

# Arsenals Adrift

## ARMS AND AMMUNITION DIVERSION

Diversion lies at the heart of illicit arms proliferation. In northern Kenya, 40 per cent of ammunition on the illicit market has leaked from Kenyan armed forces. Across the world, theft from civilian owners may result in the unlawful acquisition of as many as 1 in every 1,000 weapons. These are examples of diversion: the unauthorized transfer of arms and ammunition from the stocks of lawful users to the illicit market.

Across the world, the diversion of arms and ammunition sustains the activities of non-state armed groups, terrorist organizations, and armed criminals. It includes, but is not limited to: large international transfers organized by corrupt military officials; low-level, localized theft and resale by military and police forces; and the loss of civilian weaponry through home burglary and other forms of theft. Stockpile diversion can occur from any legally held quantity of small arms and ammunition, whether in military or in civilian hands.

The *national stockpile* encompasses every item of arms or ammunition under the control of—or destined for—a state's defence and law and order apparatus. Its components range from munitions stored in manufacturing facilities to large arms and ammunition depots and the weapons and ammunition issued to individual soldiers and police officers. Diversion can, and does, occur anywhere in the national stockpile. All state armed forces are susceptible and suffer diversion to varying degrees.

The *civilian stockpile* includes all arms and ammunition that are in the hands of—or destined for—authorized civilian users. Its components include weapons located in manufacturing facilities; arms and ammunition stored by wholesale firms; weapons and ammunition held in gun shops; and those stored by private users at home (civilian holdings). Again, stocks anywhere in the civilian stockpile can be subject to diversion.

**Table 2.1 Categories of diversion and regulatory frameworks**

Stockpile	Type of diversion	Dynamic	Description	Reach	Regulatory framework
<b>National stockpile</b>	Low-order	Intra-security force theft	Theft by members of the armed forces	Localized	Stockpile management
		Extra-security force theft	Theft through unauthorized access to stocks or attack	Regional to international	Stockpile management / security sector reform
	High-order	High-level corruption	Defence sector officials orchestrate diversion	International	Institutional capacity building / combating corruption / security sector reform
		Mass looting or dispersal	State or security sector collapse leading to the dissolution of stockpiles	Regional to international	Political (domestic governments prior to collapse, possibly occupying powers)
<b>Civilian stockpile</b>	Low-order	Theft from users	Theft from persons, homes, and vehicles	Localized	National firearms laws (ownership, carrying, and storage)
		Unauthorized sales	Sale to unauthorized users	Localized	National firearms laws (commerce and resale)
	High-order	Theft from gun shops, wholesalers, and factories	Targeted thefts by organized crime and other organized non-state groups	Regional to international	National firearms laws (commerce and security thereof)

Source: Bevan (2008a)

### Box 2.3 Diversion and improvised explosive devices

Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) can be made from any explosive material, including items with explicitly civilian applications, such as compounds derived from nitrate-based agricultural fertilizers, and military explosives, such as TNT<sup>29</sup> and RDX<sup>30</sup> (DHS, 2005; TRADOC, 2007). Many of these ingredients are readily available to non-state armed groups around the world.

Diversion of light weapons ammunition from state stocks, however, poses a particular threat because it involves the release of weapons with specific military capabilities onto the illicit market. These weapons can be used, in their entirety or as components, to manufacture IEDs. They differ from civilian explosives because they are designed exclusively for military applications. Light weapons ammunition (as well as ammunition for larger conventional weapons) can be used in the following ways:

- removal of explosives from warheads and subsequent use in home-made bombs and projectiles;
- remote firing of projectile weapons, such as mortars and rocket launchers and ammunition thereof;
- adaptation of existing ammunition, such as mortar bombs, to detonate under pressure (mines); and
- use of shaped charges from anti-armour weaponry to increase the penetrative capacity of IEDs.

These features make national stockpiles attractive targets for non-state armed groups, allowing them to drastically increase both the speed with which they can manufacture IEDs and the capacity of these weapons against modern military targets. They have proven especially deadly in Iraq (LIGHT WEAPONS).

The diversion of arms and ammunition from state security forces takes many forms and ranges from thefts that involve high-level decision-maker complicity to low-level pilfering by petty criminals (see excerpt of Table 2.1).

Its contributing factors are various, and extend from private motivations, such as the need for cash by poorly paid security personnel, to major political changes that affect the entire structures of states, military forces, and their capacity to secure national stockpiles. Increasingly, states view diversion as a critical source of weapons and ammunition—notably high-value, high-impact technology, such as man-portable air defence systems and explosives manufactured to military specifications (see Box 2.3).

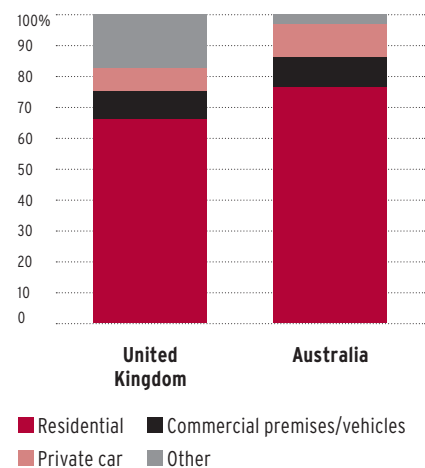
Diversion from any part of the civilian stockpile has the potential to contribute to unlawful use, armed crime, and violence. Many civilian holdings are insecure and present criminals with easy opportunities to divert arms and ammunition. The main reason for criminal access is poor physical security of arms and ammunition—primarily in homes (see Figure 2.5).

Data for ten selected countries suggests that around 1 in every 1,000 weapons in civilian hands may be subject to diversion. Taken at face value, this number may seem small, but given a global civilian stockpile of around 650 million firearms, diversion from civilian stocks is, cumulatively, a grave problem. At a diversion rate of 1:1,000 civilian weapons, annual losses could total 650,000 weapons.

By providing a source of arms and ammunition to users who might otherwise have difficulty acquiring arms, diversion intensifies armed conflict and criminality, threatening communities, societies and the state itself. Among this chapter's principal observations are:

- Diversion is largely a problem that stems from negligence by states, militaries, and civilians.
- Weapons that are diverted from state stockpiles or from civilian hands can fuel crime as easily as they can fuel insurgency or international terrorism.
- Diversion can often be addressed by relatively low-cost improvements to accounting, monitoring, and the physical security of arms and ammunition.
- Measures to curtail diversion must be comprehensive, addressing security force stockpiles and civilian holdings simultaneously. 🍷

Figure 2.5 Proportion of locations from which firearms were stolen in Australia (n = 372) and the United Kingdom (n = 4697)



Notes: Australian data for period 1 February–1 July 2004; UK aggregated from years 1999–2006.

Sources: Mouzos and Sakurai (2006, p. 37); UKHO (2000; 2001; 2003; 2004; 2005; 2006; 2007)