



Militiamen belonging to the jihadist group Ansar Dine, Kidal, June 2012.  
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# Expanding Arsenals

## INSURGENT ARMS IN NORTHERN MALI

### INTRODUCTION

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Armed violence persisted in northern Mali throughout 2014 although the government and secessionist rebel groups had signed a preliminary peace agreement in June 2013. While rebels clashed with the army and community self-defence groups, violent jihadists attacked armed forces and international peacekeepers. Fighting between armed groups over smuggling routes and competition among tribal and ethnic groups further heightened insecurity. Amid these complex dynamics, armed actors have stepped up and diversified their means of sourcing weapons.

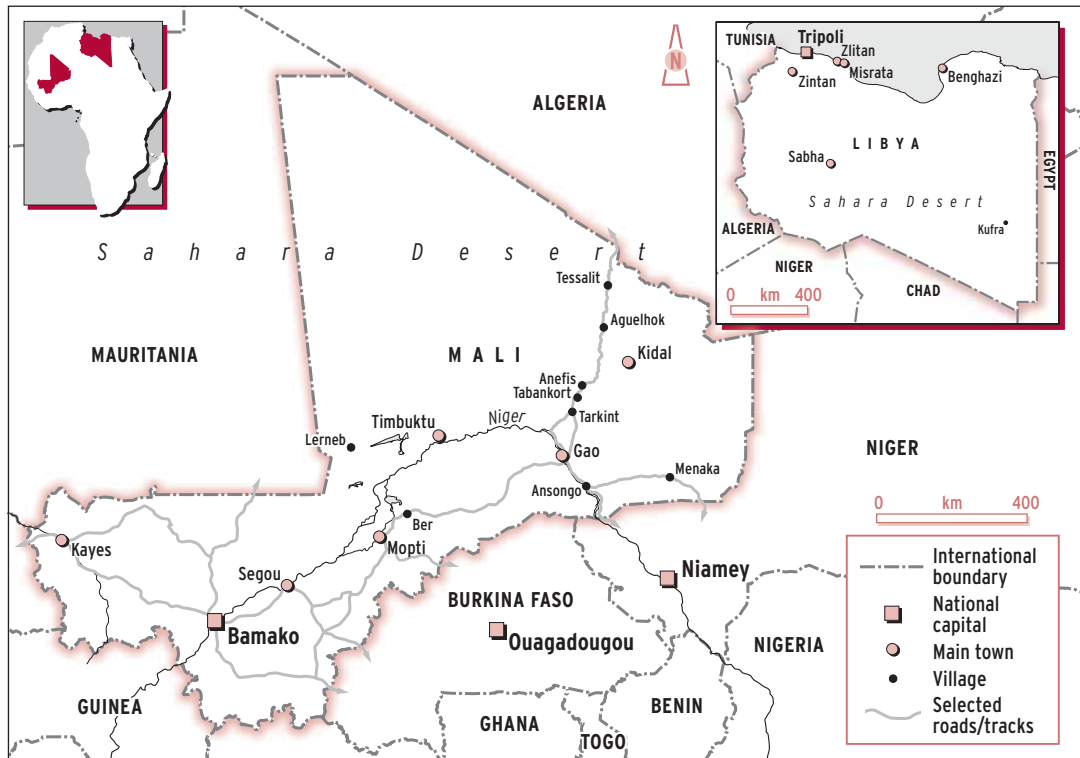
This chapter focuses on arms and ammunition used by rebel groups struggling for independence or greater autonomy, jihadists fighting for the implementation of Islamic law, and militias and self-defence groups that formed in opposition to rebels and jihadists. The analysis is based on original field investigations conducted in 2012–14, including the documentation of 1,500 small arms and light weapons cartridges identified at some 20 sites of armed clashes<sup>1</sup> and 300 weapons the Malian army recovered from armed groups in 2012–14.<sup>2</sup> The chapter also draws on previously published reports on arms and ammunition whose possession by armed groups was documented in 2012–13, comparing new findings with research conducted in northern Mali by the Small Arms Survey in 2005.

The chapter's main findings are as follows:

- Armed groups are better armed than they were a decade ago, including with larger-calibre weapons. Of particular concern is jihadist possession of man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS), although many of these may be inoperable.
- Insurgents use materiel that consists largely of cold war-era Soviet and Chinese arms and ammunition, but they also use more recently produced materiel from Bulgaria and China, among other states.
- Armed groups appear to have obtained much of their materiel through diversion from Malian army stockpiles; however, Libyan stockpiles have also been an important source of materiel, including of more recently acquired larger-calibre weapons.
- There is no evidence that foreign states have directly supplied rebels with arms and ammunition or violated the UN arms embargo by supplying jihadists with arms and ammunition, despite accusations to the contrary.
- Armed groups use trans-Saharan smuggling routes to obtain resupply from illicit markets in Libya and elsewhere in the region.
- Violent jihadists are likely to pose an ongoing threat in northern Mali. Relevant stakeholders, including the UN peacekeeping mission, may have to consider ways to best adapt to this long-term challenge.

This chapter begins by offering background information on the armed insurgency that broke out in 2012 and by providing an overview of current security challenges in northern Mali. It then examines arms and ammunition used by armed groups in northern Mali as well as their countries and years of manufacture. The findings are contrasted against

Map 6.1 Map of northern Mali



what is known about the holdings of armed groups in previous rebellions in the area. The chapter then identifies the major sources of the materiel and discusses the allegations that foreign states have supplied armed groups with arms and ammunition. The chapter's conclusion considers the findings in relation to the threat of enduring insecurity and continuing jihadist attacks on national and international forces in northern Mali.

## THE 2012 INSURGENCY AND ITS AFTERMATH

In January 2012, rebels under the banner of the Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad (MNLA) and allied jihadist groups launched a sweeping campaign against the national army in northern Mali. Their week-long attack on the army base in Aguelhok began on 18 January 2012 and culminated in the killing of 82 Malian soldiers, including through summary executions (RFI, 2012). The rebel and jihadist groups, hereafter referred to as insurgents, included local Tuareg and subsequently also Arab groups as well as Tuareg fighters who had left Libya in the wake of Col. Muammar Qaddafi's downfall the previous year (UNSC, 2013a, para. 144). For rebels, the declared aim was independence for northern Mali until, in light of developments in 2013, some of them narrowed their demands to greater autonomy. Jihadists also included radical Tuareg and Arab fighters who followed an al-Qaeda-inspired agenda with the goal of establishing Islamic law in northern Mali (Keenan, 2012). The advance of the insurgent groups triggered the



formation of additional armed groups that aligned themselves with the Malian government or emerged for self-defence purposes, to protect their local interests, and to counter the perceived threat of domination by secessionist Tuaregs.

By April 2012, insurgents were occupying the major population centres and provincial capitals of Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu. On 6 April, the MNLA unilaterally declared what they call 'Azawad' (northern Mali) independent (Al Jazeera, 2012). Yet their decision was not universally supported among insurgents or the local population. Among the dissenters were sedentary farmers and pastoralists of the Songhai and Fulani groups who feared Tuareg domination and wished the region to remain firmly within the Republic of Mali. There were also disagreements between groups that supported secular structures and those in favour of Islamic structures, including jihadist groups that were not fighting for the independence of Azawad but for the introduction of Islamic law in Mali. In 2012, when Gao, Timbuktu, and other areas were under their control, the jihadist groups implemented a radical interpretation of sharia law that included the prohibition of alcohol, music, and cigarettes as well as public beatings of individuals accused of adultery and the amputation of limbs of individuals accused of theft or buying or selling stolen goods (Bennoune, 2013).

Jihadist groups eventually turned on the rebels they had previously supported and consolidated their dominance in northern Mali. Responding to the crisis, the UN Security Council mandated the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) in December 2012 and, in April 2013, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), to which AFISMA transferred its authority in July of the same year (MINUSMA, n.d.). As jihadists pushed farther south in January 2013, raising fears that they could take over Mali's capital, Bamako, the Malian



A woman walks down a street reduced to ruins following an attack by armed groups, Gao, February 2013. © Joel Saget/AFP Photo

government requested urgent assistance. That same month, French troops arrived in Mali and launched, together with AFISMA troops and the Malian army, a counter-insurgency campaign that drove jihadists out of the major population centres (MINUSMA, n.d.). Nevertheless, jihadists have continued their attacks and remain committed to fighting the Malian army as well as French and UN forces in northern Mali.

