).
- 20 For instance, LURD postponed its final attack on Monrovia in July 2003 due to insufficient stores of mortar rounds, ordering fighters to retreat while accumulating additional armament (HRW, 2003, p. 6).
- 21 See, for instance, Global Witness (2004b).
- 22 The arms trade on Lake Victoria was the subject of an award-winning 2004 documentary film, *Darwin's Nightmare*.
- 23 Meetings with refugee communities in Lainé and Kouankan camps, 2 October and 4 October 2004, cited in Milner (2005, p. 159).
- 24 Phone interview with Colonel Sirakoro Sangaré, President of the Malian National Commission on Small Arms, 22 March 2005, cited in Florquin and Pézard (2005, p. 59).
- 25 Focus group discussion with Malian ex-combatants, Bamako, 2–3 September 2004, cited in Florquin and Pézard (2005, p. 59).
- 26 The disarmament committee in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire does not seem to have learned from the mistake of underestimating ex-combatants. The National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration has estimated militia membership at 10,000, prompting the UN to caution that the figure was 'very likely to be underestimated' (HRW, 2005b, pp. 14–15).
- 27 Interview with UNDP DDRR official in Monrovia, 21 September 2004, cited in Nichols (2005, p. 127).
- 28 'In the east [of Liberia] near the border with Côte d'Ivoire, the residents of Zwedru see former fighters zipping around town on shiny new scooters and setting up small stalls with their disarmament money, while they struggle to feed their own families' (IRIN, 2005).

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