

Across Conflict Zones

AMMUNITION PROFILING

Investigators, researchers, war reporters, and activists are increasingly documenting ammunition found in or transferred to areas that are experiencing armed conflict. Photographs of ammunition markings and packaging taken on location, as well as shipping documents retrieved from various sources, provide a wealth of information on the countries and dates of manufacture of war materiel. In some cases, these efforts also allow ammunition to be traced back to the initial recipient as well as to subsequent intermediaries.

This chapter analyses the characteristics of small-calibre ammunition—that is, of calibres of less than 20 mm—documented since 2010 in seven countries and territories: Côte d'Ivoire, Libya, Somalia, Somaliland, South Sudan, Sudan, and Syria. Drawing on a data set of 560 samples of such ammunition, the chapter analyses the diverse types of cartridges circulating across the seven case studies, with a particular focus on calibre, production facility, and date of manufacture. It also explores what these profiles can reveal about the production, procurement, and transfer of ammunition.

The chapter's key findings include:

- Facilities located in 39 countries produced the surveyed ammunition. Production plants located in China and the Soviet Union account for the greatest share of the ammunition samples. The prevalence of cartridges of Sudanese and Iranian manufacture is also noteworthy.
- More than three-quarters of the ammunition samples were Eastern Bloc-calibre cartridges, and more than half were produced during the cold war—highlighting the role of old ammunition in armed conflict and underlining the importance of reducing stock-pile surpluses.
- The presence of newly produced ammunition in several countries illustrates how quickly this materiel can be diverted or retransferred to situations of armed conflict. A total of 29 samples of ammunition observed in Côte d'Ivoire, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Syria were produced since 2010.
- The presence of different types of unmarked cartridges in all but one of the countries and territories under review raises new hurdles for arms monitoring efforts.

Iranian- and Sudanese-produced ammunition circulates in multiple countries in Africa.

It is important to note that the producing countries identified in this chapter are not necessarily responsible for transferring the ammunition to the conflict environments and actors under study. Indeed, producers may have exported the ammunition legally to these or other countries before it was retransferred without their knowledge and used in conflict, or diverted to non-state armed groups or illicit markets. Information on producers is nevertheless important in generating a baseline of the ammunition in circulation, which in turn may facilitate the identification of unusual or new ammunition flows over time and across borders. Moreover, identifying

Figure 6.7 (excerpt) **Case head of unmarked 7.62 x 54R mm ammunition, Mogadishu, 2014**

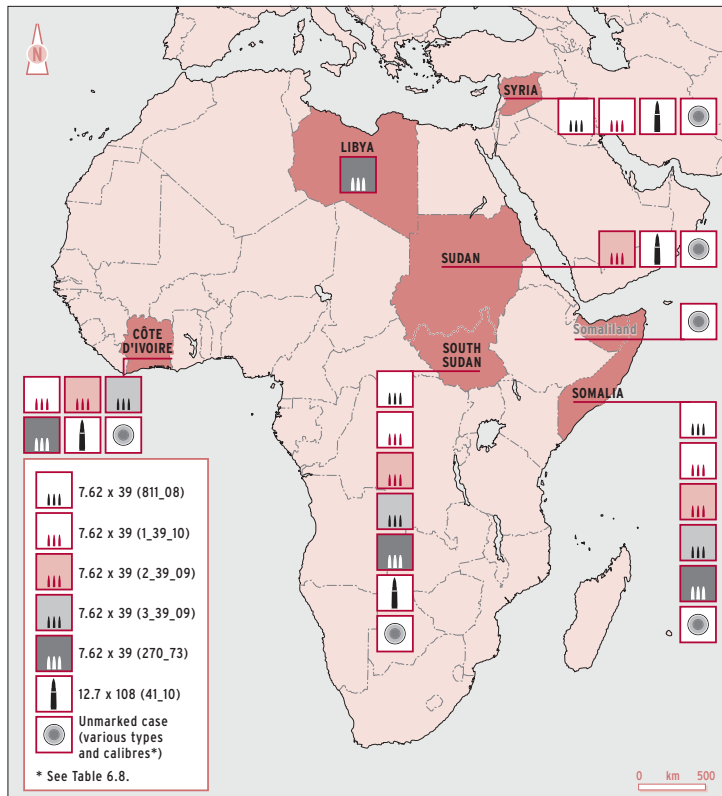


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producers is often a necessary first step in establishing the full chain of custody of ammunition transfers to areas affected by conflict.

While the majority of types of ammunition reviewed in this chapter date from the cold war era, this pattern appears to be shifting, as various other types of ammunition now also circulate in conflict-affected environments. Cartridges manufactured since 2000 were available in all the countries and territories under review barring Somaliland. As many as 29 samples of ammunition were produced after 2009—meaning at most two years before they were found in the surveyed conflict environments. Chinese and Sudanese ammunition constitute the bulk of the

Map 6.1 Selected ammunition found in case study countries and territories



samples of this new ammunition. Domestically produced ammunition is in use in the battlefields of Sudan and Syria. Overall, the data suggests a more diverse profile for conflict ammunition than was previously assumed.

Unmarked ammunition was uncovered in six of the seven countries and territories under review.

The country/territory profiles also make it possible to identify single types of ammunition that are circulating in multiple locations. While the data set contains only few such cases, they reaffirmed some of the above findings—such as the seemingly increased importance of certain types of Chinese and Sudanese ammunition in conflict-affected situations (see Map 6.1). They also point to broader patterns of ammunition transfer. In fact, in several cases, efforts to map and monitor ammunition over time provided the first evidence of clandestine or destabilizing transfers of specific types of cartridges.

The presence of unmarked cartridges, in several cases of unknown origin, in most of the conflict zones under review raises new hurdles for monitoring work.

As the chapter also points out, patchy reporting by states on their authorized transfers severely limits the utility of existing databases and complicates research on the possible provenance of conflict ammunition. More systematic reporting, data collection, and information sharing, as well as the use of more sophisticated ammunition recognition and tracing techniques, will be critical to improving our understanding—and our ability to track—conflict ammunition in the years to come. ■