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Web-exclusive comment

**A surefire way to reduce the violence: No more arms to Sudan**

By ROBERT MUGGAH

Members of the Security Council of the United Nations know a lot about how to sell weapons. The United States, Russia and China were among Sudan's chief suppliers during and after the Cold War. They seem to know precious little, however, about how to rein them back in. Although a legitimate political solution would be key to ending the killing in Darfur and the south of Sudan, there is a surefire way to reduce armed violence: to control the trade of weapons to Sudan and their circulation within its borders.

While outsiders cautiously celebrate a rejuvenated peace process in Darfur, the Southern peace agreement is teetering on the edge. The good news is that most of Darfur's various rebel factions met with envoys of the UN and the African Union in Tanzania to forge a united front to negotiate with Khartoum. Another positive development is that the Security Council recently approved sending 26,000 UN peacekeepers to Darfur, the largest-ever mission. The bad news is that armed violence shows no sign of abating in Darfur or the South.

The vast majority of conventional and light weapons in Sudan flooded in during the Cold War. In the 1980s, Sudan was receiving hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of military assistance from the United States.

The country also got one of Africa's largest-ever military aid packages from Egypt. Likewise, Libya and Iran provided more than \$2-billion (U.S.) in "economic assistance" between 1970 and 1980, much of it tradable and used to procure weapons both large and small.

Since the early 1990s, at least 34 countries have exported various types of arms to Sudan. More recently, an estimated 90 per cent of Sudan's small arms supplies originated from China and Iran. Owing to notoriously porous borders and the proliferation of hundreds of armed groups in Sudan and its nine neighbours, a vibrant illegal trade also persists.

Today Sudan, together with Somalia, is Africa's greatest arms bazaar.

The increasing militarization of Sudan led inexorably to the militarization of its civilians. The Geneva-based Small Arms Survey estimates that there are between 1.9 million and 3.2 million small arms of varying calibre in Sudan — two-thirds of which are in civilian hands.

One-fifth of these arms are held by a vast network of state security agencies, from the army to intelligence. The ratio of guns to civilians is lower than that of Canada or the United States, but the difference is that most weapons in civilian hands are assault rifles.

The introduction of high-powered military-style weapons to predominantly pastoral areas triggered local "arms races" and raised the stakes in the relentless competition for resources, including slaves and children.

Ethnic minorities are acquiring guns to defend themselves against neighbouring groups. The introduction of the AK-47 transformed long-simmering conflicts and livestock-raiding practices. Modest raids with incidental casualties are giving way to massacres and the razing of entire villages to the ground.

The key to Sudan's security is not more guns.

Here are some practical recommendations from experts and practitioners working in Sudan on how the availability of arms could be curbed.

First, the growth in oil production has facilitated Sudan's capacity to wage war on at least two fronts: in Darfur and in the South. Comprehensive checks on international investment in oil extraction and distribution by UN members states could curb the purchase of new weapons.

Second, there are diverse trade routes for arms and ammunition into Sudan. At a minimum, key suppliers such as China and Iran need to be brought into line. Likewise, countries involved in arms manufacturing, transfers and end use must adopt transparent approaches to monitoring, verifying and enforcing arms transfers to the country.

Third, there is a massive array of armed groups, splinter factions, militias, paramilitary actors and arms dealers operating in Darfur and the South. Smart sanctions to curb the activities of brokers are only part of the solution. Enhanced border management, security sector reform, stockpile control and domestic regulation are indispensable components of a coherent arms control system.

Fourth, one of the trickiest and most urgent issues is unregulated arms ownership among non-aligned armed groups and civilians. Peace agreements in Darfur and the South say little about voluntary disarmament of civilians. Because certain groups are readying themselves for a return to war, there is an urgent need to promote domestic arms control in tandem with legitimate security services and security guarantees.

Arms control has to proceed in line with legitimate governance strategies that guarantee protection of civilians. The various peace agreements in Darfur and the South are an important first step, but most are perilously close to collapse. Canada's efforts to promote civilian protection in Sudan recently suffered a blow with the expelling of a senior diplomat on Thursday. As Canadian diplomats know full well, without enhanced investment in building credible and transparent institutions, arms flows will continue and more civilians will die. Unfortunately, however, prospects for enhanced governance still seem a far way off.

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