

ARMS TRANSFERS TO EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

PIETER D. WEZEMAN

I. Introduction

United Nations member states are currently discussing the feasibility of an arms trade treaty (ATT), which would seek to create better controls on international arms transfers. To support this process, the European Union (EU) is funding a series of six regional seminars, organized by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), to increase the awareness of an ATT among UN member states, regional organizations, civil society and industry, and to promote international discussions about the proposed treaty. This paper is one in a series of region-specific Background Papers produced by SIPRI to inform discussions during these meetings. Specifically, this paper provides background information for the regional meeting on East and Southern Africa.¹ Section II gives a general overview of international arms transfers to and within East and Southern Africa in recent years, including small arms and light weapons (SALW). The transparency of these transactions is assessed in section III. Section IV includes brief conclusions.

II. Arms transfers to and from East and Southern Africa

Most weapons procured by governments or non-state groups in East and Southern Africa originate from outside the region. The arms production capabilities of most countries in the region are limited and are based on imported technology, machinery and basic components. Even though South Africa has an arms industry that produces a range of modern military products it remains dependent on imports for most of its military equipment. South Africa is the only country in the region that exports substantial volumes of arms—it was the 17th largest arms exporter globally in the period 2004–2008.² Transactions during this period include the supply of at least 2000 light armoured vehicles to the United States for use in Afghanistan and Iraq, armoured vehicles for use in peace operations in Africa, and a variety of weapons to African armed forces. Ethiopia and Sudan have built up small military industries and there are small arms ammunition factories in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe.³

¹ For the purpose of this paper East and Southern Africa includes Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

² Unless otherwise specified, information on arms transfers is taken from the SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, <<http://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers/>>.

³ Anders, H. and Weidacher, R., 'The production of ammunition for small arms and light weapons', eds S. Pézard and H. Anders, *Targeting Ammunition: A Primer* (Small Arms Survey: Geneva, 2006).

SUMMARY

● United Nation member states are currently discussing the feasibility of an arms trade treaty (ATT) which would seek to create better controls on international arms transfers. This Background Paper is one of a series produced by SIPRI to inform these discussions.

Arms flows to East and Southern Africa, which originate from a wide diversity of countries, are relatively small. However even small volumes of arms can play a major role in armed violence and can be an economic burden. Small arms and light weapons (SALW) are commonly used in violent conflicts in the region. The legal or illegal supply of significant quantities of SALW to and within the region is therefore a cause for concern. An increasing number of supplier countries are trying to address such concerns with more restrictive arms export policies.

The existing secrecy surrounding arms procurement in East and Southern Africa hampers adequate policymaking, facilitates corruption, feeds distrust between states and can allow destabilizing accumulations of arms. It also obstructs an informed debate on an ATT and would be an obstacle to the verification of an eventual treaty.

Table 1. Military expenditure in East and Southern Africa, 1999–2008

Figures are in US \$m. at constant (2005) prices and exchange rates for 1999–2008 and in the right-most column (marked *) in current US\$ m. for 2008. Figures are for calendar years.