In contrast, rebel groups that had fought the Malian army in 2012 signed a preliminary agreement with the Malian government for inclusive peace talks in Ouagadougou, Burkino Faso, in June 2013. The Ouagadougou agreement officially restored the territorial integrity of Mali and paved the way for a tentative restoration of state authority in northern Mali. Yet the Malian government and rebel groups were slow in the implementation of key provisions of the agreement, including the cantonment and disarmament of rebel groups (SCR, 2014). Moreover, the national army and insurgents clashed violently in May 2014, when the then Malian prime minister, Moussa Mara, visited the town of Kidal in the heartland of the Tuareg rebellion, which had remained under the de facto control of secessionist rebels. The clashes resulted in the routing of the national army from Kidal; the national defence and security forces subsequently withdrew from various locations in northern Mali to focus on Gao and Timbuktu (Bozonnet, 2014; Diarra, 2014; Offner, 2014). Armed groups then repositioned themselves in various areas of northern Mali, ostensibly to provide protection to the civilian population, but also, according to one observer, to gain political leverage in view of upcoming peace negotiations.<sup>3</sup>

The Malian government and rebel groups met again in Algiers, Algeria, in July 2014 to prepare for the peace talks (Ramzi and Oumar, 2014). Further meetings took place between September and November 2014, gathering representatives of the Malian government, rebel groups, and armed groups that had formed to defend their communities and interests. At the time of writing, discussions remained hamstrung due to ongoing disagreements between the participants, especially with respect to the future status of northern Mali. Rebel groups that had initially called for independence

**Table 6.1 Prominent armed groups in northern Mali, 2014**

| Group  |  | Principal membership |
|--|--|----------------------|
| Coordination Group<br>(separatist, federalist)     | Haut Conseil pour l'Unité de l'Azawad<br>(High Council for the Unity of Azawad)  | Tuareg               |
|  | Mouvement Arabe de l'Azawad (Arab Movement of the Azawad)-<br>Sidati   | Arab                 |
|  | Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad<br>(National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad)                                  | Tuareg               |
| Platform Group<br>(pro-Malian unity, decentralist) | Coordination des Mouvements et Forces Patriotiques de Résistance<br>(Coordination of Patriotic Movements and Forces of the Resistance) | Songhai and Fulani   |
|  | Coalition pour le Peuple de l'Azawad<br>(Coalition of the People for Azawad)   | Tuareg and Arab      |
|  | Mouvement Arabe de l'Azawad (Arab Movement of the Azawad)-<br>Sidi Mohamed   | Arab                 |
| Jihadist groups                                    | Al-Mourabitoune  | Arab and other       |
|  | Al-Qaeda au Maghreb Islamique (al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb)  | Arab                 |
|  | Ansar Dine   | Tuareg               |

and formed the ‘Coordination Group’ were insisting on greater autonomy for northern Mali, to be provided through a new federal structure. Other armed groups that had formed to defend their communities and interests established the ‘Platform Group’, which defended Malian unity, generally aligned itself with the positions of the Malian government, and promoted decentralization as opposed to federalism. Table 6.1 lists prominent members of the Coordination and Platform groups in the Algiers peace talks. The table also lists prominent jihadist groups, although these have not participated in the peace talks.

Moreover, northern Mali’s security situation remained precarious towards the end of 2014. Following the withdrawal of the national army from large parts of northern Mali, members of the Coordination and Platform groups clashed with one another, possibly also over the control of trade and trafficking routes, as discussed below.

Meanwhile, jihadist groups were continuing their attacks against what they perceived to be ‘the enemies of Islam’ and seeking to undermine a possible peace agreement between rebels and the Malian government. In 2014 they assaulted French and UN forces in northern Mali by carrying out suicide attacks, setting roadside bombs, and shelling camps with mortar projectiles and rockets. Suicide bombers drove vehicles laden with explosives into UN camps in Aguelhok in June 2014 and in Ber in August 2014, killing six peacekeepers and wounding another 17 (AFP, 2014a; UN News Centre, 2014). On 3 October 2014, jihadists attacked a convoy of UN peacekeepers on the road between Ansongo and Menaka in Gao region, killing nine blue helmets from Niger (Diarra and Lewis, 2014).

Northern Mali’s security situation remained precarious towards the end of 2014.

## SECURITY CHALLENGES: AN OVERVIEW

The sources of enduring insecurity in northern Mali are multi-layered and often interconnected. They include armed rebellion for greater autonomy and independence, religiously motivated violence, inter-communal clashes, and trafficking of drugs and other illicit goods. Complex ethnic, tribal, and clan-based structures as well as competition for scarce resources, which takes place in an environment of shifting alliances between and within different groups, further complicate the situation. The following sections discuss relevant factors in their historical context with a view to identifying changes in northern Mali’s security situation. ‘New’ challenges are discussed in addition to long-standing issues.

### Armed rebellions and jihadist groups

An important factor in northern Mali’s insecurity is the enduring rejection, especially by some sections of Tuareg society, of Malian state rule. Armed rebellion broke out in 1963 and was brutally suppressed by the Malian army. In the following decades, grievances grew among the northern population, much of which perceived themselves as marginalized and neglected by the state despite environmental hardship (Keita, 1998, pp. 11–13). Further rebellions, also aimed at greater autonomy in the Tuareg heartlands north of the river Niger, broke out in 1991 and 2006. While the rebellion that began in 2012 came on the heels of these uprisings, it aimed for independence rather than for greater autonomy within Mali.

The current rebellion is also notable for the capacities of armed groups. The past decades have seen numerous Tuaregs leave northern Mali in search of employment and better living conditions. Some of them fought in Libyan armed groups under Qaddafi before returning to Mali in late 2011. They brought with them military training and combat experience. Previously, the rebels had had limited numbers of arms and had faced a scarcity of ammunition (Florquin and Pézard, 2005, p. 48). By 2013 these constraints had apparently been lifted: Malian army commanders argued that insurgent-held materiel was ‘pretty much the same’ as that held by the Malian army and that it had the destructive power ‘indicative of an army, or groups that have the capacity of an army’ (AFP, 2013).

A major new factor in 2012 was the presence of jihadist fighters seeking to establish Islamic law in northern Mali. Jihadist combatants have been present in northern Mali for at least a decade, but in 2012 observers saw them emerge as a dominant group of fighters. Their presence is closely related to the spread of violent jihadist ideology in Mali and elsewhere in Africa (see Box 6.1). One such group is al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which has reportedly profited from some USD 90 million in ransoms paid for kidnapped Westerners since 2003 and has generated further revenue by taxing trafficking convoys for safe passage through its areas of control (Kustusch, 2012). Another prominent group, Ansar Dine, is composed largely of radicalized Tuaregs from northern Mali.

### Box 6.1 Violent Salafism in Mali

Islamic roots in Mali reach back to the ninth century. The majority of Malians follow tolerant Islamic traditions that reflect mystical beliefs and ancestor worship. It was only in the past decades that Salafist thought established itself among sections of Malian society. Salafist organizations that run religious schools and that receive financial support from Kuwait, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia have been a key element in the spread of Salafism in Mali.<sup>4</sup>

Salafism, a puritanical movement that does not necessarily advocate violence, sees Islam as having strayed from its origins. It holds that only the return to the teachings of Mohammed and his early disciples will allow the Muslim community to be free from enemy oppression and to re-establish the perceived former glory of Islam (Livesey, 2005). Salafists reject mystical beliefs and therewith the established traditions that underpin Malian Islamic culture.

Violent Salafism was popularized by al-Qaeda, which complemented the Salafist worldview with radical Islamic arguments. It contended that Islam was under attack by infidel 'crusaders' and their allies and that it was a divine obligation for each 'true' Muslim to engage in violent jihad, or holy war, in the defence of Islam against its enemies (FAS, 1998). In Africa, violent Salafism and jihadist groups exist mainly in Arab countries, although some operate in Nigeria, Somalia, and elsewhere on the continent.

In northern Mali violent Salafism is present mainly among radicalized Arab and Tuareg communities. Their sworn enemies include what jihadists perceive as a deeply corrupted and Westernized Malian state and army, as well as French 'crusaders' and their 'mercenaries' (international peacekeeping troops). The presence of violent Salafism in northern Mali is illustrated by a statement by Iyad Ag Ghaly, founder of Ansar Dine, that was published on a website linked to AQIM in early August 2014:

Since the beginning of the Crusader aggression against us [...] we [...] fulfil the duty of defending our religion [...]. The war between us and them is still ongoing, as you see with the martyrdom-seeking operations carried out against the enemy successively, and the rockets launched from time to time, and the mines that were placed for them everywhere (SITE Intelligence Group, 2014, p. 1, translation by SITE).



A soldier of the Malian army stands guard before a sign promoting sharia law after the liberation of Gao by national and international forces in January, Gao, February 2013. © Joel Saget/AFP Photo



An internal AQIM document dated June 2012 and recovered by journalists in Timbuktu in 2013 reflects on the jihadist rule in northern Mali in early 2012. In the document, AQIM leader Abdel Malek Droukdel admonishes fellow jihadists for their harsh implementation of sharia law in northern Mali, stressing that their approach could turn the local population against them. He urges the jihadist community to focus instead on educating the population on 'true' Islam as a step to win their support (RFI, 2013). This strategy appears to have been implemented by 2014, as 'preaching convoys' of jihadists arrived in villages to 'teach' locals about 'true' Islam. At the same time, jihadists were threatening to kill anyone who informed their enemies about their presence.<sup>5</sup>





### Box 6.2 Environmental hardship and armed conflict

Northern Mali has experienced repeated droughts, including in the 1970s and 1980s. The droughts contribute to the continuing encroachment of the Saharan desert into the Sahel and the resulting loss of land suitable to human populations and livestock herding. These environmental pressures increase competition between populations over remaining natural resources. The droughts also caused significant loss of livestock, aggravating the impoverishment of pastoralist communities and increasing the number of internally displaced people in the northern part of the country (Benjaminsen, 2008; Brooks, 2012; Holthuijzen and Maximilian, 2011).

There is no evidence that environmental hardship is a root cause of armed conflict in northern Mali, although it arguably contributes to conditions that, together with other elements, facilitate armed conflict. One factor in this regard is that some people who are affected by environmental hardship consider themselves neglected and marginalized by the Malian state. Rebel groups and jihadists exploit these perceptions by claiming that greater autonomy or independence and the imposition of Islamic law will improve living conditions in northern Mali.<sup>6</sup> In so doing, they promote insurgent recruitment and garner support among sections of the local population.

