

Ottawa
Thursday, October-02-14

Article 44 on South Sudan

Developments in South Sudan Conflict: Small Arms and Light Weapons in South Sudan and Sudan: Is that agenda for Bahir Dar Talks?

Our Articles 1 to 3 and 5 to 43 were situation analyses of the conflict in South Sudan. Our articles 4 (A), 4 (B) and 4 (C) were the first of our series on “Who is Who”. This article 44 is dedicated to an issue that has never gained its right order of priority in research, UN DDR, or the IGAD Talks.

We raise the open-ended question: Is it an integral part of a durable political settlement to address the issue as both stand alone and intertwines with Security Arrangements and security sector reform?

What the article did not address is the massive effect that the SWAPO/Namibia deal of arms dumped in Maban when Namibia got its independence and Tiny Roland and Jerry Rawlings paid for the arms to support the SPLA. It polluted the entire region of Upper Nile and West Ethiopia.

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**Guardian Africa network
October 2nd, 2014**

'Africa's arms dump': following the trail of bullets in the Sudans

Sudan and South Sudan are among the most heavily armed countries in the world. The Niles investigates how this came about and the consequences of spiraling bloodshed

Sudan was awash with arms long before the country split in two. When South Sudan seceded in 2011, it was estimated that there were up to 3.2m small arms in circulation. Two-thirds of these were thought to be in the hands of civilians. Since then, arms have proliferated on both sides of the recently devised border – with fatal results.

In Sudan, a country often dubbed “Africa’s arms dump”, the number of arms is rising by the day amid armed conflict between government forces, paramilitaries, rebels, hired militia, foreign fighters, bandits as well as inter- and intra-communal warfare. This aggression is fuelled by the global arms trade and smuggling from neighbouring states.

A similar story is heard in South Sudan, where ownership of guns and small arms is estimated to have sharply increased during its three years as an independent nation, partly due to the number

of rebel and militia groups that sprung up in Jonglei and Upper Nile states in 2010 and 2011. Arms are a common sight and ammunition can be bought for around US\$1 per cartridge at some local markets.

The arrival of firearms

Illegal gun ownership in both countries can be traced back to major historical events. Guns arrived with the invading armies of Muhammad Ali Pasha in the early 19th century. Firearms were also introduced by the British-led Anglo-Egyptian Condominium forces during the reconquest of Sudan in 1898. It wasn't until the 1950s that civilians started to own firearms in significant numbers, research shows, partly because of the 1955 mutiny which sowed the seeds of the first southern rebellion.

During these years, southern Sudanese soldiers raided military bases, stole weapons and fled into the forest, just one of the ways that light weapons found their way north into the hands of various groups located on what would later become the border.

Meanwhile, research has shown the international role in weapon supply, with former West Germany introducing automatic small arms in vast numbers to Sudan, which, until then, mainly had old British carbines. West Germany also set up the ammunition factory in Sheggera, Khartoum, in effect, providing the bullets to keep the guns firing. In the 1980s, East Germany responded by supplying the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) with AK47s via Ethiopia. In this way, Cold War animosities were played out in the Greater Horn of Africa.

Historians say liberation movements, especially those in neighbouring countries, fanned the spread of firearms in Sudan and the trade in illegal weapons. A rare evidence of how politically motivated arms deals spiralled out of control as guns proliferated followed the assassination of Congolese independence leader Patrice Lumumba. The first transitional government after the 1964 October revolution in Khartoum supplied West German G3 assault rifles to the Simba rebels. When they were defeated in 1965, the Southern Sudanese separatist rebel group Anyanya acquired many of those German guns.

Then, in 1976, forces associated with Sudanese opposition figures attacked districts in Khartoum in an attempt to seize power from President Jaafar Mohammed Al Nimeiri, troops which had been trained and equipped in Libya. Within three days the attackers were driven back, but they left a lasting legacy: thousands of small arms and other weapons made their way to civilians in western Sudan. Historical records show that arms proliferation in Darfur, meanwhile, dates from the 1960s.

