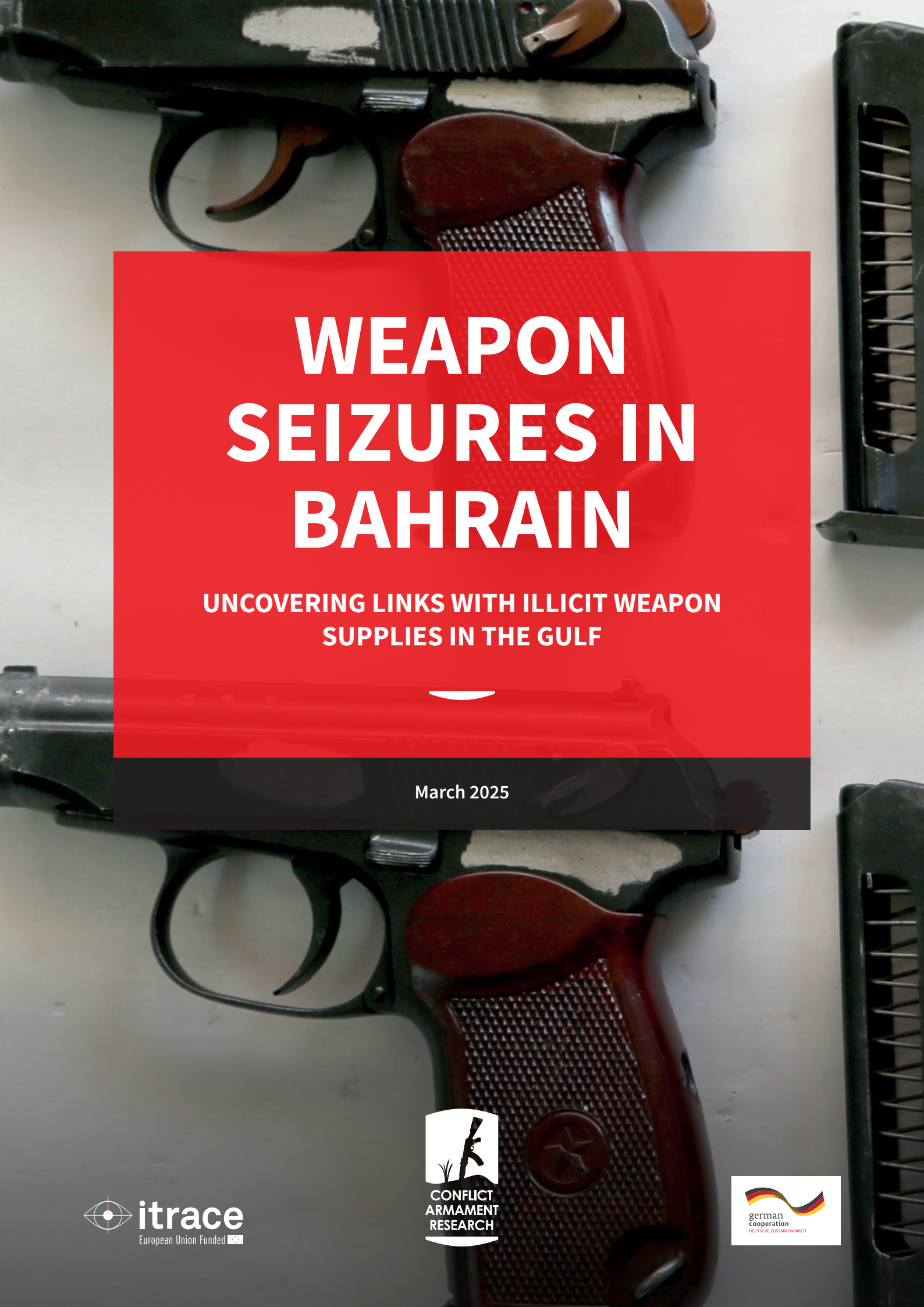

# WEAPON SEIZURES IN BAHRAIN

## UNCOVERING LINKS WITH ILLICIT WEAPON SUPPLIES IN THE GULF

March 2025

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Front cover image: Makarov-pattern pistols with modified barrels and obliterated marks, documented in Bahrain in July 2017.

Inside cover image: The obliteration of markings on an AKKS assault rifle recovered in Tubli in July 2013.

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# ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| **AAB** | Al Ashtar Brigades |
| **CAR** | Conflict Armament Research |
| **DIO** | Defense Industries Organization |
| **EFP** | Explosively formed projectiles |
| **IED** | Improvised explosive device |
| **PSF** | Public security forces |
| **UAV** | Uncrewed aerial vehicle |

# KEY FINDINGS

Having analysed the contents of eight weapon seizures made in Bahrain between 2013 and 2018, Conflict Armament Research (CAR) has identified three main common features:

- **links** with items recovered in maritime seizures in the Arabian Sea and Gulf of Aden during this period and thereafter;
- the **co-location** of weapons and ammunition with components and chemical precursors of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), much of which corresponds to material documented with other illicit actors in the region, particularly in Yemen; and
- the **obliteration** of unique identifying markings on recovered weapons.

These distinctive features link a significant proportion of weapons and ammunition documented in Bahrain during that period to external supply sources. Much of the materiel recovered in Bahrain either originated in Iran or is connected to Iran-linked supply networks.

## LINKS WITH MARITIME SEIZURES IN THE GULF

- CAR documented 42 weapons and 3,896 associated units of ammunition in Bahrain recovered during eight seizures between 2013 and 2018. While a highly heterogenous sample, weapons and ammunition produced in Iran were notably present in seven of the eight seizures analysed for this report. Significantly, these were also of much more recent manufacture than the average item in the sample. Ammunition produced in Iran as recently as 2011 was recovered in Bahrain within two years of its manufacture. Iranian weapons and ammunition are a consistent feature of seizures carried out by international naval forces patrolling the Arabian Sea and the Gulfs of Aden and Oman.
- CAR documented 18 unique headstamps of Iranian small-calibre ammunition. Two headstamps (lot 444 produced in 2009 and lot 11 produced in 2011) were collectively present in five of the eight seizures. CAR had not previously documented either of these Iranian headstamps in any of its field investigations, carried out across 28 conflict-affected countries. In January 2013 US naval and Yemeni coast guard forces recovered ammunition bearing these two headstamps in large quantities from the *Jihan 1* merchant vessel off the coast of southern Yemen. There is no evidence of supply chains carrying ammunition from Yemen to Bahrain. Indeed, ammunition from lot 11 produced in 2011 appeared almost simultaneously in both countries, suggesting that different non-state armed actors were able to access direct supply lines for this materiel.

**MUCH OF THE MATERIEL RECOVERED IN BAHRAIN EITHER ORIGINATED IN IRAN OR IS CONNECTED TO IRAN-LINKED SUPPLY NETWORKS**

▲ A Chinese Type 56-1 assault rifle recovered by Bahraini security forces, with an obliterated serial number.

- CAR documented Iranian Mk2-pattern hand grenades in three seizures in Bahrain. These grenades were housed in individual sealed plastic containers along with silica packets to counter moisture damage. The inclusion of silica packets within weapon packaging to protect them during transport is a feature typical of the maritime consignments interdicted in the Gulf of Aden en route to Houthi forces in Yemen.
- CAR documented a 7.62 × 54 R mm PKM-pattern general-purpose machine gun with distinctive features that correspond to those of PKM-pattern weapons recovered when the USS *Monterey* interdicted an illicit dhow consignment in the northern Arabian Sea in May 2021.

## CO-LOCATION OF MATERIAL

- In six of the eight analysed seizures, CAR investigators documented weapons and ammunition alongside IED components and chemical precursors. CAR has previously connected much of this IED-related material to Iran-linked supply networks.

Co-location of conventional and non-conventional items is not an unusual feature of recoveries in CAR's global operations but does signal a heightened level of coordination to acquire and maintain a relatively wide range of employable material.

## OBLITERATED MARKINGS

- Almost half of the weapons that CAR documented in Bahrain (20 of 42) featured obliterated markings. Tool marks on some of the weapons indicate that a single operator or workshop was responsible for obliterating the markings. This finding suggests that bulk weapon shipments underwent mark obliteration at a centralised location, probably at a relatively early stage in the supply chain, rather than at the local distribution stage.
- CAR documented 11 Chinese Type 56-1 assault rifles in Bahrain, seven of which had obliterated markings. Five of these rifles were recovered from a skiff being loaded with cargo transhipped from a vessel in July 2015. Bahraini forensic experts were able to chemically recover the serial numbers of these five weapons, as well as three other rifles of the same model seized during the same event, which also had identically obliterated markings.
- A set of weapons recovered at Tubli village in 2013 featured Makarov-pattern pistols, rifles, and associated sound suppressors. The pistols, on which all identifying markings had been obliterated, had also been modified and paired with specific suppressors during the production and distribution phases. The supplier may have packaged the pistols, rifles, and associated sound suppressors together as 'assassination kits', designed to enable a recipient to use untraceable weapons to carry out close-quarter attacks requiring a high degree of stealth.

# METHODOLOGY

CAR field investigation teams document illicit weapons, ammunition, and related materiel in conflict-affected locations and trace their supply sources. The teams inspect weapons in a variety of situations—whether recovered by state security forces, surrendered at the cessation of hostilities, cached, or held by insurgent forces. They document all items photographically, date and geo-reference the documentation, and incorporate contextual interview data gathered from the forces in control of the items at the time of documentation. CAR also works with local data collectors whom it has trained to support data gathering in sensitive locations.

CAR occasionally uses information and photographs from social media as background information but does not base its investigations on them, since the provenance of such data is often difficult to verify. Moreover, open-source information does not always provide the detailed physical elements—notably external and internal markings—required to trace weapons and ammunition.

CAR traces only a portion of the items it documents in the field. This traced materiel is usually of particular significance to CAR investigations. If numerous individual items were to be traced, an excessive burden would need to be placed on the national governments and manufacturing companies concerned.

Furthermore, some of the documented items are untraceable. For example, most loose small-calibre ammunition lacks the lot numbers required to identify it in production, sales, and export records. Similarly, records pertaining to the production, sale, and export of many older weapons are no longer available. CAR supplements formal weapon tracing by analysing physical evidence gathered from the weapons themselves and from related materiel; obtaining government, commercial, transport, and other documents; and interviewing individuals with knowledge or experience of the equipment transfers under scrutiny.

CAR retains all documents, interview notes, emails, recordings, photographs, and other data obtained from third parties in a secure, encrypted format. Wherever relevant, CAR publications refer to these items as being 'on file'. To protect its sources, CAR refrains from publishing all details about them and the circumstances under which it acquired certain items. CAR's sources provide all such items willingly and with full knowledge of their use by CAR. CAR does not undertake undercover work or use other clandestine investigation methods. For privacy reasons, CAR publications do not refer to private individuals by name, except in the case of well-known public officials.

CAR has contacted all governments and companies substantively referenced in this report. Unless otherwise specified, no reference to the names of countries of manufacture, manufacturing companies, intermediary parties, distributors, or intended end users implies illegality or wrongdoing on the part of the named entity. CAR would like to acknowledge the cooperation of the governments, companies, and individuals whose responses to CAR's trace requests and provision of other information have been critical in its ongoing investigations.