Likewise, economic hardship in the harsh environment of northern Mali may facilitate recruitment by rebels and jihadists, especially given insurgent payments to fighters and supporters. Some jihadist groups reportedly offer recruits USD 300 or more per month, depending on their function.<sup>7</sup> These payments represent a substantial income in northern Mali and are particularly attractive in the absence of comparable income-generating opportunities, other than engagement in smuggling and banditry.

gered flows of civilians seeking refuge (Diakité, 2014; Diop, 2014a–b; Koba, 2014).<sup>9</sup> The armed groups reportedly fought over control of important trade and smuggling routes, with a view to imposing taxes on merchants and drug trafficking convoys.<sup>10</sup>

In parallel, inter-ethnic competition over scarce resources has long been established in northern Mali, including over grazing and land rights, as well as access to water. These rivalries can involve conflicts between nomadic livestock herders and farmers. Competition is arguably intensified by enduring environmental hardship and the absence of mechanisms to mitigate environmental pressures, such as drought and desertification. Poverty and a perceived absence of development opportunities exacerbate these dynamics (see Box 6.2).

### Drug trafficking and other smuggling

Entrenched cross-border smuggling networks have long provided the backdrop to armed violence in northern Mali. In the recent past, cocaine has been smuggled through the north Malian desert on its way from Latin America towards northern Africa and Europe. In the widely publicized ‘Air Cocaine’ incident of 2009, a burnt-out Boeing 727 was discovered in the desert near Tarkint in northern Mali. Investigations revealed that the plane had originated in Venezuela and had carried several tonnes of cocaine. After loading the narcotics onto 4×4 vehicles, the traffickers may have torched the plane, which was already in poor condition (Hawley, 2010).

### Inter-communal violence

The current armed violence in northern Mali takes place against the background of complex competition between and within ethnic groups, tribes, and clans as well as groups with cross-cutting membership and interests. Traditional hierarchies characterize both Tuareg and Arab tribal structures, whereby ‘subaltern’ tribes do not necessarily share the aims and views of ‘noble’ tribes. Indeed, the aim of greater autonomy for northern Mali is by no means common to all Tuareg and Arab tribes in northern Mali, as ‘subaltern’ tribes often side with the Malian government.<sup>8</sup> Fractured social relations are also reflected in the multitude of armed groups and splinter groups in northern Mali.

Competition between communities has occasionally turned violent. In July and August 2014 members of the Coordination and Platform groups repeatedly clashed with each other in the area of Tabankort, Gao region, and Lerneb, Timbuktu region. The clashes claimed the lives of fighters and trig-

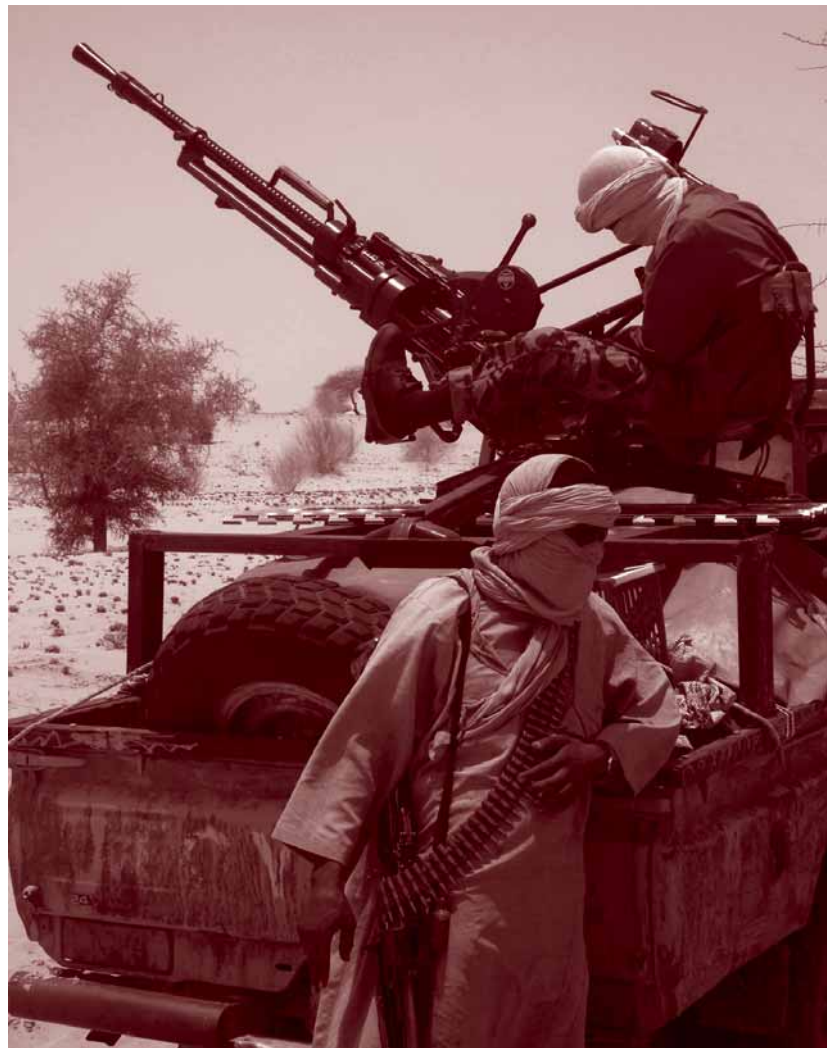
As one observer notes, traffickers and the networks they operate in northern Mali are key players at the local level, as they make temporary alliances with armed groups to protect and further their economic interests. In addition, trafficking networks allegedly enjoy close ties to political circles both in northern Mali and in Bamako, where money may be laundered in construction projects.<sup>11</sup> The thin line between traffickers and insurgents is well illustrated by the case of Mokhtar Belmokhtar, founder of the jihadist group Al-Mourabitoune, which operates in northern Mali. Belmokhtar was known as ‘Mr. Marlboro’ for his sophisticated cigarette smuggling racket across the Sahara before he branched out into kidnappings of Westerners and violent jihad (Beaumont, 2013).

A prominent means of trafficking is the use of convoys of 4x4 vehicles to cross the Sahara and Sahel, a modern version of the caravan trade. Numerous convoys carrying arms and ammunition for insurgents in northern Mali have been documented (Al Jazeera, 2014; UNSC, 2012a, paras. 120–22, 130–33; 2013a, paras. 126f, 144). In some cases, convoys leave from northern Mali to Libya to return with materiel required by insurgents. The materiel is sometimes ordered beforehand.<sup>12</sup> Convoy organizers include rebels and jihadists, as well as criminal networks that traffic in people, drugs, and other contraband. This illustrates again the close inter-linkages that can exist between the armed insurgency and transnational crime in northern Mali.

## ARMS AND AMMUNITION IN NORTHERN MALI

As in many other African conflicts, armed violence in northern Mali is carried out predominantly with small arms and light weapons, although insurgents have also accessed some larger-calibre weapons. Armed groups also use ‘technicals’—4x4 pick-up trucks with mounted machine guns—which play an important role in their mobility and fire-power. In addition, rebels and jihadists hold a variety of large conventional weapons systems, including recoilless guns and auto-cannons, as well as launch systems other than MANPADS for rockets and missiles (CAR and Small Arms Survey, 2013).

A further feature of the current violence in northern Mali is the jihadist use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). These include pressure-operated mines, which can function as main charges of IEDs, and homemade explosives that are planted at roadsides and



Jihadist combatants use a 4x4 vehicle mounted with a light weapon near Timbuktu, June 2012.  
© Romaric Ollon Hien/AFP Photo



Malian soldiers stand next to arms and ammunition seized from jihadist fighters, Gao, February 2013.  
© Joel Saget/AFP Photo

### Eastern Bloc- and Chinese-standard material

The most prevalent arms in northern Mali are Eastern Bloc- and Chinese-standard assault and sniper rifles, light- and general-purpose machine guns, and rocket-assisted recoilless weapons. Also frequently found are heavy machine guns on technicals, which serve as mobile platforms for various weapons. At a minimum, jihadists reportedly possess 81 mm mortars and MANPADS.<sup>13</sup> Research conducted for this study in northern Mali in 2014 documented about 300 small arms

airstrips and, like IED suicide attacks, target armed forces in northern Mali. Jihadists also use mortar projectiles against military camps and airstrips. On 7 October 2014, they hit the MINUSMA camp in Kidal with mortar projectiles, killing one Senegalese peacekeeper (RFI, 2014). Likewise, jihadists use improvised rocket launches in attacks. While often lacking precision, such launches can be easy and quick to set up. Altogether, the IED events and attacks contribute to a climate of fear and insecurity that restricts the presence of humanitarian actors and the assistance they can provide.

The following sections detail prominent types of arms and ammunition that armed groups use in northern Mali, with a focus on where and when the materiel was produced. The documented ammunition also includes samples that the Malian army uses. Reference to ownership of ammunition by specific groups, such as rebels or jihadists, is only made if the ownership could be confirmed, which was not always the case. There were no significant differences in terms of origin and age of ammunition documented at the various sites in northern Mali.

Arms and ammunition that were produced in the former Soviet Union, Eastern Bloc countries, and China are considered first, followed by NATO-standard materiel. In assessing the materiel and its distribution, this section then highlights quantitative and qualitative changes in the holdings of armed groups in today's rebellion as compared to previous uprisings in northern Mali.

and light weapons that were produced in Bulgaria, China, Romania, the Russian Federation (while still part of the Soviet Union), and Serbia (including when Serbia was still part of Yugoslavia). The years of production typically fell within the cold war period, but materiel also included, for example, Chinese light machine guns that were exported in 2007 and Bulgarian assault rifles that were produced in 2011 (CAR and Small Arms Survey, 2013; UNSC, 2012a; 2013a; 2014).