In a published working paper, Sudanese researcher and retired Major Abdel Karim Abdel Farraj highlighted other ways guns spread in Sudan. Conflicts, including the Libya-Chad war of the 1980s, "contributed to the influx of small arms and light weaponry into Sudan, and in particular Darfur, which, due to the region's vast size and the lack of control of both central and local authorities, received weaponry that outmatched the arsenal of both the police and armed forces." According to Abdel Karim Abdel, the decades-long southern war was the primary source of the weapons inundation, especially after 1983, when the late Libyan leader Colonel Muammar

Gaddafi supported the opposition forces, stoked by his personal animosity towards Jaafar Al Nimeiri. The arming of proxy tribal militias was the handiwork of elected governments in Khartoum in 1986-89, who provided weapons for the Baggara to fight against the SPLA. The Libya-Chad war of the 1980s “contributed to the influx of small arms and light weaponry into Sudan, and in particular Darfur, which... received weaponry that outmatched the arsenal of both the police and armed forces

The organisation Saferworld says arms were distributed among citizens by the Khartoum government or the Sudan Peoples’ Liberation Army (SPLA) in the years before the signing of the comprehensive peace agreement. “In Lakes State (in today’s South Sudan), the SPLA provided weapons to cattle keepers to enable them to protect themselves and their communities from cattle raiders. The arming of these youth groups, known as the gelweng, allowed the SPLA to shift their focus and efforts from community security to the ongoing war with the north,” Saferworld wrote in a report.

And even after the government signed the peace treaty with the rebels in 2005, ending the decades of civil war, civilians – including the gelweng in Lakes State – kept hold of their weapons, in case they needed to defend themselves.

Today’s arms trades

Apart from government provision of small arms to non-state actors, weapons have also reached civilians through porous borders with neighbouring countries. According to the report *Following the Thread: Arms and Ammunition Tracing in Sudan and South Sudan*, released in May 2014 by the Swiss research group Small Arms Survey, these weapons spread “either for the intentional purpose of selling or trading, or because armed nomadic groups travel throughout the border regions with their weapons”.

A South Sudanese example of this is the Kidepo valley that straddles South Sudan, Uganda and Kenya. For many years valley residents, the Turkana of Kenya, the Dodoth of Uganda and the Toposa of South Sudan, have traded arms across the three countries’ borders. The three groups share ethnic and linguistic roots and are all pastoralists. Given a constant threat of cattle raiding among these communities, they often traffic small arms, acquiring guns to protect their livestock or raid each other.

And arms continue to move across the Sudans’ mutual border. It is believed that communities in South Sudan’s northern states of Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Warrap and Upper Nile procure small arms from Sudan. Sudanese traders or nomads are thought to supply small arms and ammunition, but in limited quantities to individual buyers.

Tribal groups and rebel militias seeking larger amounts of arms and ammunition have to import from neighbouring countries. Tribal militias like the South Sudanese White Army (Nuer Youth from Jonglei and Upper Nile states) procure weapons and ammunition locally from traders across the border from Ethiopia’s Gambella region, according to Jonah Leff, Director of Operations at Conflict Armament Research, which maps arms flows in conflict zones.

“The majority of small arms that are available from traders locally are AK-type assault rifles. PKM machine guns and RPGs are also available, but in much smaller quantities. However, German HK G3 rifles sometimes cross the border from Ethiopia and Kenya,” he told The Niles. “In the local market rifles cost between US\$150- 250 depending on the condition and make but people often purchase rifles with cattle.”

A source, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said in the state of Jonglei, “if the gun is new you pay one heifer and an ox. If it’s old you may pay only a cow.”

But the origin of many firearms remains murky. In Sudan, the Khartoum government and opposition rebel movements frequently trade accusations over who is responsible for the spread of arms within the country. In December 2013, Interior Minister Ibrahim Mahmoud described: “the widespread availability of weapons among Sudan’s tribes, especially in the districts of Darfur,” adding, “[rebel] movements were the reason for their availability in tribal circles.” In a report submitted to the Council of States, Sudan’s upper house of parliament, entitled All The Tribes Are Now Armed, the minister said: “tribes operate on the principle that there can be no security except through the possession of weapons.”