In this report, CAR draws upon evidence reported by the United Nations Security Council Panel of Experts in its work to monitor the targeted arms embargo relating to the conflict in Yemen.[1] The report also draws on information provided to investigators by national authorities in Bahrain. CAR has not sought to independently trace items that it did not document. Instead, these sources are used to validate and test assessments derived from CAR's own field investigations.

CAR would like to thank the Embassy of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the United States and the Bahraini Ministry of Interior's General Directorate of Crime Detection and Forensic Science for their support.

# INTRODUCTION

Between 2012 and 2017, non-state armed actors in Bahrain carried out a series of attacks, primarily against security personnel and infrastructure. These attacks, many involving the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), rapidly became more lethal and sophisticated, aided by an influx of weapons and explosives into the country (Knight and Levitt, 2018; IISS, 2019). Security forces in Bahrain carried out regular seizures during this period, recovering caches of conventional small arms and ammunition, as well as IED components and precursors. CAR field investigation teams deployed to Bahrain on multiple occasions to document this materiel. Between July 2017 and August 2019, they documented 42 weapons and 3,896 associated units of ammunition in Bahrain (Box 1).[2]

These seizures occurred at a time of heightened tensions in the region. Following the 2011 'Arab Spring', several countries experienced serious internal unrest and revolt. Syria descended into civil war, and Islamic State forces seized control of vast areas of Iraqi and Syrian land, declaring a 'caliphate' in June 2014. In March 2015 an international coalition led by Saudi Arabia launched air strikes in Yemen, intervening on behalf of the country's internationally recognised government after Ansar Allah ('Houthi') forces took control of the capital city, Sana'a. As the conflict in Yemen intensified, international security forces serving as part of the Combined Maritime Forces began reporting interceptions of illicit weapon shipments in the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden, which analysts and investigators assessed were intended for the Houthis.[3]

Conducting weapon documentations in Bahrain, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen, among others, CAR has sought to develop a regional perspective on weapon diversion and proliferation. A previous CAR report, *The IED Threat in Bahrain*, examines IEDs recovered in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia using comparative analysis across the 'Gulf' region—encompassing the six member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates)—as well as Yemen. It demonstrates that many of the IED components recovered in Bahrain were identical to those documented in IEDs and uncrewed aerial vehicles (UAVs) captured from Houthi militants in Yemen (CAR, 2019).

From those investigations, CAR concluded that a significant quantity of IED components documented in Bahrain either originated in Iran or showed connections to Iran-linked supply networks operating in the region. This determination has also been reached by other independent experts (see for instance IISS, 2019). In view of this assessment, and in a context of renewed scrutiny of alleged Iranian support to allied armed groups in the region (Al Arabiya, 2023), this report outlines key common features of seizures of conventional weapons and ammunition carried out in Bahrain between 2013 and 2018—and how those features may help assess the involvement of external supply networks in other contexts.

**THIS REPORT IDENTIFIES SEVERAL KEY COMMON FEATURES OF WEAPONS SEIZURES IN BAHRAIN BETWEEN 2013 AND 2018—FEATURES THAT MAY HELP INVESTIGATORS TO ASSESS THE INVOLVEMENT OF EXTERNAL SUPPLY NETWORKS IN OTHER CONTEXTS**

## BOX 1 — CAR WEAPON AND AMMUNITION DOCUMENTATIONS IN BAHRAIN

### HETEROGENEOUS SAMPLES

The weapons and ammunition recovered in Bahrain between 2013 and 2018 form a highly heterogeneous sample with few model commonalities across the different seizures. A wide range of manufacturers produced the items, over several decades. The 42 weapons that CAR documented in Bahrain were manufactured in 11 different countries. China accounts for the largest proportion of weapons recovered in Bahrain, while the Russian Federation and Türkiye also manufactured relatively significant numbers in the sample. Iran produced nearly half (49 per cent) of the ammunition documented in Bahrain, while 15 other countries manufactured the remaining rounds.

Across the Bahraini recoveries of weapons and ammunition, Iran was the most represented manufacturing country (in seven of eight seizures, see Graph 1). Significantly, items produced in Iran were of much more recent manufacture than the wider sample (Graph 2). Iranian ammunition produced as recently as 2011, for example, was recovered in Bahrain just two years later, in July 2013.

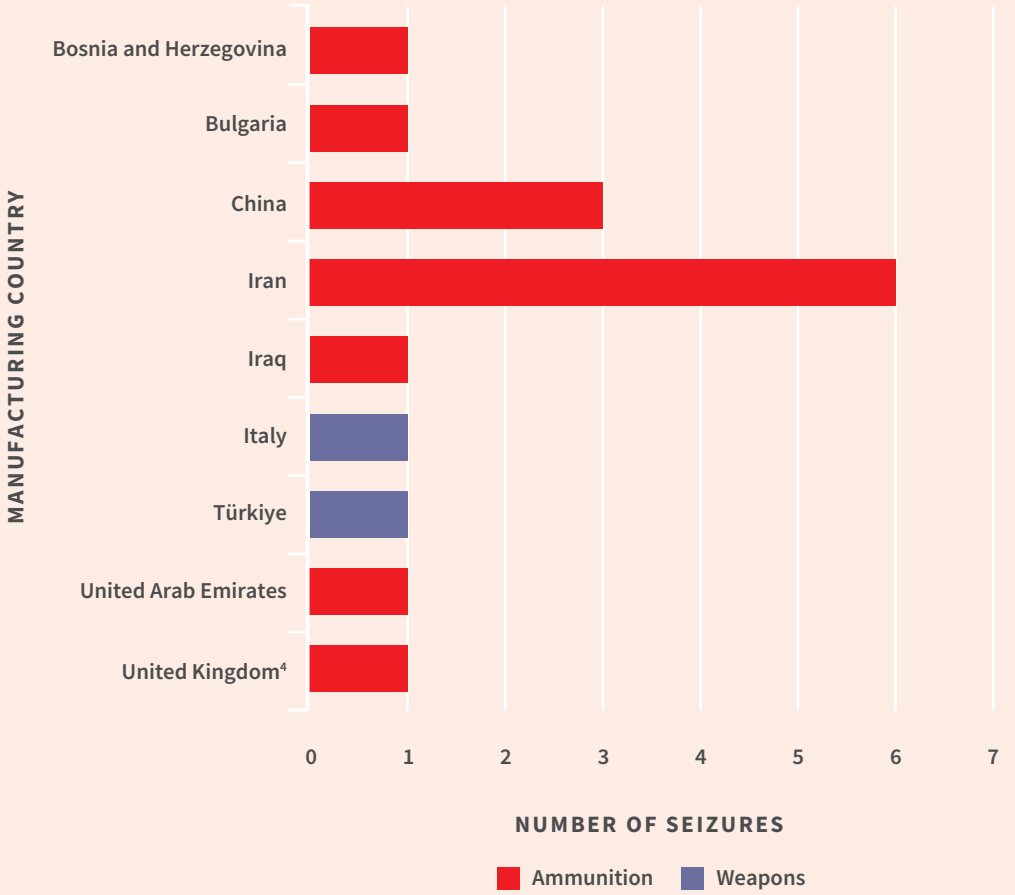
**Graph 1**

**Number of seizures in which CAR documented weapons and ammunition produced by each country present in the sample**

## BOX 1 — CAR WEAPON AND AMMUNITION DOCUMENTATIONS IN BAHRAIN (CONTINUED)

**Graph 2**

**Seizures in which weapons and ammunition produced after 2000 were documented, by manufacturing country**




### DISTINCT AMMUNITION

In total, CAR documented 3,887 rounds of small-calibre ammunition in Bahrain. Investigators documented eight different calibres of small-calibre ammunition in the sample recovered in this period. The majority of documented ammunition was of 7.62 × 39 mm calibre (2,345 rounds, 60 per cent).

CAR's analysis identified 91 unique headstamps in this sample.[5] A third of these (30 headstamps) are distinct to Bahrain, meaning that CAR field investigators have not documented them anywhere else across CAR's global operations. This is a high ratio and is quite distinct in CAR's experience, where it is more common to see diverted ammunition headstamps in multiple countries in a region. While CAR's data sampling is access dependent and cannot provide a comprehensive baseline, it suggests that it is less probable that non-state armed groups in Bahrain sourced this ammunition from regional illicit markets.

## THIS REPORT IDENTIFIES KEY LINKAGES BETWEEN WEAPONS SEIZED IN BAHRAIN AND IRAN-LINKED NETWORKS, HIGHLIGHTING A BROADER REGIONAL PATTERN OF EXTERNAL COORDINATION IN ARMING NON-STATE ACTORS

▲ Evidence bags containing cartridges seized in Bahrain.

In this report, CAR examines conventional weapons and ammunition that the Bahrain Public Security Forces recovered in eight different seizures between 2013 and 2018.[6] In most cases, the available seizure information did not allow CAR investigators to determine which specific groups were linked to a particular seizure, but national authorities confirmed to CAR that the documented materiel was recovered in operations targeting non-state armed actors active in the country.

The report identifies three main features that are common across the seizures in Bahrain (Map 1) and that enabled CAR investigators to link the supply of many of these weapons and ammunition to Iran-linked supply networks:

- **links** with items recovered in maritime seizures in the Arabian Sea and Gulf of Aden since 2013;
- the **co-location** of weapons and ammunition with components and chemical precursors of IEDs, much of which corresponds to material documented with other illicit actors in the region, particularly in Yemen; and
- **obliterations** of unique identifying markings on recovered weapons, suggestive of coordinated efforts to render materiel untraceable.

The report draws on CAR's wider investigations in the region to assess linkages between the weapons recovered in these seizures and illicit markets across the Middle East, the Gulf, and East Africa. It also draws on the wider regional context of maritime seizures, which have continued into 2024 (USDIA, 2024) and considers the extent to which the supply of weapons and ammunition to non-state actors in Bahrain was externally coordinated.

Bahrain has not suffered a significant militant attack since 2017, although its interior ministry reported in November 2021 that security forces had seized weapons and ammunition from actors allegedly planning 'terrorist operations' in the country (Al-Monitor, 2021). Some of the most prominent non-state armed groups active in Bahrain have been proscribed by certain countries, yet they have not disbanded and remain active. These include the Al Ashtar Brigades (AAB, also known as Saraya Al Ashtar), which has been designated as a terrorist organisation by several countries including, Canada (2019), the UK (2017) and the United States (2018).

The US listing describes AAB as 'an Iran-backed terrorist organization aimed at overthrowing the Bahraini government', noting that in January 2018 AAB formally adopted the branding of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp and publicly reaffirmed its loyalty to Iran (USDoS, 2018). The US designated a second Bahrain-based group, Saraya al-Mukhtar, in December 2020; the country later sanctioned four Iran-based individuals in March 2024, stating that they had been involved in facilitating the supply of lethal aid or financing to AAB (USDoS, 2020; US Treasury, 2024). These organised militant groups are the focus of this report and of CAR investigations into weapon seizures made in Bahrain between 2013 and 2018.

As international naval forces continue to interdict large consignments of weapons and ammunition in the Gulf region, considerable international attention is focused on the arming of particular high-profile groups like the Houthis in Yemen; in contrast, relatively little is known about how other actors in the region have been able to access materiel.