Country	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2008*
Angola [§]	2 718	1 259	710	778	1 027	978	1 365	1 627	1 578	1 508	2 424
Botswana	243	269	329	351	339	313	300	290	[319]	[456]	[452]
Burundi	47.9	41.2	54.7	52.4	54.6	51.9	49.6	41.4	41.6	35.7	43.9
Djibouti	30.2	28.9	28.4	36.1	44.4	38.5	44.8	[47.9]	31.8	30.9	36.2
Eritrea	401	334	247	236	231	..	..	..	..	..	..
Ethiopia	821	741	471	388	319	346	342	309	285	262	389
Kenya	227	243	280	301	304	300	317	313	351	348	595
Lesotho	48.7	46.7	49.1	37.6	35.4	33.0	33.6	35.4	38.5	43.8	41.9
Madagascar	52.3	52.7	66.1	52.5	60.5	60.2	54.0	52.1	62.7	67.1	103
Malawi	13.8	11.7	12.5	13.5	13.9	23.3	34.0	[38.9]	[40.0]	..	..
Mauritius	10.3	10.7	10.8	11.0	11.3	10.7	10.9	10.7	10.5	..	..
Mozambique	61.6	63.8	72.7	75.2	74.4	81.5	62.2	55.9	62.8	65.5	84.0
Namibia [§]	154	140	166	166	164	173	192	202	225	283	266
Rwanda	69.7	59.2	60.6	57.1	53.3	46.5	45.0	49.6	45.9	50.0	67.7
Seychelles	13.2	12.3	12.8	12.6	12.6	16.1	14.7	14.5	17.6	10.5	8.1
Somalia	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
South Africa	2 408	2 884	3 242	3 488	3 648	3 680	3 979	3 977	[4 027]	[3 953]	[3 760]
Sudan [†]	693	902	566	655	501	1 425	1 165	1 278	..	..	..
Swaziland [†]	38.5	36.9	34.7	35.3	41.2	45.4	59.5	59.2	60.2	..	..
Tanzania	107	114	133	136	125	134	139	154	157	162	190
Uganda	164	160	161	173	188	216	217	211	237	..	..
Zambia	95.1	..	..	..	..	130	140	153	111	165	262
Zimbabwe	211	207	120	118	92.4	..	..	..	..	..	..

.. = data not available; [] = SIPRI estimate; [†] = all figures are for current spending only (i.e. exclude capital spending); [§] = all figures are for the adopted budget, rather than actual expenditure.

Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, <<http://www.sipri.org/databases/milex/>>.

Arms imports

The imports of major conventional weapons by East and Southern African states during the period 2004–2008 accounted for only 3.5 per cent of the volume of total world arms imports. However, relatively small flows of arms have played a major role in armed violence in the region for many years. Furthermore, even though in 2008 total military expenditure by East and Southern African states was less than 1 per cent of total world military expenditure (see table 1), any unnecessary arms imports can be a significant burden on the small economies of these states, in particular because such imports can exacerbate debts. Unnecessary arms imports may be caused by inadequate military planning and budgeting processes or by corruption.⁴

South Africa was by far the largest importer of major conventional arms in East and Southern Africa during 2004–2008 (figure 1). It is implementing a major military modernization programme, which includes the procurement of 28 combat aircraft, 3 submarines, 4 corvettes, 24 advanced trainer aircraft

⁴ Nightingale, K., *Shooting Down the MDGs: How Irresponsible Arms Transfers Undermine Development Goals*, Oxfam Briefing Paper no. 120 (Oxfam: Oxford, Oct. 2008); and Omitoogun, W. and Hutchful, E., SIPRI, *Budgeting for the Military Sector in Africa: The Processes and Mechanisms of Control* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2006).



and 264 armoured vehicles. Debate about the rationale for this programme and the possibility that corruption contributed to the procurement of excessively expensive arms continues.⁵ Sudan was the second largest arms importer in the region during 2004–2008. It imported major weapons throughout the period, including an estimated 24 combat aircraft and 24 armed helicopters, some of which have been used in the conflict in Darfur.⁶ Eritrea was the third largest importer in 2004–2008, but its most recent imports of major arms were in 2004–2005.

International transfers of small arms and light weapons

SALW are the most commonly used weapons in the violent conflicts in East and Southern Africa, and they are generally the only weapons used by such armed non-state groups as the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, the factions in Somalia or the different groups that were involved in the post-election violence in Kenya in 2008. It is widely acknowledged that the uncontrolled spread of SALW throughout society poses a threat to national and regional peace.⁷

No reliable overview of the flow of SALW to and within the region exists. However, the transfers that are reported by governments in exporting countries show that governments in the region import significant quantities of SALW (see box 1 for examples). The purpose for which the weapons have been acquired is often unclear, as is the intended user (e.g. the armed forces, police, militia, or private individuals or groups), where they are distributed, and if delivered weapons are adequately protected against theft and diversion. It is therefore difficult to assess if any of these imported weapons should be a cause for concern.