Less common, larger-calibre weapons in insurgent possession include recoilless guns, multiple-launch rocket systems (MLRS), auto-cannon, and launch systems for 122 mm rockets. These weapons were largely produced in the Soviet Union and China during the cold war. Table 6.2 provides an overview of the main types of Eastern Bloc- and Chinese-standard materiel, relevant patterns, and calibres. In some cases, exact models could not be identified because physical access to the materiel could not be secured. Some larger-calibre weapons, for instance, could only be identified on the basis of long-distance photos taken by journalists in northern Mali in 2012 and 2013.

Of the 1,500 small arms and light weapons cartridge cases that were physically documented with armed groups for this study in northern Mali in 2014, some 1,200 were for use in small arms such as the rifles and light and general-purpose machine guns listed in Table 6.2. The remaining 300 cartridge cases were mostly for use in light weapons, such as the heavy machine guns listed in Table 6.2. The distribution of small arms and light weapons ammunition cartridges appears to reflect the relative proportions of small arms and light weapons observed in the hands of armed actors in northern Mali.

The vast majority of the cartridges had case markings, or 'headstamps', indicating that they had been produced in China or the Soviet Union. Other countries of production identified by marks on the cases include Algeria, Bulgaria,

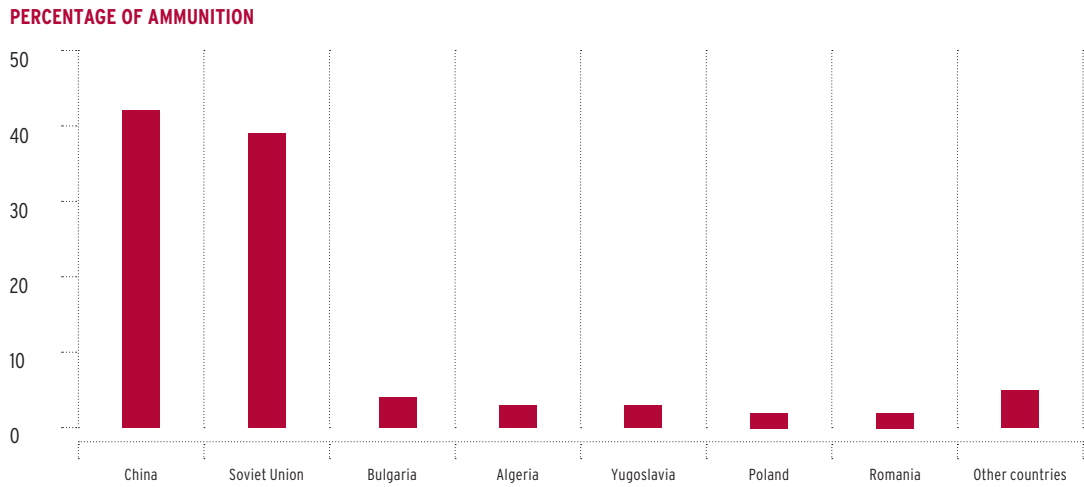
**Table 6.2 Eastern Bloc- and Chinese-standard materiel documented with armed groups in northern Mali, 2012-14\***

| Type                              | Pattern                        | Calibre (mm) |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|
| Assault rifle                     | AK-type                        | 7.62 x 39    |
| Light machine gun                 | RPD                            | 7.62 x 39    |
| Sniper rifle                      | SVD                            | 7.62 x 54R   |
| General-purpose machine gun       | PK                             | 7.62 x 54R   |
| Heavy machine gun                 | DShKM                          | 12.7 x 108   |
|                                   | KPV/KPVT                       | 14.5 x 114   |
| Rocket-assisted recoilless weapon | RPG-7                          | 40           |
| Rocket pod (aerial)               | UB-32-57                       | 57           |
| Recoilless gun                    | SPG-9                          | 73           |
| MLRS                              | Type 63 and BM21               | 107 and 122  |
| Auto-cannon                       | 2A14                           | 23 x 152B    |
|                                   | ZU-23-2                        | 23 x 152B    |
| MANPADS                           | 9K32 (SA-7a) and 9K32M (SA-7b) | 72           |

Note: \* The table includes materiel documented by researchers and journalists.

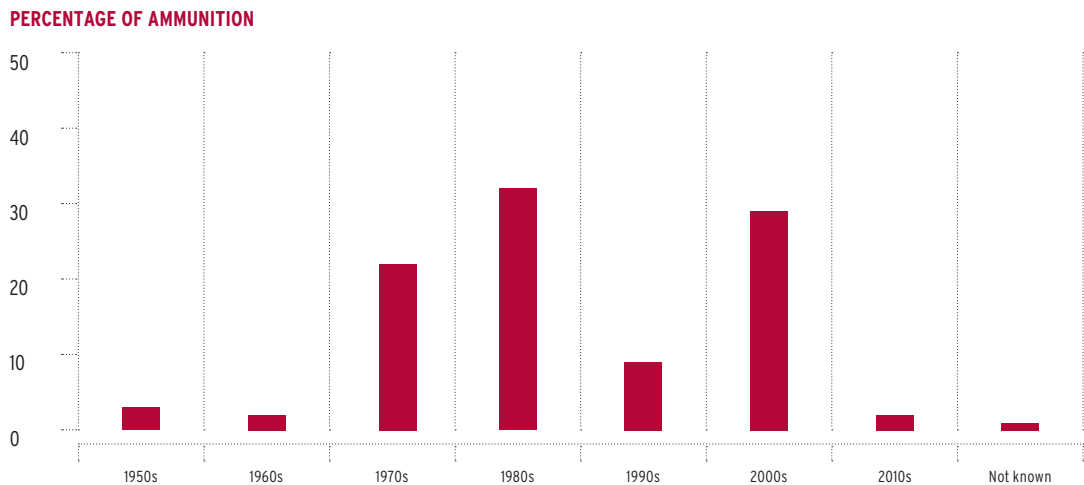
Sources: CAR and Small Arms Survey (2013); UNSC (2012a; 2013a; 2014); author interviews and fieldwork, 2014.



Figure 6.1 **Distribution of ammunition documented with armed groups in northern Mali in 2014, by producer country**

Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia. Further producer countries, each of which accounts for at most 1 per cent of the 1,500 documented cartridge cases, include Czechoslovakia, Egypt, the German Democratic Republic, North Korea, the Russian Federation, and Sudan. Figure 6.1 illustrates the distribution of documented ammunition cartridges per producer country.

The production years of the physically documented ammunition range from the 1950s to the current decade. About 54 per cent of the ammunition was produced in the 1970s and 1980s; a further 29 per cent was produced in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (see Figure 6.2). The most recent ammunition, produced in or since 2010 and representing 2 per cent, comprises Chinese ammunition produced in 2010, Bulgarian ammunition from 2011, and one Sudanese cartridge from 2012. About 1 per cent of the cartridge cases did not bear year-of-production marks. Photos 6.1–6.3 show Bulgarian ammunition from 2011 and Chinese ammunition from 2010.

Figure 6.2 **Production dates of ammunition documented with armed groups in northern Mali in 2014, by decade**

## Photos 6.1-6.3



**Photo 6.1:** Bulgarian 7.62 x 39 mm cartridge from 2011 (10\_11).

**Photo 6.2:** Bulgarian 7.62 x 54R mm cartridge from 2011 (10\_11).

**Photo 6.3:** Chinese 7.62 x 54R mm cartridge from 2010 (945\_10).

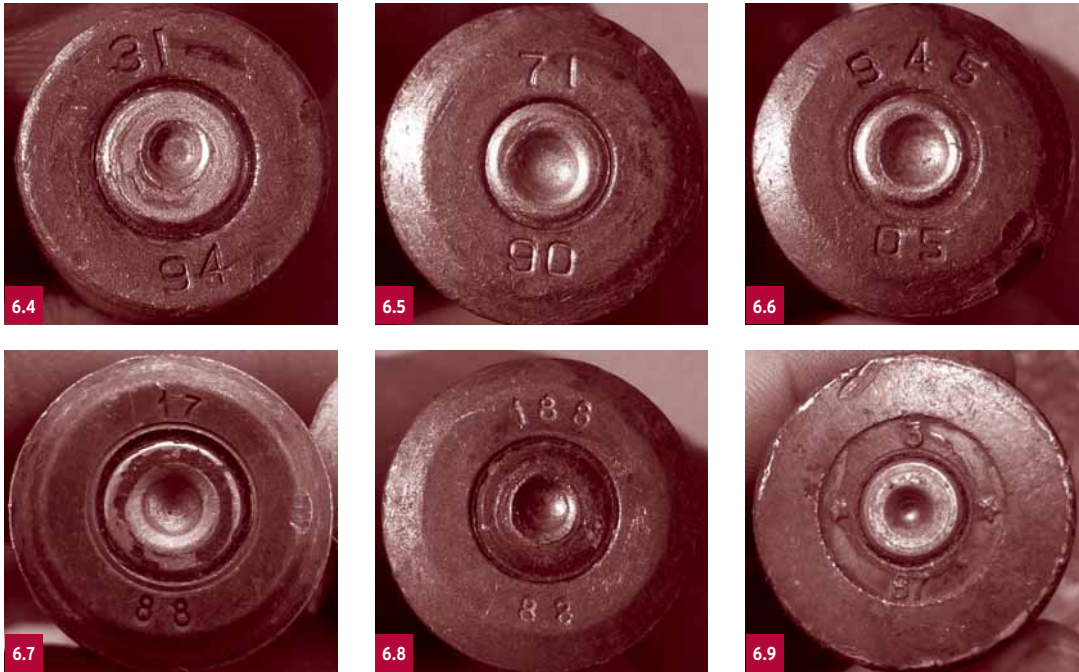
Also of note is the distribution of unique combinations of calibres and headstamps. For this quantitative analysis, cartridges that are identical in calibre and have the same headstamp (usually consisting of a producer code and a year-of-production code) are considered the same variety. This approach shows that one-third of the 1,500 documented cartridge cases consisted of only six different varieties. The most prominent ammunition variety in this context was 7.62 × 54R mm calibre with the Chinese producer mark 945 and year-of-production mark for 2005. Other prominent varieties, also of 7.62 × 54R mm calibre, had the identifications marks 17\_88 and 188\_88, which indicate production in the Soviet Union (now Russia). In contrast, the remaining ammunition varieties consisted of ammunition with more than 120 different combinations of calibre, producer marks, and year-of-production marks. Table 6.3 and Photos 6.4–6.9 present the six most prominent ammunition varieties and the number of cartridge cases documented for each of these varieties.