**Map 1**

**Recovery sites in Bahrain 2013–18**

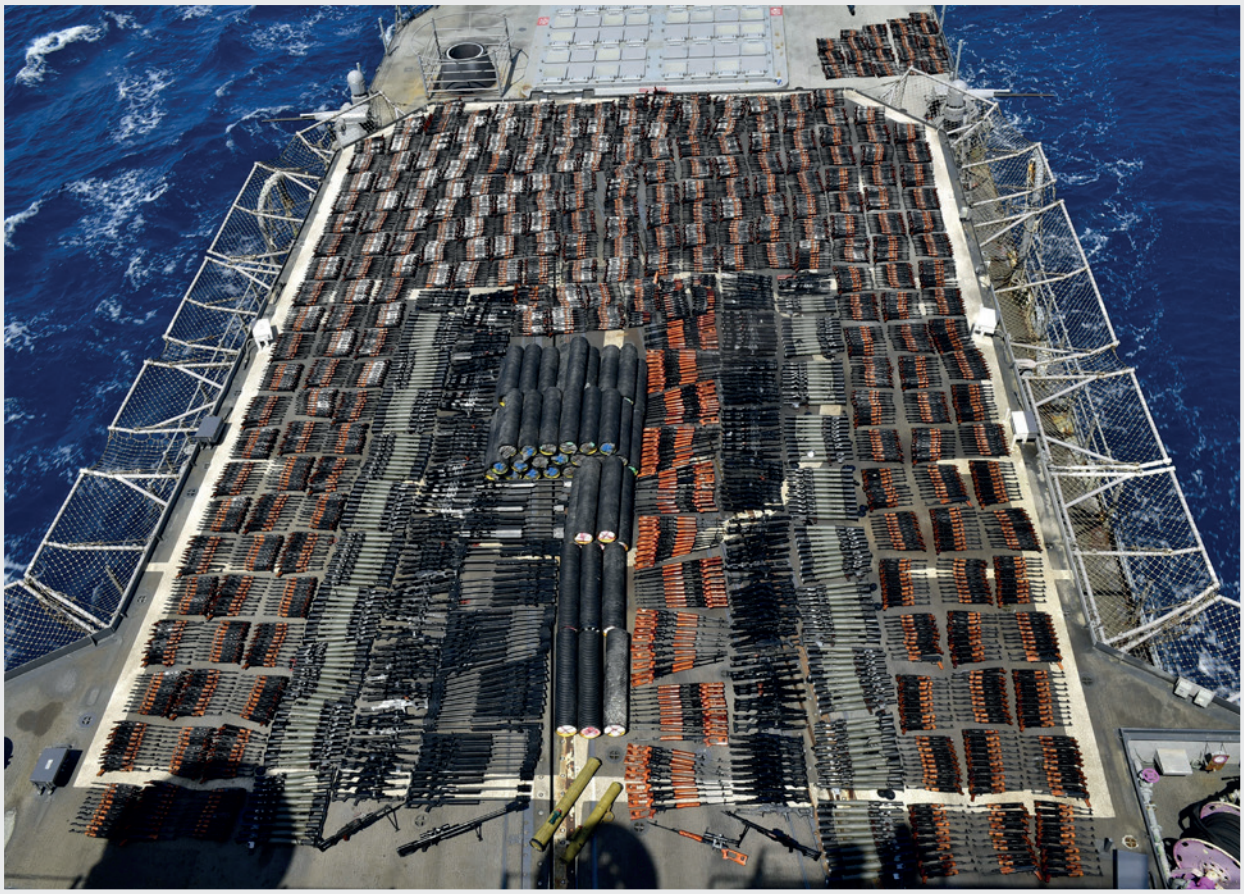
# LINKS WITH MARITIME SEIZURES

Between 2013 and 2023, international naval forces patrolling the Arabian Sea and the Gulfs of Aden and Oman seized at least 19 large consignments of weapons and ammunition that were being transported primarily by dhows—traditional cargo vessels used widely in the region.[7] The first of these took place in January 2013, when US naval and Yemeni coast guard forces interdicted the *Jihan 1* off the coast of southern Yemen. In its 2021 report, the UN Security Council Panel of Experts on Yemen states that these maritime seizures pointed to 'three distinct supply routes for arms and related materials destined for Houthi forces' (UNSC, 2021, p. 27; see Figure 1). The Panel's assessment is based on the locations of the dhows at the time of interception, analysis of GPS devices recovered from a number of vessels, and the types of illicit materiel in each seizure. Iran has consistently denied allegations of its involvement in these supplies.[8]

**Figure 1**

**Thousands of weapons, reportedly bound for Houthi forces, displayed on the deck of the USS *Monterey* after the warship interdicted a dhow in the northern Arabian Sea.**

*© U.S. Navy Photo*



One of these routes appears to be used primarily for consignments of small arms and light weapons, another for high-value items such as components for advanced conventional weapons. Weapon consignments supplied to the Houthis are transhipped from larger vessels to smaller dhows off the Somali coast. Investigations into a Somalia-based trafficking network involved in transporting weapons along this route found that larger, *jelbut*-style dhows crewed by Somali and Yemeni nationals collect the cargo in waters near Iranian ports and then travel to the north-eastern Somali coast. There the materiel is transhipped to smaller Yemeni *shu'ai*-style feeder vessels, which carry the items to Yemen, from where they are then transported overland to Houthi-controlled territory (Bahadur, 2020).[9]

Weapon consignments seized by international maritime forces have typically contained strikingly similar combinations of materiel, which often involve co-location of conventional and non-conventional items:

- **Type 56-1 assault rifles** produced by Jianshe Machine Tool Factory, China, in 2016, 2017, and 2018, including more than 16,000 that were recovered in four interdictions between April 2020 and May 2021;
- **AM-50 12.7 × 99 mm anti-materiel rifles** manufactured in Iran, first reported in these seizures in 2020,[10]
- **RPG-7 launchers**, including 100 seized by the HMAS *Darwin* on 27 February 2016 and 200 interdicted by the USS *Sirocco* on 28 March 2016,[11]
- **PKM-pattern 7.62 × 54 R mm general-purpose machine guns** some of which were recovered in four seizures in 2020 and 2021 (UNSC, 2022);
- **small-calibre ammunition**, reported in at least six maritime interdictions, including 476,000 rounds from a dhow in the Arabian Sea in June 2019 (al-Barei, 2019); and
- **anti-tank guided weapons** and components, including 150 9M113 'launch containers' seized in the Gulf of Aden by US naval forces in February 2020 and another 21 recovered by the Royal Saudi Naval Forces in June 2020.

## WEAPON CONSIGNMENTS TO HOUTHI FORCES HAVE TYPICALLY CONTAINED STRIKINGLY SIMILAR COMBINATIONS OF MATERIEL

Numerous seizures included radio-controlled IED components, such as transmitter and receiver kits. These items share features with components documented by CAR in Bahrain, indicating a possible common source of supply, as detailed in a previous CAR publication (CAR, 2019). These interlinkages are explored in the next section of this report.

Images of the seizures show near-identical packaging of illicit materiel, including larger items packaged in pairs in plastic sheaths, wrapped in Styrofoam padding and finally weather-proof green bags. The application of barcode stickers and secondary serialisation numbers—which CAR has observed on seized items since 2020—may indicate a progression in the efficiency and sophistication of stockpile management practices.

While specific types of materiel recovered in these seizures differ notably from items seen in Bahrain (see Box 2), CAR documented multiple connections between the seizures in Bahrain and the weapons and ammunition illicitly supplied to other non-state armed groups, particularly the Houthis in Yemen. This report details three of these key connections:

- The high prevalence of recently produced Iranian small-calibre ammunition, documented in six out of eight seizures in Bahrain;
- A pattern in the packaging of certain items, particularly grenades—observed by CAR in three seizures and in maritime seizures such as the MV *Francop* in 2009; and
- PKM-pattern general-purpose machine guns, recovered in the 2013 speedboat seizure and in several maritime seizures such as the USS *Monterey* in 2021.

The following sections provide a detailed account of these linkages.

## BOX 2 — DIVERGENCES BETWEEN MARITIME SEIZURES AND MATERIEL RECOVERED IN BAHRAIN

Seizures of maritime supplies reportedly destined for Yemen frequently include high-powered systems, such as anti-tank guided weapons, as well as technologies and components for more complex systems, like ballistic and cruise missiles. In contrast, CAR did not document any high-powered or advanced conventional weapons in Bahrain.

For instance, CAR's documentation in Bahrain included only four 40mm rockets: three Iranian PG7-AP2 rockets manufactured in 2007, equipped with Chinese fuzes (see Figure 2), and a Bulgarian OG-7V rocket manufactured in 1986;[12] however, no rocket-propelled grenade launchers were documented. Similarly, CAR did not document any medium- or large-calibre ammunition, such as rocket-propelled grenades.

**Figure 2**

**Three Iranian 40 mm PG7-AP2 rockets with the lot number 08-13-2007 recovered by Bahraini security forces during operations between August 2017 and February 2018.**[13]

*Documented by a CAR field investigation team in Manama, Bahrain on 20 April 2018.*


Additionally, while CAR did not document any optical sights in Bahrain, several maritime seizures included Belarusian and Iranian optical sights, some of which bore distinctive quality-control stickers.

CAR has observed similar labels on radio-controlled IED components recovered in Bahrain and Yemen, as well as from the *Jihan 1* and an Iranian UAV shot down over Israel (CAR, 2019; 2020).

## IRANIAN SMALL-CALIBRE AMMUNITION PRODUCED SINCE 2000

CAR investigators documented 3,887 rounds of small-calibre ammunition in Bahrain.[14] Individual Combat Industries Group (ICIG), a sub-entity of the Defense Industries Organization (DIO) in Iran, manufactured nearly half (49 per cent) of the documented rounds. CAR documented 18 unique headstamps of Iranian small-calibre ammunition, all of which were manufactured in or after 2000, and mostly between 2007 and 2011.[15]

CAR investigators identified Iranian small-calibre ammunition manufactured since 2000 in six of the eight seizures analysed in this report. As Table 1 shows, most Iranian headstamps were recovered in caches in Tubli (Seizure 1, seven headstamps); Nuwaidrat (Seizure 4, six headstamps); and during a series of operations in Bahrain between 2017 and 2018 (Seizure 8, seven headstamps).[16]

**Table 1**

**Iranian small-calibre ammunition produced since 2000 that CAR investigators documented in Bahrain**

| Year of manufacture | Headstamp | Calibre | Quantity documented in Bahrain | Seizures recovered in | Quantity documented in other CAR operations |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2000 | 7.62 × 39_00 | 7.62 × 39 mm | 6 | Seizure 8 | 0 |
| 2005 | 7.62 × 39_181_05 | 7.62 × 39 mm | 1 | Seizure 8 | 0 |
| 2006 | 7.62 × 39_92_06 | 7.62 × 39 mm | 3 | Seizure 8 | 0 |
| 2006 | 7.62 × 54_124_06 | 7.62 × 54 mm R | 1 | Seizure 4 | 0 |
| 2006 | 9 × 19_06 | 9 × 19 mm | 150 | Seizure 4 | 0 |
| 2007 | 7.62 × 39_31_07 | 7.62 × 39 mm | 32 | Seizure 8 | 0 |
| 2007 | 7.62 × 39_207_07 | 7.62 × 39 mm | 1 | Seizure 8 | 0 |
| 2007 | 7.62 × 39_208_07 | 7.62 × 39 mm | 105 | Seizure 8 | 1 (Syria) |
| 2007 | 7.62 × 54_7_07 | 7.62 × 54 mm R | 451 | Seizures 1, 4 | 0 |
| 2007 | 7.62 × 54_8_07 | 7.62 × 54 mm R | 4 | Seizure 4 | 0 |
| 2007 | 7.62 × 54_9_07 | 7.62 × 54 mm R | 305 | Seizures 1, 2 | 0 |
| 2007 | 7.62 × 54_13_07 | 7.62 × 54 mm R | 191 | Seizures 1, 2 | 0 |
| 2007 | 9 × 19_07 | 9 × 19 mm | 50 | Seizure 4 | 0 |
| 2009 | 7.62 × 39_444_09 | 7.62 × 39 mm | 243 | Seizures 6, 7, 8 | 1000 (Yemen)* |
| 2010 | 7.62 × 39_423_10 | 7.62 × 39 mm | 2 | Seizure 1 | 0 |
| 2011 | 7.62 × 39_3_11 | 7.62 × 39 mm | 1 | Seizure 1 | 0 |
| 2011 | 7.62 × 39_9_11 | 7.62 × 39 mm | 1 | Seizure 1 | 0 |
| 2011 | 7.62 × 39_11_11 | 7.62 × 39 mm | 350 | Seizures 1, 4 | 600 (Yemen)* |

Note: *This ammunition was recovered from the *Jihan 1* merchant vessel in January 2013 and documented by the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen (UNSC, 2021).

