



The Sudan Arms and Ammunition Tracing Desk

In December 2009 the Small Arms Survey estimated that there were some [2.7 million small arms and light weapons](#) in Sudan, more than two-thirds of which were circulating outside of state-controlled stockpiles. Widespread arms proliferation among non-state actors has long been identified as a critical factor leading to the outbreak and escalation of armed violence and conflict in Sudan and South Sudan. Non-state actors obtain these weapons through direct contributions from governments, leakage from government stocks, captures on the battlefield, and cross-border trade. Identifying the sourcing of arms and ammunition is an important tool that helps stakeholders better understand—and ultimately address—the dynamics that contribute to armed conflict.

In September 2011 the Small Arms Survey’s HSBA launched the Sudan Arms and Ammunition Tracing Desk project. The aims of this project are to:

- refine previous estimates of the numbers and types of weapons among various Sudanese actors through focused field research;
- apply tracing techniques employed by UN expert panels and other official bodies to investigate the origins and possible sourcing routes of weapons and ammunition; and
- promote best practices for the identification and tracing of arms and ammunition in Sudan and South Sudan among all interested stakeholders.

Our aim is for the Tracing Desk to become a central resource and clearing house for the identification and analysis of arms and ammunition holdings and flows in Sudan and South Sudan. Outputs will include timely web reports based on field research and collaborations with Sudanese and international stakeholders, an HSBA *Issue Brief* in 2012 on arms flows and holdings, and contributions to other HSBA publications.

Arms tracing is a multi-step technical process that involves the identification, mapping, and verification of arms and ammunition:

- *Identification* involves recording the make, model, and unique identifying markings of each weapon, round of ammunition, and weapons-/ammunition-bearing container/vessel (such as ammunition crates). Because there is no international standardized system for marking weapons and ammunition, experts depend on a wide variety of resources for this identification process.
- *Mapping* consists of cross-referencing and analysis of independent samples of arms and ammunition to illuminate patterns in holdings and procurement. For instance, matching lot numbers of ammunition found in the stocks of several armed groups may indicate a source-to-recipient pattern of supply.



- *Verification* is the process of triangulating findings with national arms export reports; databases such as the [UN Register of Conventional Arms](#) and [the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's Arms Transfer Database](#); qualitative data; and, where possible, sales documentation from manufacturing governments to obtain a picture of weapons transfer routes.

Because arms and ammunition may change hands many times between point of manufacture and possession by a non-state armed group, the tracing process is often protracted.

Extensive field research conducted by the [UN Panel of Experts on Sudan](#), the Small Arms Survey, and other independent researchers has already confirmed that a number of non-state armed groups operating in Darfur, the Three Areas, and South Sudan are extremely well equipped militarily. Kalashnikov-pattern assault rifles, general-purpose machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades, and in some instances 12.7 mm heavy machine guns have all been documented in significant quantities. While the vast majority of these weapons are decades old, newly manufactured weapons have, for example, been identified in the stocks of some Southern insurrectionist forces. Ammunition for these weapons is readily available.

Agencies and practitioners who would like to identify and trace specific arms and ammunition recovered in Sudan are encouraged to contact the HSBA Tracing Desk at [<sudantracing@smallarmssurvey.org>](mailto:sudantracing@smallarmssurvey.org).

HSBA Tracing Desk reports:

- Materiel seized from Peter Gadet's forces (October 2011)
- Materiel seized from George Athor's forces (October 2011)

Additional resources:

The Small Arms Survey has produced an [Ammunition Tracing Kit](#) in English and French and a set of [ID cards](#) to aid in the visual identification of a selection of firearms commonly used in contemporary armed conflicts and crimes.