Lack of security

But rebel movements met the minister’s claims with an accusation of their own. “Responsibility for the spread of weapons and militarisation of the country’s tribes lies solely at the feet of the Khartoum regime, in its efforts to retain power and to obtain and preserve wealth,” said Adam Salih, military spokesman of the Sudanese Liberation Movement’s Minnawi faction. “The Revolutionary Front has a hand in the matter.”

Tribes operate on the principle that there can be no security except through the possession of weapons

Researchers have highlighted a deadly surplus of weapons in South Sudan, describing how small arms which were once in the hands of the rebel forces now officially belong to South Sudan’s armed forces. The Swiss research group Small Arms Survey in April this year reported on an “Excess Arms in South Sudan,” warning that South Sudan has no policy to manage the weapons surplus, which often end up with civilians.

“South Sudan has not systematically destroyed surplus or non-serviceable firearms since obtaining independence in 2011,” the report said, adding that the government failed to record its arms stockpiles, meaning the weapons can be taken illicitly.

A mixture of poor training and poor pay means that organised forces of South Sudan – including military, police, prison services, wildlife wardens, and the fire brigade – have been reported to pass on weapons to the civilian population.

Soldiers meanwhile, have been accused of reselling collected weapons to the population after they were removed during disarmament campaigns.

Years of animosity between Sudan and South Sudan sped up the flow of arms in both countries. Researchers suggested that in the last few years the Sudanese government may have supplied

small arms and ammunition to some of the rebels and militia groups fighting to topple the government in Juba and provided weapons and ammunition to David Yau Yau's rebels in December 2012. The weapons, which some indicate may have been delivered by airdrops, including a type of Chinese rifle that had never before been observed in South Sudan called the CQ, which is a copy of an M16. The second rifle was an A30 RPG-type rocket launcher that was being manufactured by the Yarmouk factory in Sudan.

Sudan, meanwhile, said it has clear evidence of South Sudan supporting rebels beyond their national border, including providing weapons. South Sudan repeatedly challenged the allegations which President Salva Kiir, at the time, dubbed as tantamount to an indirect declaration of war.

'Everyday violence'

Whoever has a gun in his hand protects his life: this belief — which prevails in many regions in Sudan and South Sudan — and the spiralling civilian ownership of firearms poses a serious threat to life.

Armed robbery and pillage are widespread in both countries, facilitated by the availability of weapons. These crimes are mainly carried out by "highwaymen" who position themselves along roads day and night, threatening pedestrians and vehicles, stealing possessions and money before fleeing. These robberies frequently result in bloodshed, particularly when victims seek to resist with weapons of their own. Previously, such crimes were only found in Sudan's distant regions, far from any effective state control, but in recent times they have started to take place inside major cities.

In its report, Saferworld paints a similar portrait of everyday violence in South Sudan: "One only needs to read the newspaper on any given day to understand the problem that the proliferation of small arms has caused in South Sudan. For instance, armed robberies in urban centres, the hijacking of vehicles, aid vehicles being detained, hundreds killed in cattle raiding, hundreds more killed in revenge attacks – such incidents are devastatingly common throughout South Sudan."

Organised forces of South Sudan – including military, police, prison services, wildlife wardens, and the fire brigade – reportedly pass on weapons to the civilian population. Meanwhile, the inability of governments in Juba and Khartoum to provide security within their respective countries feeds internal demand for arms.

South Sudanese people feel the pressing need to protect themselves since the outbreak of violence in December 2013 and the spread of fighting to Jonglei, Upper Nile and Unity states. Until South Sudan can provide safe home for its citizens, "arms will remain a household feature," said Leff, from Conflict Armament Research.

Meanwhile, in Sudan, many sectors of society view arms as a necessity, despite harsh punishments for bearing arms and for importing weapons without a license. Carrying weapons is especially important among pastoralists along the borders of West Sudan in Darfur, through greater Kordofan and the Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile and into eastern Sudan.

A mix of ongoing fear and established patterns of behaviour has made citizens across Sudan and South Sudan loathe to give up weapons. This gives rise to a tragic vicious circle whereby surging gun ownership boosts insecurity which, in turn, persuades more people they need a gun. It is only by tackling these root causes that Sudan and South Sudan can hope to free the region from the scourge of arms.

Reorganized into paragraphs by:

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