Table 1 highlights two headstamps of 7.62 × 39 mm ammunition: 7.62 × 39_444_09 (lot 444 produced in 2009, as shown in Figure 3) and 7.62 × 39_11_11 (lot 11 produced in 2011, as shown in Figure 5). Collectively these two headstamps were present in five of the seizures analysed in this report. According to Bahraini Forensic Firearms Lab records, more than half of a total of 5,851 rounds of Iranian small-calibre ammunition recovered in Bahrain at this time came from just these two production runs (Michetti, 2020). The prevalence of these two headstamps in such quantities—and with the year of manufacture so close to their recovery dates—suggests that they may have been supplied to non-state armed actors in Bahrain in a coordinated or wholesale manner.

Prior to analysing the seizures in Bahrain, CAR had not documented either of the aforementioned Iranian headstamp, despite years of field investigations across 28 conflict-affected countries. In January 2013, however, US naval and Yemeni coast guard forces recovered this ammunition in large quantities from the *Jihan 1* merchant vessel off the coast of southern Yemen (see Table 1 and Figures 4 and 6). The *Jihan 1* was transporting a significant quantity of conventional military items of Chinese, Iranian, and Russian manufacture, as well as thousands of IED components, including chemical precursors and commercial electric detonators (CAR, 2019). The UN Panel of Experts on Yemen documented the items recovered from the *Jihan 1* at a Yemeni government facility in Aden. The Panel also interviewed Yemeni crew members and analysed waypoint data from the vessel's GPS navigation system. In its 2013 report, five of the eight Panel members 'found that all available information placed the Islamic Republic of Iran at the centre of the *Jihan* operation' (UNSC, 2013, p. 15).

**Figure 3**

**Iranian 7.62 × 39 mm ammunition bearing the headstamp 7.62 × 39_444_09, recovered by Bahraini security forces in February 2017 during operations targeting a cell involved in the January 2017 Jau prison escape (Seizure 6).**

*Documented by CAR in Manama, Bahrain on 23 July 2017.*


**Figure 4**

**Iranian 7.62 × 39 mm ammunition bearing the headstamp 7.62 × 39_444_09, recovered from the *Jihan 1* merchant vessel[17] in January 2013.**

*Documented by the UN Panel of Experts in Aden in 2013.*
*© United Nations*

**Figure 5**

**Iranian 7.62 × 39 mm ammunition bearing the headstamp 7.62 × 39_11_11, recovered by Bahraini security forces from a cache in Tubli village in July 2013 (Seizure 1).**

*Documented by CAR in Manama, Bahrain, on 23 July 2017.*

**Figure 6**

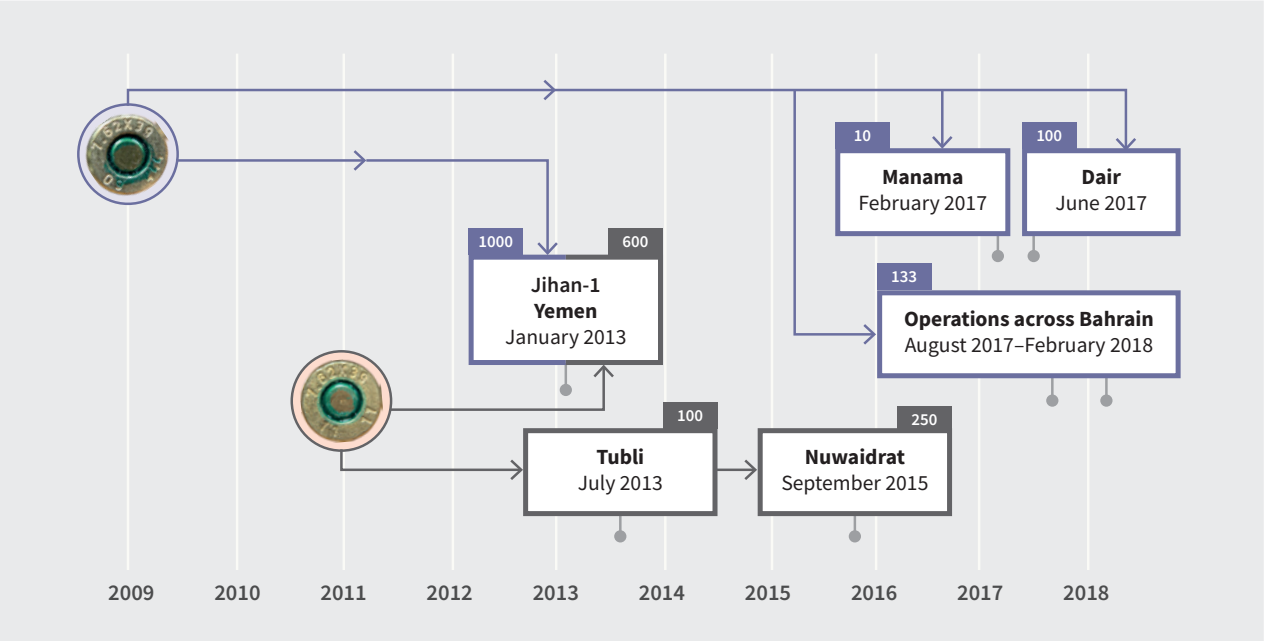
**Iranian 7.62 × 39 mm ammunition and packaging bearing the headstamp 7.62 × 39_11_11, recovered from the Jihan 1 merchant vessel in January 2013.**

*Documented by the UN Panel of Experts in Aden in 2013.*
*© United Nations*


There is no evidence of supply chains carrying ammunition from Yemen to Bahrain. Indeed, ammunition from lot 11 produced in 2011 appeared almost simultaneously in both countries, suggesting that they may have been supplied directly, but separately, to non-state armed actors in the region. Graph 3 shows the transfers and documented data relating to these rounds in Yemen and Bahrain between 2013 and 2018.

**Graph 3**

**Seizure dates and locations for headstamps 7.62 × 39_444_09 and 7.62 × 39_11_11**



## PACKAGING OF IRANIAN GRENADES

Bahraini security forces recovered two types of grenades in weapon seizures, both of which CAR assesses to have been manufactured in Iran. In all the seizures in which security forces recovered grenades, they were found alongside IED-related material (Michetti, 2020, pp. 23-24). CAR investigators documented a sample of the grenades recovered from a speedboat off Bahrain's coastal waters in December 2013, in the Nuwaidrat cache in September 2015, and after operations targeting Al Ashtar Brigade cells between August 2017 and February 2018 (Seizures 2, 4, and 8).[18]

The vast majority of the recovered grenades are made from cast-iron and do not bear manufacturer markings. CAR believes that these are a copy of the Mk2, a fragmentation grenade that the United States first introduced in World War I. The grenades that CAR documented in Bahrain—and the fuze model recovered alongside them—appear identical to items displayed in a product catalogue issued by Iran's Defense Industries Organization (see Figures 7 and 8).[19]

**Figure 7**

**An Mk2-pattern hand grenade recovered during the 2013 speedboat interdiction.**

*Documented by CAR in Manama, Bahrain, on 23 July 2017.*[20]

**Figure 8**

**Iran's product catalogue features a grenade model that appears identical to the Mk2-pattern grenades and associated fuzes recovered in Bahrain.**


Security forces recovered 52 of these Mk-2-pattern grenades in two different maritime operations: Seizure 2, a speedboat interdiction on 28 December 2013, and Seizure 5, carried out on Nabih Saleh island on 1 December 2016. All 52 grenades were paired with fuzes bearing a single lot and date number (82-2006) and were housed in individual, sealed plastic containers along with silica packets to prevent moisture damage (Michetti, 2020; see Figure 9).[21] The inclusion of silica packets in packaging to protect weapons and ammunition during transport is a feature typical of the maritime consignments interdicted in the Gulf of Aden en route to Houthi forces in Yemen (see Figure 10).

**Figure 9**

**The plastic container for an Mk2 grenade and an accompanying silica packet.**

*© Bahrain Ministry of Interior, first published by Atlantic Council (2020).*

**Figure 10**

**Weapons packaged with silica packets, recovered by the USS *Monterey*.**

*© Confidential source. On file with CAR.*


On 4 November 2009, Israeli naval forces interdicted the MV *Francop* merchant vessel in the eastern Mediterranean Sea and reportedly recovered 500 tonnes of Iranian conventional materiel that had been hidden alongside regular cargo in containers branded Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (Israel MFA, 2009). The seizure included crates containing hand grenades that appear identical to the Mk2-pattern grenades recovered in Bahrain. They were stored in similar plastic containers (albeit tan-coloured rather than black) and paired with the same model of fuze (see Figure 11).

**Figure 11**

**A case of Mk2-pattern hand grenades recovered from the MV *Francop* in 2009.**

*© Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*

## OVERMARKED PKM-PATTERN GENERAL-PURPOSE MACHINE GUN

On 18 July 2017, a CAR field investigation team documented a 7.62 × 54 mm R PKM-pattern general-purpose machine gun as well as an additional barrel (see Figure 12).[22] Bahraini maritime security forces recovered the items from a speedboat in December 2013, in an operation that this report refers to as Seizure 2. They had interdicted the vessel as it entered Bahraini waters, having travelled from Iraq. It was transporting the PKM along with small-calibre ammunition, grenades, and a variety of materials that could be used in the production of IEDs.

**Figure 12**

**A PKM-pattern machine gun and extra barrel recovered by Bahraini security forces from a speedboat entering Bahraini waters in December 2013.**

*Documented by CAR in the United States on 3 February 2021.*

CAR was not able to identify the manufacturer of the weapon or the barrels and therefore has not been able to trace or verify their provenance. The original markings on the weapon have been partially obliterated and overmarked using a distinctive dot-peen method that is also employed to apply serial numbers to Iranian weapons (see Figure 13).[23] Obliteration of key markings, a common feature of materiel recovered in Bahrain between 2013 and 2018, is the focus of the third section of this report.

While CAR has not been able to ascertain the origin of the machine gun, several features suggest a possible link to Iran. The overmarked serial number (15PNB00115) matches a marking format that CAR has observed on some Iranian small arms.