**Table 6.3 Prominent ammunition varieties documented with armed groups in northern Mali, 2014**

| Country                   | Factory                          | Calibre (mm) | Year of production | Marking  | Quantity |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------|--------------------|----------|----------|
| China                     | Unknown state factory (code 31)  | 7.62 x 39    | 1994               | 31_94    | 73       |
|                           | Unknown state factory (code 71)  | 7.62 x 54R   | 1990               | 71_90    | 36       |
|                           | Unknown state factory (code 945) | 7.62 x 54R   | 2005               | 945_05   | 188      |
| Soviet Union (now Russia) | Barnaul Machine Tool Plant JSC   | 7.62 x 54R   | 1988               | 17_88    | 88       |
|                           | Novosibirsk LVE Plant JSC        | 7.62 x 54R   | 1988               | 188_88   | 84       |
|                           | Ulyanovsk Machinery Plant SPA    | 14.5 x 114   | 1987               | 3_*_87_* | 40       |

**Notes:** \* Denotes five-pointed star. The current names of the formerly Soviet plants are, in order of appearance in Table 6.3: Barnaul Cartridge Plant CJSC, LVE Novosibirsk Cartridge Plant JSC, and OJSC Ulyanovsk Cartridge Works.

## Photos 6.4-6.9



**Photo 6.4:** Chinese 7.62 x 39 mm cartridge from 1994 (31\_94).

**Photos 6.5-6.6:** Chinese 7.62 x 54R mm cartridges from 1990 (71\_90) and 2005 (945\_05).

**Photos 6.7-6.8:** Soviet 7.62 x 54R mm cartridges from 1988 (17\_88 and 188\_88).

**Photo 6.9:** Soviet 14.5 x 114 mm cartridge from 1988 (3\*\_87\_\*). The Soviet ammunition was produced in what is now the Russian Federation.

### NATO-standard materiel

In comparison to Eastern Bloc- and Chinese-standard materiel, far fewer Western-made small arms and light weapons have been documented among armed groups. Materiel recorded in 2014 included Belgian- and Portuguese-produced assault rifles from the 1950s and 1970s as well as Belgian-produced sub-machine and general-purpose machine guns (years of production unknown). Relevant light weapons documented in northern Mali in 2013 and 2014 included US heavy machine guns from the 1970s and recoilless guns (origin and years of production unknown) (CAR and Small Arms Survey, 2013; UNSC, 2012a; 2013a; 2014). The NATO-standard arms and weapons listed here represent around 2 per cent of the materiel that was physically analysed for this study in 2014.

Corresponding ammunition documented in northern Mali for this study in 2014 includes 7.62 × 51 mm cartridges, produced in Belgium in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as in Pakistan in the 1980s. The relevant cartridge cases accounted for about 0.5 per cent of the documented ammunition. In 2013, Belgian mortar projectiles (60 mm) and recoilless gun projectiles (106 mm) were observed in northern Mali, as were anti-tank mines used in IED events. Also reported but not observed are French 81 mm mortar projectiles.<sup>14</sup>

Tables 6.4 and 6.5 provide an overview of documented NATO-standard arms and weapons, as well as of their related ammunition. Quantities for documented arms and weapons are only given for materiel that was physically observed for this study in 2014.

**Table 6.4 NATO-standard materiel documented in northern Mali, 2012–14\***

| Type                        | Pattern     | Calibre (mm)   | Quantity |
|-----------------------------|-------------|----------------|----------|
| Sub-machine gun             | P90         | 5.7 x 28       | 1        |
| Assault rifle               | FAL and G3  | 7.62 x 51      | 3        |
| General-purpose machine gun | MAG         | 7.62 x 51      | 1        |
| Heavy machine gun           | M2          | 12.7 x 99      | 2        |
| Recoilless gun              | M40         | 106 x 607R     | *        |
| Mortar projectiles          | Not known   | 60, 81, and 82 | *        |
| Recoilless gun cartridges   | NR160       | 106 x 607R     | *        |
| Anti-tank mines             | M3 and M3A1 | n/a            | *        |

Notes: \* Includes materiel documented by researchers and journalists.

**Table 6.5 Country of origin of NATO-standard ammunition documented in northern Mali, 2014**

| Country  | Factory                      | Calibre (mm) | Year of production | Marking       | Quantity |
|----------|------------------------------|--------------|--------------------|---------------|----------|
| Belgium  | Fabrique Nationale d'Herstal | 7.62 x 51    | 1977               | *_77_FN       | 4        |
|          |                              |              | 1980               | *_7.62_80_FNB | 2        |
| Pakistan | Pakistan Ordnance Factories  | 7.62 x 51    | 1981               | POF_81_L2A2   | 1        |

Note: \* Denotes NATO design mark.

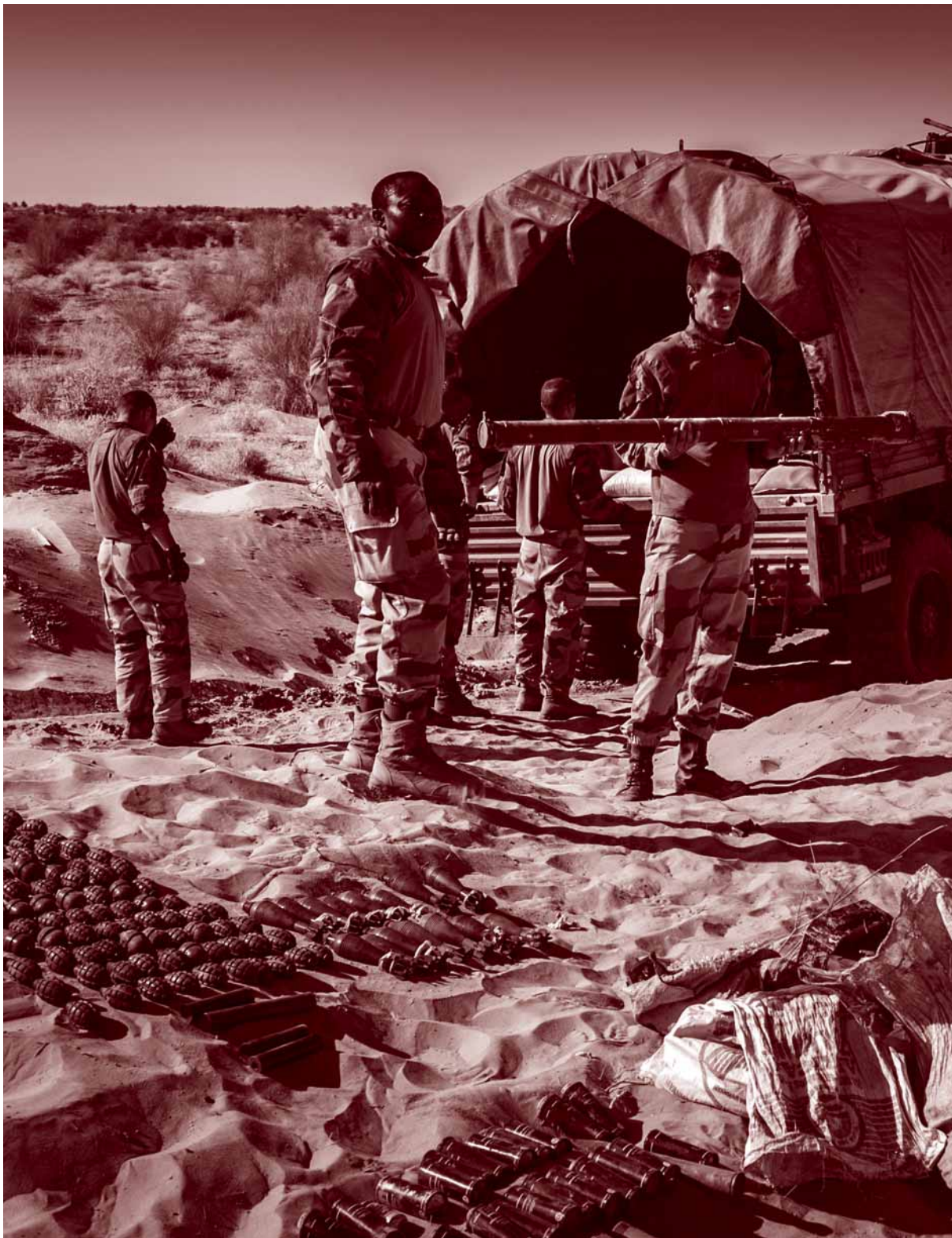
## Assessment

The types, origins, and age of documented materiel broadly reflect Mali's recent history. Following independence, the country turned to the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact members for its military procurement needs (Library of Congress, 2005, p. 18). Likewise, Sino–Malian military relations date back to the 1960s (Chinese Foreign Ministry, 2006). These interactions are mirrored in the study findings, which show that the bulk of materiel in northern Mali consists of cold war-era production from the former Eastern Bloc and China. As noted, procurement from former Eastern Bloc countries and China continued after the cold war. Bulgaria, for example, exported small arms, light weapons, and related ammunition worth some EUR 15 million (USD 18 million) to Mali between 2010 and 2012 (CEU, 2011; 2012; 2014).