It is even more difficult to assess the volume of illegal supplies of SALW to non-state actors, including individuals, criminals and rebel groups, or to governments subject to UN arms embargoes. However, investigations into the implementation of UN arms embargoes, such as those on Somalia, the Darfur region of Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), have shown that significant numbers of weapons—either originating from existing stockpiles in the region or imported from elsewhere—have been illegally transferred by networks involving private individuals and government officials in both the exporting country and transit countries within and outside the region.⁸ Such illegal arms flows to and within the region are

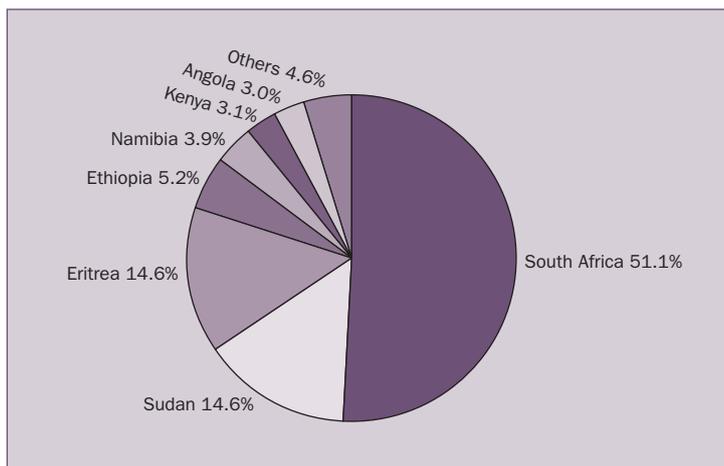


Figure 1. The recipients of major conventional weapons in East and Southern Africa, 2004–2008

Figures are shares of the total volume of transfers to East and Southern Africa.

Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, <<http://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers/>>.

⁵ Nightingale (note 4).

⁶ See the reports of the UN Security Council Committee established pursuant to Resolution 1591 (2005) concerning the Sudan, <<http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1591/>>.

⁷ See e.g. United Nations, Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, A/CONF.192/15, 20 July 2001.

⁸ For a detailed descriptions of cases of such illegal arms flows see the reports by the UN panels of experts or monitoring groups investigating UN sanctions available at <<http://www.un.org/sc/>>

**Box 1.** Examples of transfers of small arms and light weapons to East and Southern Africa, 2004–2008

- Djibouti received 14 machine guns and 141 rifles from the USA in 2005.
- Eritrea received 50 mortars from Bulgaria in 2008 and an unknown number of machine pistols from Romania in 2005.
- Ethiopia received 114 light weapons from Bulgaria in 2007.
- Kenya received 40 000 rifles and 405 grenade launchers from Ukraine in 2007.
- Mozambique received 215 rifles and 28 machine guns from the United Kingdom in 2006–2007.
- Rwanda received 5000 rifles and 76 500 kilograms of small arms ammunition from Bulgaria in 2005, and 2010 assault rifles from Romania in 2007.
- The Somali Transitional Federal Government received 5000 firearms from Yemen in 2005.
- Uganda received 1000 automatic rifles from Ukraine in 2007.