In March 2016, the French naval vessel MV *FAS Provence* interdicted a consignment of weapons in the Arabian Sea that included 2,000 Iranian 7.62 × 39 mm KLS-model assault rifles (CAR, 2016), which bore the same serial number format as the one documented on the machine gun recovered in Bahrain (see Figure 14).

**CAR COULD NOT DETERMINE THE WEAPON'S ORIGIN. HOWEVER, THE SERIAL NUMBER PATTERN AND MARKING METHODS ARE CONSISTENT WITH THOSE FOUND ON IRANIAN WEAPONS**

**Figure 13**

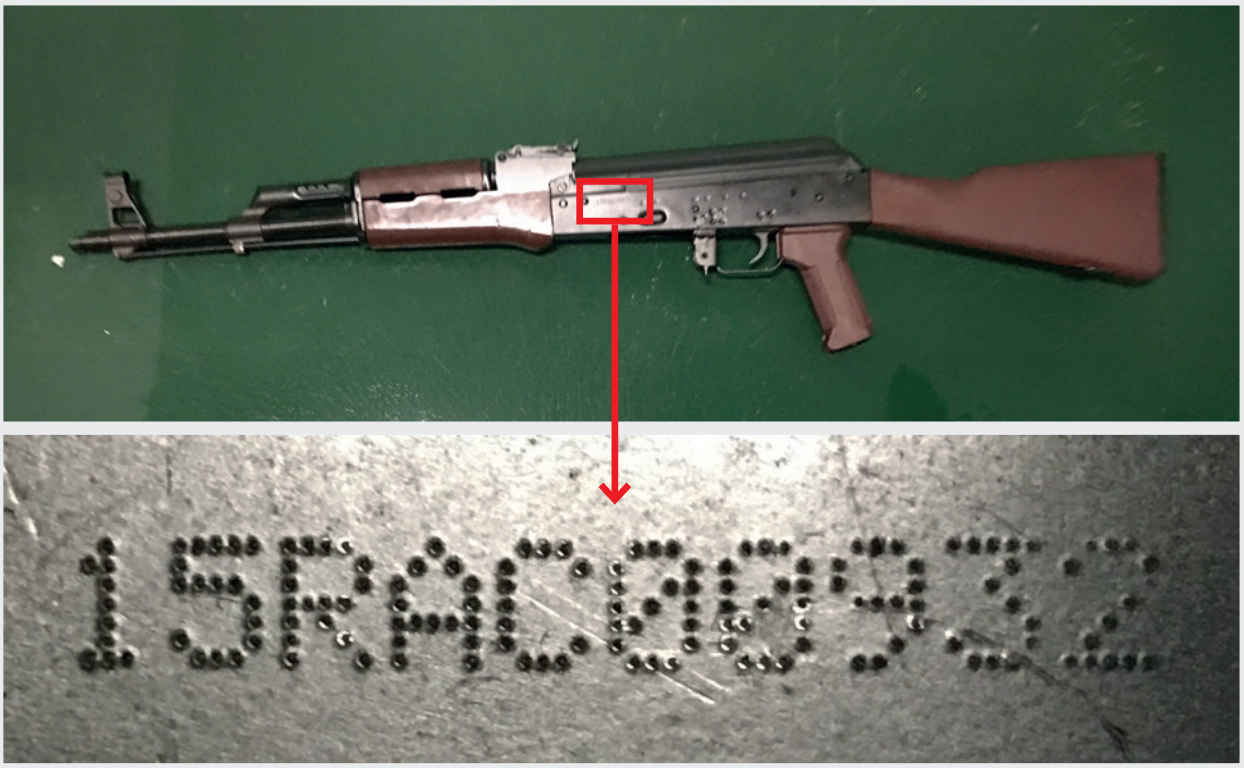
**A dot-peen serial number on a PKM-pattern machine gun recovered in Bahrain, overmarked in the location where the original serial number was obliterated.**

*Documented by CAR in Manama, Bahrain on 18 July 2017.*

**Figure 14**

**A serial number applied to an Iranian KLS rifle, recovered by naval personnel of the MV *FAS Provence* in March 2016. Its format is identical to that of the PKM-pattern weapon recovered in Bahrain.**

*© Confidential source. On file with CAR.*



The separate PKM-pattern barrel recovered in Bahrain is also overmarked with the last four digits (0115) of the dot-peened main serial number on the weapon's receiver, as are other internal components. A second barrel assembly documented with the weapon bears a different four-digit overmarked number (0101). The dot peen serialisation marks were applied with notable uniformity, probably by an armourer in a workshop or industrial environment where multiple items were serialised for organizational, parts matching, and inventory purposes.

In 2020 and 2021, international naval forces recovered PKM-pattern machine guns in at least four maritime seizures. In May 2021, in the northern Arabian Sea, the USS *Monterey* interdicted a dhow that was transporting an illicit consignment. Information provided to, but not confirmed by, the Panel suggested that the ship had been at a location close to the port of Jask in Iran previous to its seizure. The shipment included 192 PKM-pattern general-purpose machine guns, 164 of which the UN Panel assessed bore characteristics similar to those of the weapon recovered in Bahrain (UNSC, 2022). These shared features, detailed in Table 2, include:

- post-manufacture dot-peen serial numbering in the same font;
- black polymer pistol grips with a distinctive stippling pattern common to Iranian rifles;
- a black polymer rear stock;
- identical rear sight markings; and
- re-finished fire selector marks and other post-manufacture surface re-finishing, such as the application of black lacquer or paint.

It is possible that these PKM-pattern weapons were assembled using components from weapons manufactured elsewhere and finished with polymer furniture procured locally or online.[24] Both the PKM-pattern machine gun and extra barrels recovered in Bahrain and the items seized by the USS *Monterey* in 2021 feature surface finishing and possible overpainting, as well as secondary serialisation markings on the barrels. The weapons recovered in 2021 exhibit a higher quality of serial number marks and surface finishing, however. While the fire selector marks on the weapons are similar, for example, the application on the machine gun seized in Bahrain is less precise (see Table 2).

Similarly, the application of the dot-peen serial numbers and black overpaint is much cleaner on the weapons recovered in 2021. The item seized in Bahrain still has visible Cyrillic markings (see Figure 15); in contrast, those recovered by the USS *Monterey* do not, possibly because pre-existing manufacturer markings on components were more carefully removed.

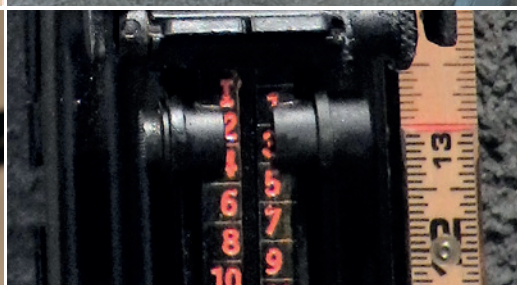
**Figure 15**

**Stamped markings are visible directly beneath the dot-peen marking '0115' on the feed assembly of a PKM-pattern general-purpose machine gun recovered in Bahrain.**

*Documented by CAR in Manama, Bahrain on 18 July 2017.*

**Table 2**

**Common features of PKM-pattern general purpose machine guns recovered in Bahrain in 2013 and by the USS *Monterey* in 2021.**

| Feature | Bahrain seizure (December 2013) | USS *Monterey* seizure (May 2021) |
|---|---|---|
| Post-manufacture dot-peen serial numbering in the same font |  |  |
| Black polymer pistol grips with a distinctive stippling pattern |  |  |
| Black polymer rear stock |  |  |
| Rear sight markings in orange paint |  |  |
| Re-finished fire selector marks and other post-manufacture surface re-finishing |  |  |
| | Documented by CAR in Manama, Bahrain on 18 July 2017 and on a second occasion in the United States on 3 February 2021 | © Confidential source. On file with CAR[25] |

## SECONDARY SERIALISATION MARKINGS ON KLF RIFLES

CAR investigators documented two KLF 7.62 × 39 mm assault rifles that Bahrain Public Security Forces recovered on 1 December 2016, while searching a skiff docked at Nabih Saleh island (Seizure 5). In addition to the rifles, the security forces recovered two Iranian hand grenades and Iranian-manufactured small-calibre ammunition. Officials informed CAR that the rest of the skiff's cargo had already been transferred to recipients in Bahrain, and that the smugglers had used the materiel for personal protection.[26] Navigation data and statements by the crew indicated that the vessel originated in Iran (Michetti, 2020, p. 8).

The two KLF rifles recovered from the skiff are marked with seven-digit serial numbers that are only three digits apart (2304094 and 2304097).[27] The serial numbers on both rifles were applied by a dot-peen machine (see Figure 16) and are similar in font and format. The '2', for example, is distinctly curved and has an out-of-line dot on the first descent (purple box). The format of the '0' is also identical on both rifles, with a diagonal slash containing seven dots (red box).

The KLF rifle with the serial number 2304097 bears a secondary serialisation mark on the underside of the receiver: 3A1366. The font of this secondary mark differs from that of the primary serial number. It seems to have been applied after the weapon's production (see Figure 17), perhaps as part of an inventory management process.

**Figure 16**

**Serial numbers on the receivers of two KLF rifles, featuring similarities in marking font, recovered on 1 December 2016 (Seizure 5).**

*Documented by CAR in Manama, Bahrain, on 18 July 2017.*

**Figure 17**

**A secondary serialisation marking on the underside of the receiver of a KLF assault rifle recovered from a docked skiff on 1 December 2016.**

*Documented by CAR in the United States on 3 February 2021.*

The format of this post-production mark (one digit/one letter/four digits, i.e. 1A1111) is identical to that of secondary serialisation markings that CAR has observed on Iranian 12.7 × 99 mm AM-50 anti-materiel rifles and 7.62 × 54 mm R PKM-pattern machine guns contained in a consignment that was interdicted by the USS *Monterey* in the northern Arabian Sea in May 2021 (see Figure 18). These distinctive markings may indicate that the KLF rifles recovered in Bahrain passed through the same inventory management process as the consignment interdicted by the USS *Monterey*—and that materiel recovered in both maritime seizures (in Bahrain in 2016 and the Arabian Sea in 2021) share a common source of supply.[28]

**Figure 18**

**Similar six-character secondary serialisation markings on an Iranian-manufactured PKM-pattern general-purpose machine gun (left) and an AM-50 anti-materiel rifle (right), observed in a consignment of weapons interdicted by the USS *Monterey* in May 2021.**

*© Confidential source. On file with CAR.*[29]


CAR data collectors in Somalia have documented six other KL-pattern rifles whose serial numbers begin with the same prefix (230-) as those recovered in Bahrain. These documentations were carried out between January 2021 and November 2022 and include two rifles with under-folding stocks, in common with the KLF.[30] The six weapons were reportedly part of a consignment of rifles purchased by arms dealers from Yemen.[31] One weapon bears the serial number 2304586 which is within 500 digits of those on the two 230-series rifles seized at Nabih Saleh in 2016 (see Figure 19).[32]

KL-pattern rifles have been observed among illicit items recovered during maritime interdictions. One such shipment was intercepted in March 2016, in the Arabian Sea when a French naval vessel in the Combined Maritime Forces—the MV *FAS Provence*—interdicted a dhow carrying a hidden consignment of materiel bound for Yemen. The consignment included 1,998 fixed-stock KL-series rifles.[33]

## IRANIAN KLF RIFLES RECOVERED IN BAHRAIN DISPLAY SIMILAR DISTINCTIVE MARKINGS TO THOSE FOUND ON WEAPONS SEIZED BY THE USS *MONTEREY* IN 2021

**Figure 19**

**An Iranian KL-pattern assault rifle with the serial number 2304586. The number is 489 and 486 digits apart from the serial numbers on the two rifles recovered in Bahrain from a skiff that reportedly originated in Iran.**

*Documented by CAR data collectors in Somalia in January 2021.*

▼ **Shoulder-fired rocket launchers and machine guns displayed on the deck of USS *Gravely*, seized from a dow intercepted in March 2016 in the Arabian Sea.**

© U.S. Navy Photo

# CO-LOCATION OF MATERIAL

Security forces in Bahrain recovered weapons and ammunition in the country in a variety of contexts between 2013 and 2018. As specified in Table 3, they discovered caches buried underground or hidden within residential areas (Seizures 1, 4, and 7); they carried out targeted operations to disrupt known cells (Seizures 6 and 8); and they conducted maritime interdictions of vessels in Bahrain's territorial waters (Seizures 2, 3, and 5).