These findings also corroborate the claim that armed groups have significant capacities in terms of available materiel. Rebels and jihadists use weapons such as cannon and rocket launchers, which were traditionally associated exclusively with military forces and had not been seen with armed groups in northern Mali in 2005 (Florquin and Pézard, 2005, p. 52). Of particular note is the jihadist possession of MANPADS, which, if operational, could be used against helicopters and planes, threatening lines of supply and movement of French and international forces in northern Mali (see Box 6.3).<sup>15</sup>

Some observers have suggested that insurgents also possess considerably more vehicle-mounted heavy machine guns and related ammunition than a decade ago.<sup>16</sup> These changes have allowed insurgents to conduct larger, more





A French soldier holds the launch tube of a surface-to-air missile before it is destroyed along with other seized weapons, Timbuktu, March 2013.  
© Olivier Debes/ECPAD/AP Photo



### Box 6.3 MANPADS in northern Mali

In June 2013, journalists with the Associated Press inspected a house in Timbuktu that had previously served as quarters for al-Qaeda-linked fighters. Among the documents was a 26-page MANPADS training manual in Arabic (Callimachi, 2013). The discovery fuelled fears that jihadists intended to use such missile launch systems in northern Mali. Three months before, observers had already identified a jihadist fighter with a shouldered MANPADS in a YouTube video (Jenzen-Jones, 2013a). In addition, French forces recovered 13 MANPADS—Soviet type 9K32M (SA-7B)—from jihadists in northern Mali in 2013 (UNSC, 2014, para. 119).

Jihadists in northern Mali typically store MANPADS in substandard conditions, potentially rendering them inoperable. In particular, the batteries that are required to launch the missiles may undergo depletion over time. But a French technical analysis of two of the recovered MANPADS, built in 1978 and 1979, concluded that they were fully operational some 35 years after their production, 'despite rustic storage conditions and handling without caution'.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, jihadists may be able to acquire additional functioning MANPADS in the region. Instructions on how to build homemade batteries for MANPADS are available on the Internet. Syrian jihadists have reportedly used such improvised batteries with success (Smallwood, 2014). The presence of operational MANPADS in jihadist possession in northern Mali is, therefore, a continuing security risk.

Of note in this context is why jihadists appear to refrain from using operational MANPADS. As of December 2014, there had been no successful MANPADS attacks against French or UN air assets in northern Mali. Two observers noted in this regard that jihadists might reserve operational MANPADS to defend 'high-level' targets, such as leaders of jihadist groups.<sup>18</sup> Yet jihadists could arguably employ MANPADS in offensive roles should they obtain greater numbers of operational systems.



intense campaigns than in previous insurgencies (DefenceWeb, 2013). Moreover, insurgents use materiel that is not known to be in use by the Malian army, suggesting that they secured it via illicit trafficking into northern Mali from abroad rather than through battlefield capture or the looting of army stockpiles.

## SOURCES OF MATERIEL OF ARMED GROUPS

**Non-state actors secure a considerable portion of their holdings by capturing army stockpiles.** Armed groups in northern Mali sourced the bulk of their arms and ammunition through capture from Malian army stockpiles. But there are other sources in the region. Insurgents sourced large conventional weapons from Libyan stockpiles in particular. They also possess materiel that was sourced from, among other countries, Algeria, Burkina Faso, and Côte d'Ivoire (see below). There are allegations that individual countries supplied arms and ammunition to al-Qaeda-linked groups in northern Mali that are under a UN arms embargo.<sup>19</sup> There is, however, no concrete evidence that any state in the region or elsewhere has directly transferred military materiel to rebels or jihadists in northern Mali.

### Malian stockpiles

There do not seem to be significant differences in types, models, and years of production of arms and weapons held by the Malian army and armed groups. Likewise, the ammunition varieties most commonly used by armed groups in northern Mali are all found in the possession of both state and non-state actors. These findings support the assessment that much of the groups' materiel was sourced from Malian army stockpiles.

Non-state actors secure a considerable portion of their holdings by capturing army stockpiles. Examples are the capture of army bases in Aguelhok, Gao, and Timbuktu in early 2012. A more recent incident involved the raiding of army materiel in the Kidal events of May 2014. According to their statements, rebels captured 50 new 4×4 vehicles—which the EU had provided to the Malian army as part of its support for military training—as well as 'several tonnes of arms and ammunition' (AFP, 2014b; Observateur Paalga, 2014). This probably included 7.62 × 39 mm ammunition that Bulgaria produced in 2011 and that Mali imported in 2012 (BBC, 2012). Some 7.62 × 39 mm ammunition with marks indicating Bulgarian production in 2011 was subsequently documented with non-state actors.

Research published in 2005 already identified Malian army stockpiles as a primary source of arms and ammunition for armed groups. According to that report, which analysed the arsenals of rebels fighting between 1990 and 2004, rebel holdings 'largely comprised weapons seized and captured from Malian army stockpiles' (Florquin and Pézard, 2005, p. 51). Non-state actors also acquired materiel from new recruits who had deserted the army with their weapons, and through misappropriation by state officials, as when individual soldiers sold their weapons to rebels (Florquin and Pézard, 2005; Republic of Mali, 2008, p. 2). In addition, the Malian government provided arms to self-defence units and pro-government militias (Keita, 1998, p. 20). This further increased the amount of arms in non-state actor possession in northern Mali. According to some observers, such means continue to play a role in the domestic availability of arms and ammunition in the area.<sup>20</sup>

### Libyan stockpiles

Libyan stockpiles represent another important source of materiel for rebels and jihadists in northern Mali. Tuareg fighters who left Libya for Mali following the collapse of the Qaddafi regime in 2011 did so with their arms and weapons (UNSC, 2013a, para. 144). Widespread, poorly controlled arms held by Libyan revolutionary brigades and other groups continue to be a central source of materiel for armed groups in northern Mali.<sup>21</sup> The flow of trafficking convoys

## Box 6.4 The Libyan arsenal and trafficking dynamics

### Dispersal of the Qaddafi arsenal

A full assessment of the Qaddafi-era arsenal is difficult to provide, but Libyan imports increased significantly following the lifting of the EU embargo in 2004 and US sanctions in 2004. EU member states granted Libya arms export licences worth some EUR 1.13 billion (USD 1.39 billion) over the period from 2005 to 2010 (Hansen and Marsh, 2014, p. 13). Force estimates and standard arms-to-soldier multipliers would suggest that on the eve of the 2011 conflict, the regime held between 250,000 and 700,000 firearms, 70–80 per cent of which would have been assault rifles; the number of trafficked firearms was probably in the low tens of thousands (UNODC, 2013, pp. 36–37). Qaddafi's particular brand of 'coup-proofing' relied on massive arms caches—more than 100 depots and warehouses around the country—that could be accessed quickly and distributed to allies in emergencies (UNSMIL, 2013).<sup>22</sup>

By the end of 2011, revolutionary brigades in Benghazi, Misrata, and Zintan controlled much of Qaddafi's 'vast arsenal of conventional weapons' (McQuinn, 2012, p. 43). The rebels' victory in Zliten in August 2011, in particular, led to their acquisition of hundreds of Soviet-era T-55 tanks, Grad rocket launchers, and enormous quantities of small arms and light weapons ammunition. In mid-2011, the Misrata brigades alone had some 30,000 small arms that they had either captured in battle or looted from arms depots. Anti-Qaddafi forces soon had large quantities of light weapons, as well, including 12.7 mm machine guns, 14.5 mm anti-aircraft guns, rocket-propelled grenades, and 20 mm, 23 mm, and 33 mm anti-aircraft machine guns—perhaps as many as 4,000 of the latter (McQuinn, 2012, pp. 46–47). According to British intelligence sources, more than one million tonnes of weapons were looted from arms dumps *after* Qaddafi was toppled (Drury, 2013). Of major concern was the possible proliferation of chemical agents and MANPADS.

Revolutionary armed groups' control over weapons stockpiles has been uneven at best, and generally poor. Even in the midst of the conflict, arms were reportedly being trafficked out of Libya, including some ultimately destined for groups in Mali. Research suggests that Malian stockpiles were the primary source of weapons to insurgents in the region for years (Florquin and Berman, 2005; Lebovich, 2013; Republic of Mali, 2008); since 2011, however, Libyan-sourced weapons have been noted in or en route to northern Mali.

UN investigators have documented some of the trafficking routes and intermediaries from Libya to Mali. In June 2011, the armed forces of Niger intercepted a Mali-bound vehicle loaded with 640 kg of Semtex explosives and 335 detonators originating in Libya. The car accompanying the shipment had been contracted in Benghazi in 2010. According to the presumed trafficker, Abta Hamedi, the weapons were destined for AQIM cells in Mali (UNSC, 2012a). Tuareg leaders

arrested for smuggling weapons and explosives were subsequently released by Nigerien authorities, leading to speculation about an appeasement strategy (Lacher, 2013, p. 71).

In October 2014, French troops intercepted and destroyed an AQIM convoy in northern Niger. The convoy consisted of six 4x4 vehicles that had started in Libya and were destined for AQIM fighters in northern Mali. The convoy carried several tonnes of materiel, including missiles for use in MANPADS, 23 mm anti-air cannon, ammunition of 7.62 to 23 mm and larger calibres, machine guns, and about 100 anti-tank rockets (Al Jazeera, 2014; Le Mamouth, 2014).