Sources: United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA) online database, <http://disarmament.un.org/UN_REGISTER.nsf>; national arms exports reports, available at <http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/transfers/transparency/national_reports>; and reports by UN panels of experts, available at <<http://www.un.org/sc/committees/>>.

made easier by the lack of adequate border-monitoring capabilities. For example, it is difficult to counter arms smuggling by air because of a lack of proper air traffic control equipment in most of Africa.⁹

Suppliers

A diversity of countries supply arms to East and Southern Africa, and no single country appears to be the dominant arms supplier. In 2004–2008 the largest suppliers of major conventional arms to the region were Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, China and Sweden (see figure 2). All of the exports from Germany, the UK and Sweden went to South Africa. Of Russia's supplies to the region, 44 per cent went to Eritrea, 38 per cent to Sudan and 18 per cent to Ethiopia. Although China supplied fewer arms, these went to more countries, including 58 per cent to Namibia, 14 per cent to Sudan, 12 per cent to Zimbabwe and smaller proportions to Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. Smaller arms exporters to the region, supplying major arms or SALW, include Belarus, Bulgaria, France, Iran, Israel, Italy, Romania, South Africa, Ukraine and the USA.

Direct financial gain is likely to be one of the main motivations for suppliers of arms to the region. Arms supplies may also be part of attempts to maintain or create political influence or to gain access to natural resources, as has been suggested in the case of US and Chinese arms transfers to African countries.¹⁰ However, there is insufficient public information to determine how important the latter factor is. In some cases arms are supplied, often for free or for low prices, to help improve the capability of the recipients to conduct peace operations. An example of this was the USA's donation to Tanzania in 2009 of several armoured vehicles for peacekeeping.¹¹ In gen-

committees/>. See also Fruchart D. et al., *United Nations Arms Embargoes: Their Impact on Arms Flows and Target Behaviour* (SIPRI/Uppsala University: Stockholm/Uppsala, 2007).

⁹ Griffiths, H., 'Building air transport capacity in Africa: options for improving security and governance', SIPRI Policy Brief, Oct. 2009, <http://books.sipri.org/product_info?c_product_id=390>.

¹⁰ See e.g. Shinn, D. H., 'Military and security relations: China, Africa, and the rest of the world', ed. R. I. Rotberg, *China into Africa: Trade, Aid, and Influence* (Brookings Institution Press: Baltimore, MD, 2008), pp. 155–56.

¹¹ Lapierre, D. P., 'U.S., U.K. transfer \$9 million of peacekeeping equipment to Tanzania for Darfur mission', US Africa Command, 13 May 2009, <<http://www.africom.mil/getArticle.asp?art=3008>>.



eral, however, such donations are scarce and peacekeeping operations in Africa are hampered by a lack of adequate equipment.¹²

Supplier states sometimes have to make difficult choices about the potential benefits and risks to peace and security when supplying arms. For example, the Ugandan and US governments supplied arms to the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in order 'to help them stabilize the situation in the country'.¹³ The wisdom of these arms supplies has been questioned because UN investigations have shown that weapons have regularly been diverted from the TFG to other armed groups in the country, fuelling violence and instability.¹⁴

An increasing number of arms exporting countries have adopted more restrictive arms export policies and have signed up to multilaterally agreed guidelines such as the Wassenaar Arrangement or the EU's Common Rules Governing Control of Exports of Military Technology and Equipment.¹⁵ However, even when based on common guidelines, national policies still differ between countries. For example, in the period 2004–2008, while some EU member states exported weapons to Rwanda or Uganda—two countries involved in conflict—other EU member states denied arms exports to these countries, citing the EU's common rules.¹⁶ In another example involving members of the Wassenaar Arrangement, Russia has supplied weapons to Sudan and Zimbabwe whereas the EU has imposed arms embargoes on these countries.¹⁷

III. Transparency in arms transfers

A lack of transparency in arms procurement processes remains common among East and Southern African states, hampering adequate policymaking and potentially facilitating corruption.¹⁸ The secrecy that surrounds arms