Regardless of the context, in all but two of these seizures, conventional weapons and ammunition were typically recovered co-located with IED components and chemical precursors. These materials include:

- radio-controlled IEDs (circuit boards, transmitters, and receivers);
- passive infrared sensors, which are used as victim-operated firing switches for IEDs;
- explosively formed projectile main charges;
- under-vehicle IED charge configurations;
- military-grade explosives; and
- homemade explosive precursors.

▼ **Explosives, IED components and other related items documented by CAR in Manama, 2018.**

In and of itself, the co-location of conventional and non-conventional items is not unusual in CAR's field operations.[34] Neither is it a characteristic specific to transfers facilitated by external, covert, supply networks. It was, however, a particularly distinctive feature of these recoveries in Bahrain and signals a heightened degree of coordination in order to access and maintain a relatively wide array of material. In addition to highlighting the complex nature of planned attacks in Bahrain, this finding provides critical pointers for investigations into illicit supply chains and sources.

The period during which these seizures occurred saw a sudden growth in the sophistication of weapons and related materiel available to non-state armed actors in Bahrain. During violent confrontations in 2011 and 2012, groups had targeted Bahraini security forces with crude, domestically manufactured IEDs and improvised weapons. From 2013 onwards, however, Bahraini security forces began to interdict vessels whose cargoes included preconfigured IED components alongside conventional military weapons (CAR, 2019). This coincided with an influx of new material: non-state actors in Bahrain first received explosively formed projectiles (EFPs) for example in 2013—described as a "game changer" (Knights, 2016)—when security forces recovered 12 onboard a speedboat (Seizure 2).

**WHILE CO-LOCATION OF CONVENTIONAL AND NON-CONVENTIONAL ITEMS IS NOT UNUSUAL, IT WAS A DISTINCTIVE FEATURE OF THESE RECOVERIES IN BAHRAIN SUGGESTING HEIGHTENED COORDINATION**

**Table 3**

**IED-related material recovered in Bahrain, 2013-18 and documented by CAR**

| No | Seizure date | Location | Seizure context | Key types of co-located IED materials |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | July 2013 | Tubli village | Large cache recovered from an underground storage facility beneath a warehouse | • Chemical precursors |
| 2 | December 2013 | Offshore (exact location unknown) | Interdiction of a speedboat entering Bahrain waters and reportedly traveling from Iraq | • Detonating cord and electric detonators<br>• Directional fragmentation charges<br>• Explosively formed projectiles<br>• Magnetic under-vehicle IEDs<br>• Plastic explosives<br>• Radio-controlled IED components with obliterated markings |
| 3 | July 2015 | Offshore (exact location unknown) | Interdiction of a skiff observed receiving cargo via transhipment from another vessel in the Iranian Exclusive Economic Zone | • Electric detonators<br>• Plastic explosives |
| 4 | September 2015 | Nuwaidrat village | Network of under- and above-ground caches | • Directional fragmentation charges<br>• Explosively formed projectiles<br>• Electric detonators<br>• Plastic explosives<br>• Radio-controlled IED components |
| 5 | December 2016 | Nabih Saleh | Part of a cache recovered from a docked skiff | N/A |
| 6 | February 2017 | Manama | Operations conducted after an attack on the Jau Reform and Rehabilitation Centre | N/A |
| 7 | June 2017 | Dair village | Cache recovered from residential areas | • Directional fragmentation charges<br>• Explosively formed projectiles<br>• Magnetic under-vehicle IEDs<br>• Radio-controlled IED components |
| 8 | August 2017–February 2018 | Multiple locations | Several operations targeting militant factions | • Chemical precursors<br>• Directional fragmentation charges<br>• Electric detonators<br>• Plastic explosives<br>• Radio-controlled IED components with obliterated markings |

**MANY OF THE ITEMS SEIZED IN BAHRAIN ARE IDENTICAL TO THOSE RECOVERED ACROSS THE GULF REGION, PARTICULARLY IN YEMEN.**

In September 2015, Bahrain Public Security Forces made what officials at the time called the largest single recovery of illicit materiel in the country. Beneath a villa in Nuwaidrat village, they discovered a production workshop for IEDs and explosively formed projectiles, including a cache of AK-pattern assault rifles, pistols, small-calibre ammunition, and a large quantity of IED-related material (Seizure 4 in this report). This seizure demonstrated a new-found domestic production capability for IEDs among non-state actors in Bahrain (CAR, 2019).

Previous CAR analysis has linked much of this IED-related material to supply networks associated with Iran, demonstrating that many items seized in Bahrain are identical to those recovered across the Gulf region, particularly in Yemen. On two occasions in Bahrain, for example, CAR investigators documented circuit boards and electronic components that displayed signs of attempted mark obliteration through the application of black paint. CAR identified attempted obliteration on components recovered in 2013 following the speedboat interdiction (Seizure 2) and a series of operations between August 2017 and February 2018 (Seizure 8). The obliteration of marks on components used in IED and UAV production is rare across CAR's global operations. CAR investigators have however documented several instances relating to Iranian production and supply, including an IED component documented in 2018 following its recovery from Houthi forces in Yemen (CAR, 2019) and several components documented in Shahed-136 UAVs recovered in Ukraine (CAR, 2023).

CAR also identified multiple links between material documented in Bahrain and items present on the *Jihan 1* cargo vessel. This includes:

- a radio-controlled commercial transmitter captured with an under-vehicle IED in Dair village in June 2017 (Seizure 7);
- similarly constructed radio-controlled IED receiver kits recovered in several seizures, including Dair village and the 2013 speedboat interdiction (Seizure 2); and
- passive infrared sensor triggers, used as victim-operated firing switches for IEDs, documented after recovery in Nuwaidrat village in 2016 (Seizure 4) and following a series of operations between August 2017 and February 2018 (Seizure 8).

As detailed elsewhere in this report (pp. 18-19, 36), CAR has also observed matches between the conventional materiel recovered aboard the *Jihan 1* and some of the weapons, ammunition and other items seized in Bahrain.

CAR's analysis of IED-related material in the Bahrain seizures showed that non-state actors in the country most probably had access to supply sources that were similar to those of other groups in the region such as the Houthis in Yemen. The presence of this material in nearly all the seizures reviewed in this report therefore similarly suggests that weapons and ammunition recovered in Bahrain during this period may have been supplied by the same networks, especially in seizures containing both conventional and non-conventional materiel.

▼ **Small-calibre ammunition seized in Bahrain.**

# OBLITERATED MARKINGS

A distinctive feature of CAR's documentations in Bahrain is the high number of obliterated key markings, including serial numbers, on recovered weapons and ammunition. CAR field investigators documented a total of 20 weapons with obliterated markings. According to the Bahraini government's own records, more than one-quarter of all the weapons recovered in the country between 2013 and 2018 (23 of 90) had obliterated marks (Michetti, 2020).

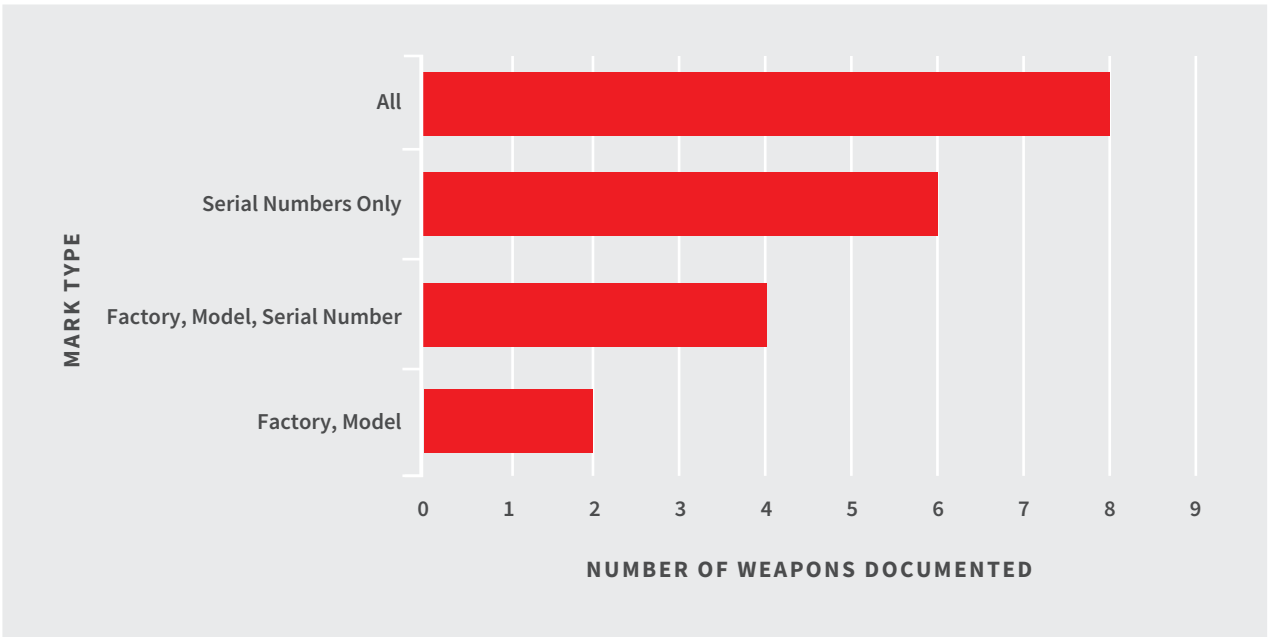
Obliteration is the deliberate removal of identifying markings. This can involve the use of various methods, such as grinding, filing, chemical removal, and over-stamping. It is often carried out with the intent to conceal the identity of a weapon or ensure it cannot be traced. Weapons seized in Bahrain showed evidence that their marks had been removed through grinding, using both hand and power tools. The serial number had been removed on 18 of these weapons, and the factory and model marks on 14 (see Graph 4). On eight of the weapons, all identifying markings had been obliterated.

It is not possible to determine with any degree of certainty at what stage of the supply chain obliteration took place. Tool marks on some firearms documented in Bahrain suggest that a single operator or workshop was responsible for obliterating the marks and, therefore, that bulk shipments of weapons probably passed through a centralised location for mark obliteration. These weapons may thus have gone through the obliteration process at a relatively early stage in the supply chain, rather than at the local distribution stage.