The UN Panel of Experts on Libya has also documented Libyan stockpiles of small arms and heavy weapons in Mali—including ammunition that had been bought by the United Arab Emirates and that was presumably transferred to Libyan revolutionaries in 2011 (UNSC, 2014). AK-pattern rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, and vehicles seized during the second half of 2011 in Libya helped Tuareg rebels launch their offensives in northern Mali in 2012. Professional smugglers from southern Libya joined later (Difallah, 2013).

### Shifting trafficking dynamics

Qualitative research has helped clarify some of the changing dynamics involved in the trafficking of weapons and other contraband from the Libyan Fezzan (southern region), where state border control is weak and specific tribes have long claimed rights to trade routes. Given that Mali lies on the other side of some 1,800 km of burning Nigerien and Algerian sands, cross-national tribal relationships are crucial to moving goods.

In the Fezzan, access to the border during the Qaddafi era was a privilege granted to tribes that enjoyed prominent positions in the regime's elite units and intelligence services (Lacher, 2014). Big men who financed the contraband and controlled the markets headed the trafficking networks. Around Sabha, towards Niger and Chad, the cartels of the Awlad Suleiman, Qadhadhfa, and Warfalla dominated. In contrast, the Tubu remained on the margins of profitable enterprise, mainly serving as drivers and smugglers.<sup>23</sup>

The political upheavals that have swept across North Africa upset the established smuggling and trafficking networks and cartels. In the south of Libya violent armed struggles over the borders and urban markets between Tubu armed groups and the Awlad Suleiman in Sabha and the Zwayya in Kufra resulted in reconfigurations. In both regions the Tubu gained control of the borders and started to feed surplus weapons into contraband routes through Kufra and Dongola (Sudan), towards northern Egypt, the Sinai Peninsula, or Yemen. The old routes following the traditional patterns of Tubu tribal alliances re-emerged. Conflicts erupting in the Sahel and the Middle East altered the new routes, accelerating their growth and diversification.



► By the end of the Libyan armed conflict in 2011, fleeing officers from the former 32<sup>nd</sup> Brigade had hidden most of their highly sophisticated weaponry in the desert. In early 2014, the Tubu allegedly gained access to the weapons after initiating a series of conciliatory steps with the Qadhafha and other tribes close to the former regime. The Tubu armed groups rehabilitated several military cadres of the Jamahiriya from Sabha. By forging new tribal alliances, the Tubu consolidated their sway over contraband and arms trafficking in the Fezzan, gaining control of the vast border region that gives them access to Chad, Egypt, Niger, and Sudan. The Tuareg, in contrast, have seen their control of the routes gradually erode (Shaw and Mangan, 2014); such has been the case since a Zintani-led brigade was mandated to patrol the border with Algeria and Tubu gained control of Sabha and the roads to the north.

Other dynamics quite apart from the collapse of the Libyan regime have also altered trafficking dynamics in the region. These include the gradual rise in the share of illicit products (including drugs, alcohol, and counterfeit goods) in the informal trade over the last 20 years; the influence of criminal activities in the Sahel on desert trade; and inter-tribal clashes for the control of routes, water, and land. Jihadist groups from Algeria moved southward, finding in the southern Sahara not only safe haven for planning their fight for the 'Grand Sahara emirate', but also vital supply lines deeply intertwined with smuggling and informal trade.

As late as October 2014, French action against alleged AQIM convoys carrying weapons from the Fezzan across Niger have shown that southern Libya remains a 'Tesco for terrorists' (Strazzari and Tholens, 2014). The combination of quickly rising demand for weapons in Libya, a net of tribal alliances expanding over large areas of the Sahel-Sahara, and access to a broad sample of weaponry have catalysed the transformation of the Fezzan into a dynamic hub for arms trafficking.<sup>24</sup>

Authors: Francesco Strazzari, Rafaâ Tabib, and Moncef Kartas

from Libya to northern Mali also confirms that at least jihadists in northern Mali exhibit a continued demand for arms and related ammunition (see Box 6.4).

The presence of Libyan-sourced materiel appears linked to qualitative changes in insurgent stockpiles. For example, a scarcity of heavy machine guns and related ammunition was reportedly overcome through Libyan-sourced materiel in previous insurgencies in northern Mali (Florquin and Pézard, 2005, p. 51; UNSC, 2012a, para. 129). Further, Libya is a prominent source of the larger-calibre weapons that were observed in insurgent hands in 2012, including vehicle-mounted ZU-23-2-pattern anti-aircraft auto-cannon, employed primarily to engage ground targets (CAR and Small Arms Survey, 2013). Likewise, Libya served as a source of MANPADS and their missiles that are now in the possession of jihadists in northern Mali (UNSC, 2014, para. 119).

Insurgents in northern Mali also use other materiel that was probably sourced in Libya, including Belgian and Yugoslavian 60 mm mortar projectiles; French 81 mm mortar projectiles; Belgian 106 × 607R mm projectiles; Chinese-produced 107 mm and 130 mm artillery rockets; and Soviet-produced 122 mm artillery rockets (UNSC, 2014, paras. 122–25; Spleeters, 2014).<sup>25</sup> In its February 2014 report, the UN Panel of Experts on Libya observes that some armed groups in northern Mali 'possess heavy ammunition without launchers [ . . . ] which may be diverted for use in improvised explosive devices. A lot of such old heavy ammunition can be found in Libyan stockpiles' (UNSC, 2014, para. 126). Belgian-produced anti-tank mines have been observed in roadside bombs and French-produced mortar projectiles in jihadist arms caches in northern Mali. Belgian-produced anti-tank mines and French-produced mortar projectiles with matching identification codes (lot numbers) are known to exist in Libya.<sup>26</sup>

Among the documented small arms that armed groups in northern Mali sourced in Libya, two were Russian-produced AK 103-2 rifles that the Russian Federation identified, on the basis of their markings, as having been delivered to Libya between 2005 and 2008 (UNSC, 2014, para. 118). A further possible case concerns a Belgian P90 sub-machine gun, manufactured by FN Herstal, that UN personnel observed in rebel possession in northern Mali in June 2014.<sup>27</sup> As confirmed in interviews with Malian army personnel, P90 sub-machine guns are not found in their stockpiles. Belgium has, however, sold

## Photos 6.10–6.14



6.10



6.11



6.12



6.13



6.14

**Photos 6.10–6.11:** Belgian 7.62 x 51 mm cartridges from 1977 (\*\_77\_FN) and 1980 (\*\_7.62\_80\_FNB).

**Photo 6.12:** Pakistani 7.62 x 51 mm cartridge from 1981 (POF\_81\_L2A2).

**Photo 6.13:** North Korean 7.62 x 39 mm cartridge from 1991 (93\_91).

**Photo 6.14:** Sudanese 7.62 x 39 mm cartridge from 2012 (1\_39\_012).

P90s to other states in the region, including to Libya—which imported 367 of them, along with other materiel, in 2009—as well as to Mauritania and Nigeria (Spleeters, 2012).<sup>28</sup>

Armed groups in northern Mali also possess small arms ammunition that is known to exist in Libya but not in Malian state stockpiles. An example is Belgian-produced 7.62 × 51 mm ammunition with production dates of 1977 and 1980 (see Photos 6.10–6.11).<sup>29</sup> Another example is ammunition in the same calibre that was produced in Pakistan in 1981 (see Photo 6.12). The Small Arms Survey and the UN Panel of Experts on Libya documented identical ammunition in Libya (Jenzen-Jones, 2013b, pp. 22–23; UNSC, 2013a, paras. 67–70). The Panel reported that the ammunition found in Libya probably originated from a retransfer from Qatar, which had initially acquired the ammunition from Pakistan in the 1980s (UNSC, 2013a, paras. 67–70). Of further note is a 7.62 × 39 mm cartridge with production marks from North Korea in 1991 (see Photo 6.13); it was found at the site of an attack on UN peacekeepers in Gao region on 3 October 2014. Not known to exist in army stockpiles in Mali or in neighbouring countries, 7.62 × 39 mm ammunition with identical markings was also documented in Libya in 2012.<sup>30</sup> This raises the possibility that the cartridge case found in northern Mali came from Libya. Similarly, the abovementioned Sudanese ammunition produced in 2012 may have come from Libya, where other recently produced Sudanese ammunition is known to exist (see Photo 6.14).<sup>31</sup>

### Other regional stockpiles

Besides Libyan-sourced materiel, research has identified Algerian small arms ammunition—specifically, 7.62 × 39 mm and 7.62 × 54 R mm cartridges produced at the Entreprise des Réalisations Industrielles de Seriana in 1999, 2007, and 2009 (see Photos 6.15–6.17)—that is in use by both the national army and armed groups in northern Mali. Research also identified small arms ammunition that may have been diverted from army stockpiles in Burkina Faso. The

## Photos 6.15-6.19



6.15



6.16



6.17



6.18



6.19

**Photos 6.15-6.16:** Algerian 7.62 x 39 mm cartridges from 1999 (S\_99) and 2007 (S\_07).

**Photo 6.17:** Algerian 7.62 x 54R mm cartridge from 2009 (S\_09).

**Photos 6.18-6.19:** Romanian 7.62 x 39 mm cartridges from 2005 (325\_05) and 2007 (SADU\_7.62\_07).

ammunition in question is from Romania, 7.62 × 39 mm in calibre, and produced in 2005 and 2007 (see Photos 6.18–6.19). Rebels in Côte d'Ivoire have used ammunition of the same calibre with identical markings. The UN Group of Experts concerning Côte d'Ivoire established that Romania had exported the relevant ammunition encountered in western Africa exclusively to Burkina Faso (UNSC, 2012b, paras. 24–26). It is possible, therefore, that rebels in Côte d'Ivoire obtained the ammunition after its diversion from army stockpiles in Burkina Faso. It is also possible that some of the ammunition diverted from these stockpiles found its way into northern Mali. Further regional sources, particularly of small arms and related ammunition, include Côte d'Ivoire itself as well as Guinea, Liberia, Mauritania, Niger, and Sierra Leone (Berghezan, 2013, p. 32; Florquin and Pézard, 2005, p. 61).