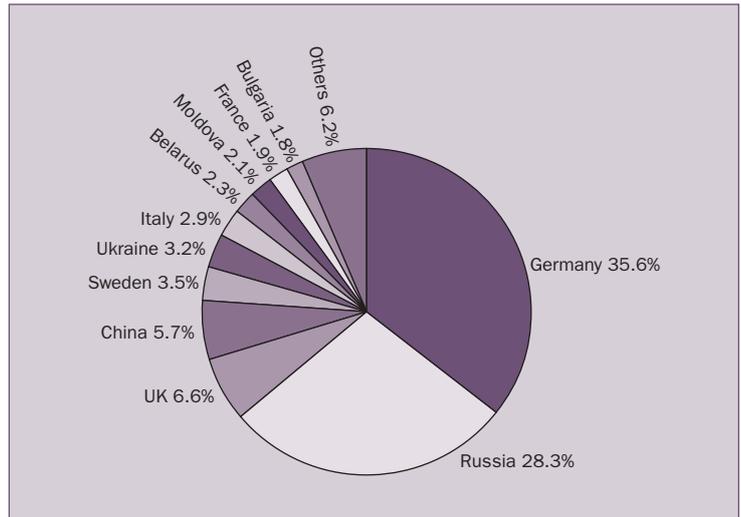


Figure 2. The suppliers of major conventional weapons to East and Southern Africa, 2004–2008

Figures are shares of the total volume of transfers to East and Southern Africa.

Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, <<http://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers/>>.

¹² See e.g. United Nations, News Centre, 'Officials from joint African Union–UN mission bid farewell to Darfur', 25 Aug. 2009, <<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=31853>>.

¹³ US Department of State, Background briefing on U.S. assistance to the Somalia Transitional Federal Government, 26 June 2009, <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2009/06a/125448.htm>>.

¹⁴ United Nations, Security Council, Letter dated 20 November 2008 from the members of the Monitoring Group on Somalia addressed to the Chairman of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to Resolution 751 (1992), S/2008/769, p. 40.

¹⁵ On the Wassenaar Arrangement on Export Controls for Conventional Arms and Dual-Use Goods and Technologies see its website, <<http://www.wassenaar.org/>>. The Common Rules (known as the Code of Conduct on Arms Exports until 2008) are published in Council of the European Union, Council Common Position defining common rules governing the control of exports of military technology and equipment, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L335, 8 Dec. 2008.

¹⁶ See the 6th–10th annual reports according to Operative Provision 8 of the European Union Code of Conduct on Arms Exports, available at <<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/showPage.aspx?id=1484>>.

¹⁷ For a full list of EU arms embargoes see the SIPRI Arms Embargoes Database, <http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/transfers/controlling/arms_embargoes/>.

¹⁸ eds Omitoogun and Hutchful (note 4), pp. 38–40.

Table 2. East and Southern African states' participation in the UN Register of Conventional Arms, 1999–2008

The table lists only those states that reported at least once during the period.

Country	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008 ^a
Botswana		x								
Burundi						x	x			x
Comoros			x	x		x	x			
Djibouti			x		x		x	x	x	
Kenya		x	x	x			x	x	x	
Lesotho			x	x		x	x			
Malawi		x	x	x	x	x				
Madagascar	x	x								
Mauritius	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	
Mozambique						x	x	x		
Namibia				x	x	x	x	x	x	
Rwanda			x							
Seychelles	x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x
South Africa	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Swaziland								x*	x*	x*
Zambia							x	x		
Regional total	4	7	9	8	5	9	11	8	6	4
World total	100	118	126	123	115	117	118	113	91	78

x = report submitted; * = report includes background information on small arms imports and exports.

^a Figures for 2008 include reports received up to 1 Dec. 2009.

Source: UNROCA online database, <http://disarmament.un.org/UN_REGISTER.nsf>.

procurement throughout the region feeds distrust between states and can allow excessive and destabilizing accumulations of arms. Such an accumulation occurred in the late 1990s when Ethiopia and Eritrea prepared for war. Recent documented and alleged arms procurement by Chad, Sudan, the Government of Southern Sudan, and Kenya may also lead to destabilizing accumulations.¹⁹

The UN Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA) was established in 1991 to increase transparency in arms procurement and to contribute to the prevention of destabilizing accumulations. States are requested to report annually to UNROCA on their imports, exports and holdings of certain types of major conventional weapon. Participation by East and Southern African countries has been poor. Of the 24 countries in the region, 16 have submitted one or more reports to UNROCA over the decade 1999–2008 (see table 2). Only nine countries have reported more than three times in this period and only three have reported more than six times.