Obliteration of weapon marks was evident in six of the eight documented seizures. Notably, all but one of those seizures also included materiel originating in Iran, such as radio-controlled IED components, Iranian small-calibre ammunition, and Iranian plastic explosives.[35] The affected weapons share no other common characteristic. They were manufactured in five different countries and include three different models of assault rifles, as well as pistols and the PKM-pattern machine gun detailed in Section 1.[36]

**Graph 4**

**Types of marks obliterated on weapons documented by CAR in Bahrain**



## TYPE 56-1 ASSAULT RIFLES

The Chinese 7.62 × 39 mm Type 56-1 assault rifle is the most prevalent weapon model in CAR's data set from Bahrain, observed in four of the seizures analysed in this report. As shown in Section 1, large numbers of Type 56-1 rifles are commonly discovered in maritime seizures in the Arabian Sea, as well as the Gulfs of Oman and Aden. However, those rifles are distinctive in all being produced by the same factory just a few years before their interdiction. Where CAR was able to determine the age of the rifles documented in Bahrain, they were typically many decades older.

In total, CAR documented 11 Type 56-1 rifles in Bahrain, seven of which featured obliterated markings.[37] These rifles were recovered in three different seizures:

- Five rifles seized in the skiff interdiction in July 2015 (Seizure 3), in which security forces intercepted cargo being transhipped—alongside a large amount of IED-related material—in the Iranian Exclusive Economic Zone;[38]
- One rifle recovered in operations following the attack on Jau Reform and Rehabilitation Centre in February 2017 (Seizure 6); and
- One rifle recovered during operations targeting non-state cells in Bahrain between August 2017 and February 2018 (Seizure 8).

The five rifles that CAR documented following Seizure 3 were part of a total group of eight that security forces recovered from the skiff. All of the manufacturer and serial number markings on these nine rifles had been obliterated in an identical manner (see Figure 20 for an example), removing both serial numbers and manufacturer markings. Bahraini firearms laboratory personnel chemically recovered all of the markings, revealing that these rifles had been manufactured by Qinghua Machine Tool Factory and that they all fell within three serial number sub-series (three in sub-series '140', four in sub-series '150', and one in sub-series '182').[39]

CAR field investigators have documented Type 56-1 rifles in Afghanistan, Somalia, and Yemen that were manufactured by the same factory and bear unobliterated serial numbers that appear to fall within the same sub-series. To draw conclusions about possible connections or otherwise between those rifles and the ones that security forces recovered in Bahrain, however, would require more information about how Chinese manufacturers allocate serial numbers within a specific purchase order, as well as details on the roles of any intermediaries in the chain of supply.

**Figure 20**

**Serial number obliteration on a Type 56-1 assault rifle, interdicted by Bahraini security forces on 25 July 2015. Bahraini firearms laboratory personnel subsequently recovered the serial number on this weapon.[40]**
*Documented by CAR in Manama, Bahrain on 8 August 2019.*

## 'ASSASSINATION KITS'

In July 2013, security forces in Bahrain uncovered a weapons cache in a warehouse in Tubli village (Seizure 1). In this seizure, the Bahrain Public Security Forces recovered five modified 9 × 18 mm Makarov-pattern pistols (see Figure 21). They also seized four Bulgarian AKKS 7.62 × 39 mm assault rifles and an Iranian 7.62 × 39 mm KLF assault rifle. The manufacturer, date, and serial number markings on all ten weapons had been obliterated in a similar manner, through grinding (see Figure 22). CAR documented the weapons in Manama on 23 July 2017.

**Figure 21**

**Four Makarov-pattern pistols with modified barrels and obliterated marks. Bahraini police recovered five similar pistols in a cache in Tubli in July 2013.**

*Documented by CAR in Manama, Bahrain, on 23 July 2017.*

**Figure 22**

**The obliteration of serial number and manufacturer marks on a Makarov-pattern pistol (left) and an AKKS rifle (right), recovered in Tubli in July 2013.**

*Documented by CAR in Manama, Bahrain, on 23 July 2017.*

Bahraini security forces recovered ten sound suppressors alongside the weapons—five small ones suitable for pistol calibres and five larger ones suitable for rifle calibres (see Figure 23 and 24). The supplier may have packaged the pistols, rifles, and associated sound suppressors together as 'assassination kits', designed to enable a recipient to use untraceable weapons to carry out close-quarter attacks requiring a high degree of stealth (see Box 3 for a similar case in Azerbaijan in 2012).

**BAHRAINI SECURITY FORCES RECOVERED PISTOLS, RIFLES, AND SUPPRESSORS POSSIBLY PACKAGED AS 'ASSASSINATION KITS' FOR STEALTH ATTACKS USING UNTRACEABLE WEAPONS**

**Figure 23**

**Sound suppressors that appear to have been paired with the modified Makarov-pattern pistols.**
*Documented by CAR in Manama, Bahrain, on 23 July 2017.*

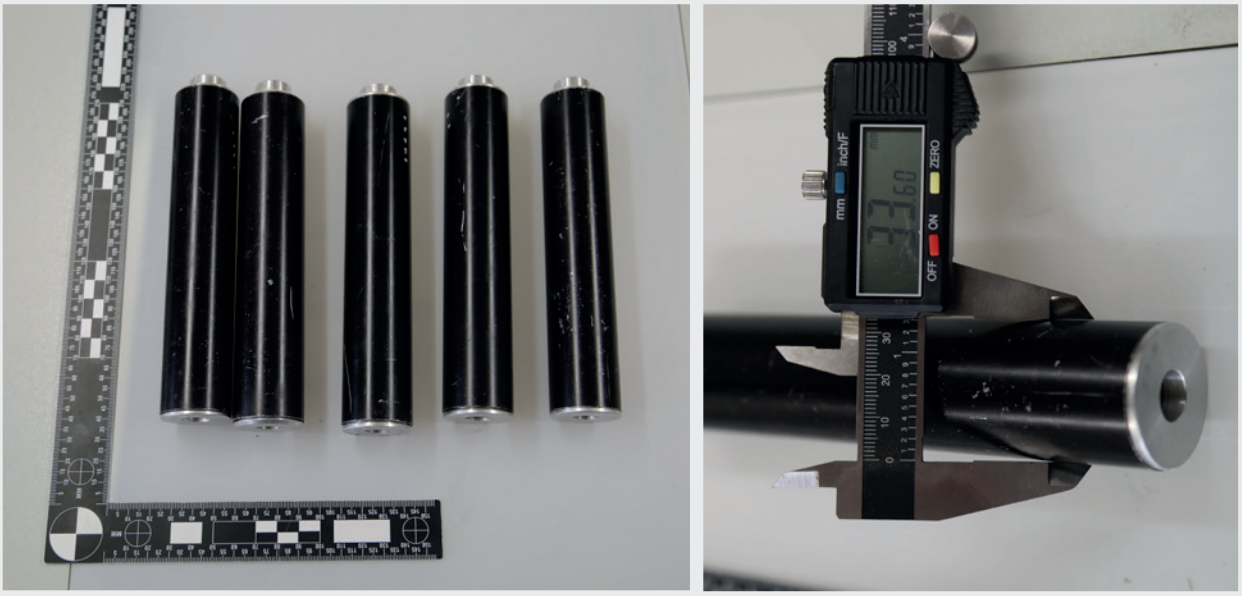
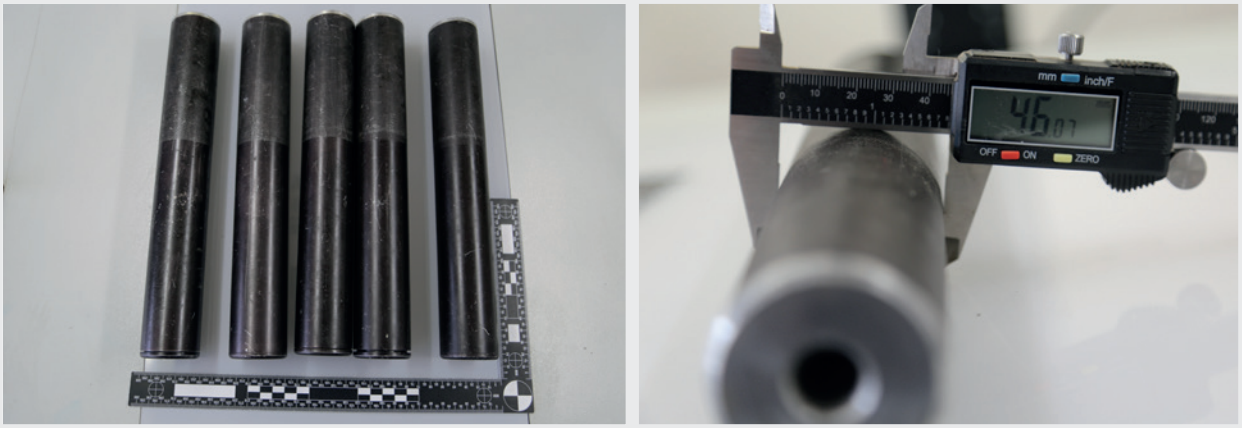



**Figure 24**

**Larger sound suppressors suitable for assault rifle-calibre weapons.**
*Documented by CAR in Manama, Bahrain, on 23 July 2017.*



Features of the larger sound suppressors appear to match those of suppressors recovered from the *Jihan 1* merchant vessel, which had been carrying a large consignment of illicit materiel reportedly from Iran (see Figures 25 and 26). US naval forces interdicted the vessel off the coast of Aden, Yemen, in January 2013—a few months earlier than when Bahraini forces discovered the cache in Tubli. Both sets of sound suppressors feature stippling on the ends of the items (to aid with screwing on and off) and black end caps that attach to the weapon barrel.

**Figure 25**

**A sound suppressor recovered from the *Jihan 1* merchant vessel off the coast of Yemen in January 2013 and documented by the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen.**
*© United Nations*