Comparing small arms ammunition varieties documented in northern Mali and Côte d'Ivoire is informative. Fewer than 1 per cent of the varieties found in northern Mali were also found in Côte d'Ivoire (Anders, 2014). Moreover, the relevant ammunition varieties were documented in only very small quantities in northern Mali. If armed groups did source the ammunition from Ivorian stockpiles and circulation, the overall quantities seem conspicuously low. The findings support the view of some observers that materiel from sources other than Malian and Libyan stockpiles is typically limited in quantity and obtained by individuals and small criminal networks.<sup>32</sup>

Of further interest is a Polish assault rifle that the author documented in northern Mali in June 2014. The rifle is of the AK type and bears production marks for 1976. Its distinguishing feature is the use of Arabic in the markings of the rifle's rear sight. The Arabic script suggests that the rifle was previously held by armed forces in an Arabic-speaking country, possibly in North Africa. Research has identified a second such rifle in northern Mali; its serial number was removed, presumably in an effort to prevent the identification of the source. The same model of Polish rifle, also from the 1970s and with Arabic sights, was found in rebel possession in Côte d'Ivoire. The rifles documented in Côte

d'Ivoire all had their serial numbers removed, suggesting that they had been trafficked into Côte d'Ivoire (UNSC, 2013b, para. 62). It is possible that the two assault rifles in northern Mali and those documented in Côte d'Ivoire were diverted from the same, still unidentified, state stockpile in North Africa.

### Foreign state support to armed groups

While the majority of materiel among armed groups in northern Mali came into their possession through diversion, the question of whether foreign states directly supplied armed groups with materiel remains a particular concern in light of the UN sanctions regime relating to al-Qaeda-linked entities and individuals. The regime includes the prohibition of arms transfers to jihadist groups in northern Mali (UNSC, n.d.). In 2012, there was repeated speculation as to whether Qatar and other Arab Gulf countries had supported such groups with arms that were delivered under the guise of humanitarian assistance (Muratet, 2012). Other speculation concerned the possible role of Burkina Faso in arms deliveries to insurgents in northern Mali.



A soldier of the Malian army crouches behind a wall sprayed with the term 'Azawad', Gao, February 2013. © Joel Saget/AFP Photo



One specific allegation of an embargo violation involved a Qatari Red Crescent flight to northern Mali on 6 April 2012, which may have carried not only humanitarian goods, but also arms and money for the jihadist Ansar Dine (Berghezan, 2013, pp. 33–34). The allegation, which remains unproven, gained credibility in view of the apparent delivery of arms and ammunition to Libyan insurgents by Qatar (UNSC, 2013a, paras. 67–70). Similarly, the government of Burkina Faso was accused of delivering arms to insurgents in northern Mali or, at a minimum, of failing to prevent such transfers from its territory. For example, Burkina Faso was accused of allowing truck deliveries of arms destined for the jihadist fighters to leave from its territory in September 2012, although these charges remain unsubstantiated (Berghezan, 2013, p. 34).

There is no concrete evidence for state-sponsored embargo violations in northern Mali. Nor does any particular materiel support allegations of such violations, as was the case in Cote d'Ivoire. There, embargoed actors possessed tens of thousands of small-calibre ammunition cartridges produced in Sudan in 2010. The cartridges could be found throughout the country beginning in early 2011. The quantity and age of the particular ammunition variety suggested that it was trafficked in one or more high-volume transfers from Sudanese government stockpiles (UNSC, 2013b, paras. 45–46). No comparable materiel whose quantity, age, or origin might suggest possible embargo violations by foreign states was identified in northern Mali so far.

## CONCLUSION

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Rebels and jihadists in northern Mali are better armed and possess larger conventional weapons than they did in 2005. Evidence presented here indicates that Malian army stockpiles represent the primary source of weapons for these groups. While a negotiated peace agreement between rebels and the government seems necessary to reduce violence over the long term, improvements to the army's physical security and stockpile management appear to be urgent.

Preventing weapons from reaching northern Mali from other parts of the region is another pressing need. The dispersal of the Libyan arsenal into the hands of revolutionary brigades has upended trafficking dynamics in the Sahara–Sahel and facilitated more direct linkages between Libyan suppliers and jihadists, especially in northern Mali. Countering these developments will probably require regional initiatives beyond the UN embargo on jihadists—which has been largely ineffective to date. With many of the border areas controlled by non-state or semi-autonomous groups, this is likely to be a long-term challenge.

Since falling out with secessionist rebels, violent jihadists have emerged as perhaps the most pressing security concern in northern Mali. Countering these groups will require dynamic responses from the international community, and the record so far has not been promising. In August 2014, French forces reduced their numbers in northern Mali in favour of a new Sahel-wide anti-jihadist initiative. Since MINUSMA does not have the capacity to engage in offensive counter-jihadist action, a French presence, even with reduced numbers, seems essential to limit violent jihadist activity in northern Mali.

In short, a peace agreement between the Malian government and rebels seems crucial to addressing insecurity in northern Mali, but it is probably only one element of a broader set of required actions. While the jihadist campaign presents different challenges, it shares with the secessionist rebellion a reliance on ongoing, and apparently expanding, access to small arms and light weapons. Identifying ways of preventing the tools of armed violence from reaching these groups should be among the prioritized efforts designed to bring security to northern Mali. ■

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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|         |  |
|---------|--|
| AFISMA  | African-led International Support Mission in Mali                        |
| AQIM    | Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb  |
| IED     | Improvised explosive device  |
| MANPADS | Man-portable air defence system  |
| MINUSMA | United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali |
| MLRS    | Multiple-launch rocket system  |
| MNLA    | Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad                        |

## ENDNOTES

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- 1 The sites are located mainly in and near Aguelhok, Anefis, Gao, Kidal, Tabankort, and Timbuktu.
- 2 In addition to the field investigations, the chapter relies on a range of interviews with mainly Malian officials as well as representatives of the French armed forces and the United Nations, mostly conducted in Bamako in June–October 2014. Many of the interviewees requested anonymity and are therefore not identified by name.
- 3 Author interview with a UN political affairs officer, Bamako, July 2014.
- 4 Author interview with a UN political affairs officer, Bamako, July 2014.
- 5 Author interview with a UN terrorism analyst, Bamako, August 2014.
- 6 Author interview with a UN political affairs officer, Bamako, July 2014.
- 7 Author interviews with a UN terrorism analyst and security analysts of the French armed forces, Bamako, August–September 2014.
- 8 Author interview with a UN political affairs officer, Bamako, July 2014.
- 9 Author interview with a UN information analyst, Bamako, August 2014.
- 10 Author interview with a UN information analyst, Bamako, August 2014.
- 11 Confidential author interviews, Bamako, July–August 2014.
- 12 Author interview with fighters of an Imghad Tuareg militia, Tabankort, August 2014.
- 13 Author interview with security analysts of the French armed forces, Bamako, September 2014.
- 14 Author interview with security analysts of the French armed forces, Bamako, September 2014.
- 15 At the time of writing, no Malian air assets were active in northern Mali.
- 16 Author interviews with representatives of the Malian armed forces and a UN terrorism analyst, Bamako, July–August 2014.
- 17 Author interview with security analysts of the French armed forces, Bamako, September 2014.
- 18 Author interview with a UN terrorism analyst, Bamako, August 2014.
- 19 The main jihadist groups in northern Mali (Al-Mourabitoune, Ansar Dine, and AQIM) fall under the UN sanctions regime on al-Qaeda and al-Qaeda-linked actors that the UN Security Council established with resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011). The Security Council extended the embargo to the relevant groups in northern Mali on separate occasion since 2011, including Al-Mourabitoune, for example, in the sanctions list of June 2014. See UNSC (1999; 2011) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee (2014).
- 20 Confidential author interviews, Bamako, July–August 2014.
- 21 Author interviews with a representative of the Malian armed forces, a UN terrorism analyst, and security analysts of the French armed forces, Bamako, July–September 2014.
- 22 Confidential author interview with an officer of the UN Support Mission in Libya, Geneva, 2014.
- 23 Confidential author interviews conducted in southern Libya, September–October 2013.
- 24 This conclusion reflects the findings of the authors' field-based research in southern Libya and several interviewees with heads of armed groups and traders in Awbari, Murzug, and Sebha, October 2013.
- 25 Author interviews with security analysts in the French armed forces, Bamako, September 2014.
- 26 Author interviews with security analysts in the French armed forces, Bamako, September 2014.
- 27 Author interview with a UN terrorism analyst, Bamako, August 2014.
- 28 Author correspondence with a conflict armament researcher, August 2014.
- 29 The Small Arms Survey documented ammunition cartridges that were identical in calibre and markings in Libya (Jenzen-Jones, 2013b).

- 30 Author correspondence with an arms trafficking investigator in Libya, October 2014.
- 31 Author correspondence with an arms trafficking investigator in Libya, October 2014.
- 32 Author interviews with a representative of the Malian armed forces and a UN terrorism analyst, Bamako, July–August 2014.

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