Several African states have repeatedly stated that they do not prioritize the reporting of major conventional weapon transfers to UNROCA. Instead, they asked for more transparency in transfers of small arms and light weapons, either through the inclusion of SALW in UNROCA or via a separate

¹⁹ Wezeman, P. D., 'United Nations arms embargoes: Their impact on arms flows and target behaviour—Case study: Eritrea and Ethiopia, 2000–2001', SIPRI, 2007, <http://books.sipri.org/product_info?c_product_id=356>; Wezeman, P. D., 'Arms flows to the conflict in Chad', SIPRI Background Paper, Aug. 2009, <http://books.sipri.org/product_info?c_product_id=389>; and Lewis, M., *Skirting the Law: Sudan's Post-CPA Arms Flows*, HSBA Working Paper no. 18 (Small Arms Survey: Geneva, 2009).



mechanism.²⁰ This became possible with the inclusion of SALW in UNROCA from 2003 and with simplified reporting mechanisms for SALW from 2006. However, despite these changes, only one country in East and Southern Africa—Swaziland—has submitted a report including information on SALW transfers, and overall participation in UNROCA has not increased.²¹

Although the need for information exchange and transparency regarding small arms flows and possession has been mentioned in regional intergovernmental discussions, this has not led to systematic public transparency.²² The lack of transparency of arms importing countries contrasts with the increasing transparency of a number of arms exporting countries, which publish detailed official arms export reports and submit information to UNROCA. In 2009, after a hiatus of three years, the South African Government published a report on permits for arms exports in 2008 to over 80 recipients with a total worth of \$600 million.²³

IV. Conclusions

This overview of arms transfers to East and Southern Africa highlights a number of challenges in the debate about the feasibility of an international arms trade treaty. While the volumes of arms imported by most countries in the region have been small, many of these countries have experienced violent conflicts in recent years. A key challenge is to understand which arms supplies provoke, prolong or aggravate these conflicts and which supplies contribute to security and stability. Based on such an understanding, an assessment will have to be made of how arms exporters and arms importers can better coordinate their arms transfer policies and how an ATT can play a role in that.

Of specific relevance to East and Southern Africa is the need to draw lessons from previous failures in the implementation of UN embargoes imposed on states in the region. The region's lack of transparency in arms transfers and arms procurement obstructs an informed debate on an ATT and would be a serious obstacle to the verification of an eventual treaty.

The region's lack of transparency in arms transfers and arms procurement obstructs an informed debate on an arms trade treaty

²⁰ Wezeman, S. T., *The Future of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms*, SIPRI Policy Paper no. 4 (SIPRI: Stockholm, Aug. 2003), p. 22.

²¹ See Holtom, P., *Transparency in Transfers of Small Arms and Light Weapons: Reports to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, 2003–2006*, SIPRI Policy Paper no. 22 (SIPRI: Stockholm, July 2008); and Holtom, P. 'Reporting transfers of small arms and light weapons to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, 2007', SIPRI Background Paper, Feb. 2009, <http://books.sipri.org/product_info?c_product_id=373>.

²² E.g. Article 16 of the Protocol on Control of Firearms, Ammunition and Other Related Materials, which was signed by the 14 member states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) on 14 Aug. 2001 and entered into force on 8 Nov. 2004, <<http://www.sadc.int/index/browse/page/125/>>.

²³ South African National Conventional Arms Control Committee, 'National Conventional Arms Control Committee's (NCACC) annual report', May 2009, available at <http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/transfers/transparency/national_reports/>.

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SIPRI BACKGROUND PAPER

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