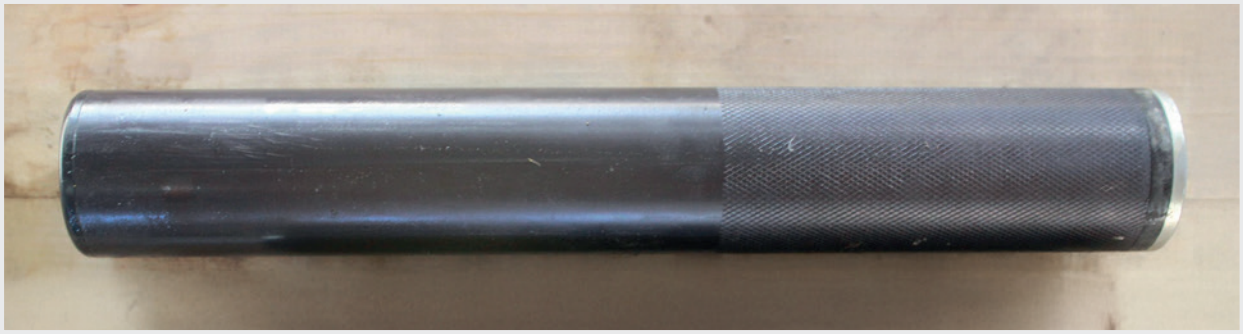


**Figure 26**

**A sound suppressor recovered in Tubli village in July 2013.**
*Documented by CAR in Manama, Bahrain, on 23 July 2017.*

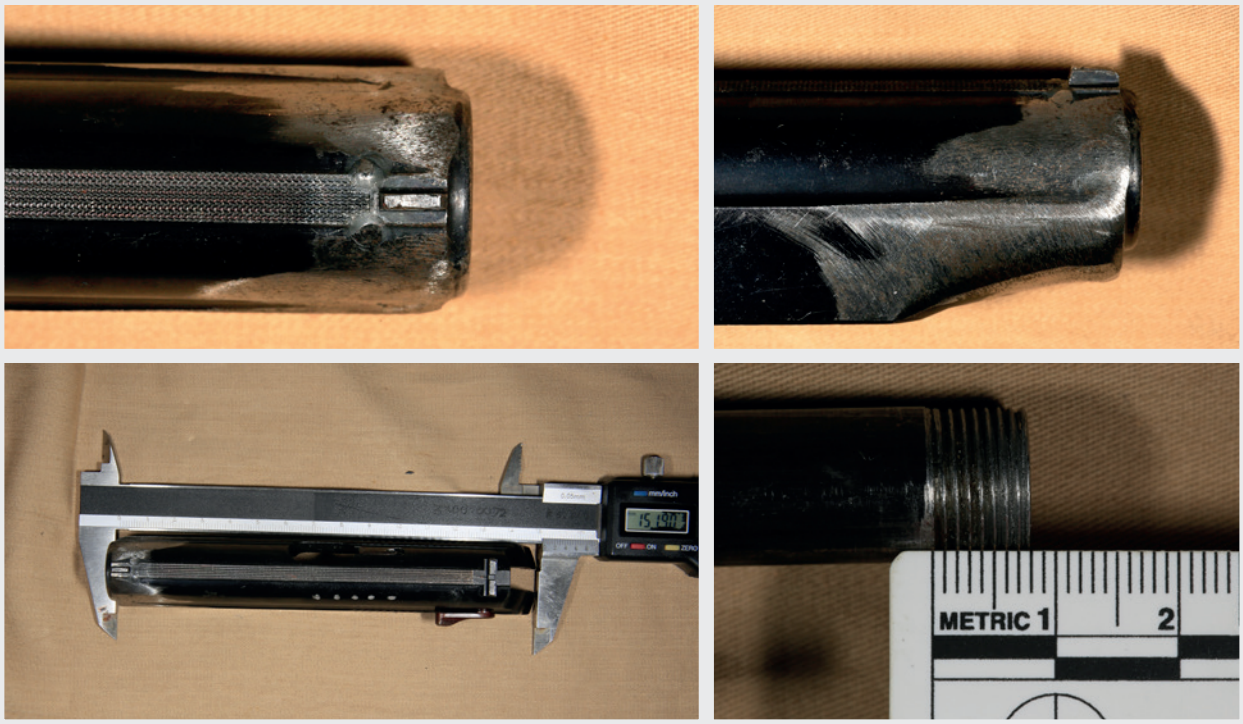
## BOX 3 — **MAKAROV-PATTERN PISTOLS SEIZED IN AZERBAIJAN**

In 2012 police in Azerbaijan arrested two suspected Iran-linked operatives, accusing them of plotting to carry out terrorist attacks, including the assassination of US and Israeli diplomats in Baku (Warrick, 2012). A police presentation of the weapons recovered from the suspects includes images that show Makarov-pattern pistols with obliterated marks and sound suppressors that appear similar to those documented by CAR in Bahrain. Azeri authorities also recovered Iranian M112 plastic explosives, which security forces similarly recovered in Bahrain, in large quantities (ITIC, 2012).

In addition to post-production obliteration of serial numbers and markings, the Makarov-pattern pistols show signs of having been modified to accept a sound suppressor.[41] Tool marks present at the front of all five recovered Makarov-pattern pistols indicate that a section of the top slide was removed and the section housing the front sight was re-attached by welding. These modifications exposed a section of the original barrel, which was threaded to accept a sound suppressor (see Figure 27). While this process appears labour-intensive and risks inducing malfunctions if not executed perfectly, it allows for the use of the original barrel—a component that could be more challenging to replace. The top slide of the modified pistols is approximately 10 mm shorter than that of a standard Makarov pistol (151.19 mm vs. 161.03 mm).

**Figure 27**

**Top left and right: Surface damage to the front of the top slide of a Makarov-pattern pistol, where sections of the component were welded together following the removal of material. Bottom left: The top slide of the modified pistol is shorter than the standard. Bottom right: The pistol's barrel has been threaded to accept a sound suppressor.**
*Documented by a CAR field investigation team in Manama, Bahrain, on 8 August 2019.*



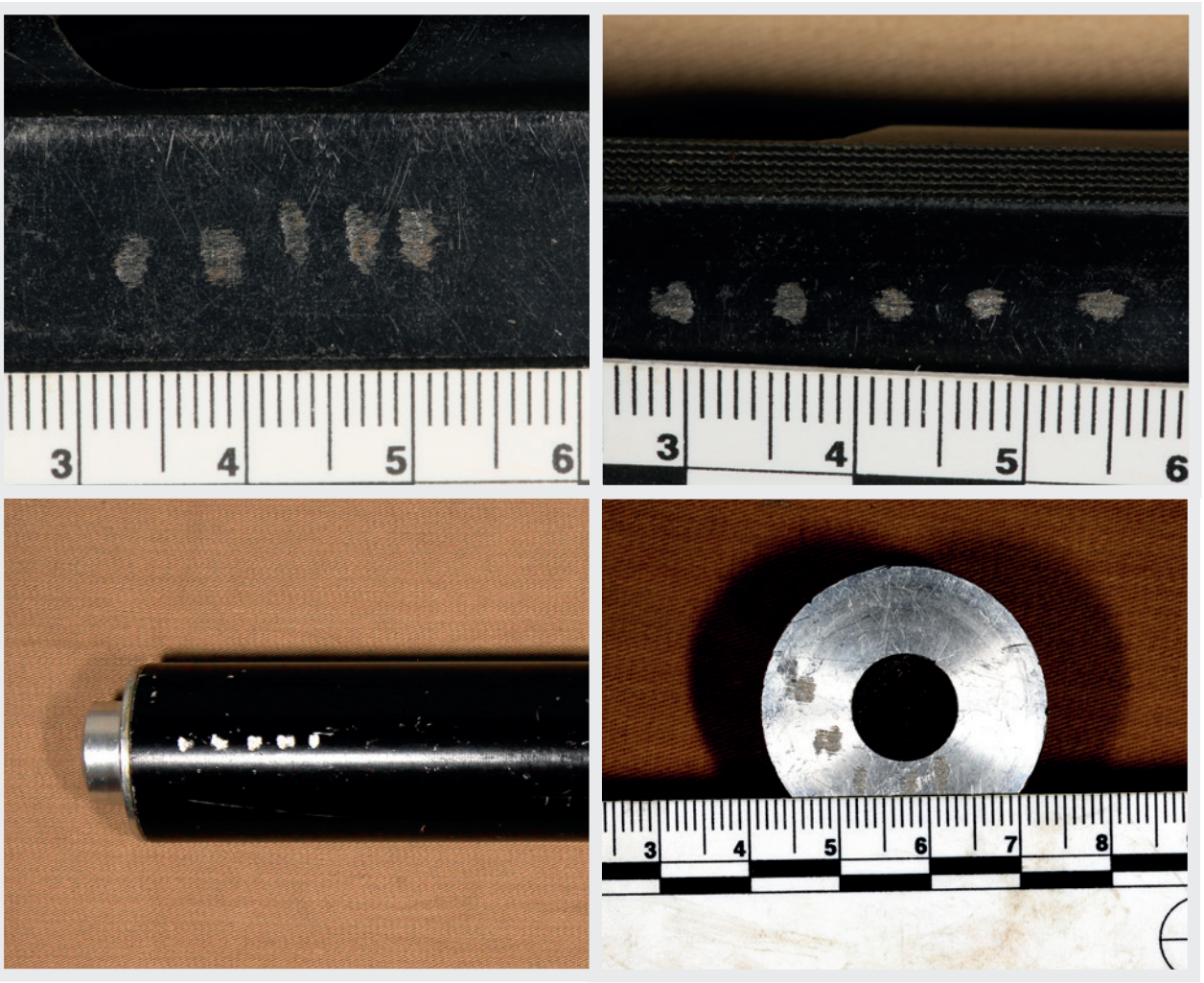

CAR considers it likely that the pistols and sound suppressors were fitted and tested together to ensure, for example, that the bore of a pistol barrel and the bore of the corresponding sound suppressor were concentric. Even small variations in the orientation of the barrel muzzle in relation to the pistol mechanism and internal sound suppressor components could result in catastrophic failure.

The individuals who modified the pistols appear to have been mindful of these risks. The application (and subsequent obliteration) of 4- and 5-character post-production markings on each pistol, sound suppressor body, and sound suppressor muzzle piece may be a sign of this awareness (see Figure 28). This serialisation may have been intended to ensure that a sound suppressor fitted to a pistol remained with it through a logistics chain to the end user. CAR's analysis suggests that the modification and fitting of sound suppressors was conducted in an industrial environment with trained armourers and access to testing facilities for live-firing.

**Figure 28**

**Areas of obliteration on a Makarov-pattern pistol (top left and right) and on the main body and muzzle piece of the sound suppressor (bottom left and right). This obliteration may have been intended to mask post-production marks related to modifications that would allow the pistol to accept the sound suppressor.**

*Documented by a CAR field investigation team in Manama, Bahrain, on 8 August 2019.*



**CAR'S ANALYSIS SUGGESTS THAT THE SOUND SUPPRESSORS WERE MODIFIED AND FITTED IN AN INDUSTRIAL ENVIRONMENT WITH TRAINED ARMOURERS**

▶ **A Makarov-pattern pistol with the sound supressor attached.**

# CONCLUSION

CAR's analysis of eight weapon seizures undertaken in Bahrain between 2013 and 2018 has identified three common features that together help explain how non-state armed groups in the country were able to rapidly increase the complexity and lethality of their attacks. Despite the general heterogenous nature of the recovered materiel, these three features link some of the weapons and ammunition at that time to supply networks associated with Iran.

The first of these features relates to commonalities between the eight seizures and maritime recoveries between 2013 and 2023.[42] Central to this assessment is materiel recovered by US naval and Yemeni coast guard forces from the *Jihan 1* merchant vessel in January 2013, as well as more recent interdictions such as that carried out by the USS *Monterey* in 2021. CAR's comparative analysis of materiel recovered in Bahrain with those of maritime seizures in the region reveals common signatures of coordinated external support—such as large amounts of recently manufactured Iranian small-calibre ammunition, visually identical sound suppressors, and hand grenades packed in individual sealed plastic containers. The absence of high-powered or advanced conventional weapon types such as man-portable air defence systems from the Bahrain seizures may reflect a disparity of status and operational requirement across different non-state actors in Bahrain and Yemen at the time.

**ALTHOUGH COVERT SUPPLY NETWORKS ARE INHERENTLY CHALLENGING TO EVIDENCE, CAR'S ANALYSIS OF EIGHT WEAPON SEIZURES IN BAHRAIN BETWEEN 2013 AND 2018 ATTEMPTS TO IDENTIFY SOME SIGNIFIERS OF COORDINATED EXTERNAL SUPPLY TO NON-STATE ACTORS**

The second feature of the seizures was the co-location of conventional and non-conventional items. Six of the documented seizures contained materials that could be used in IED production, in addition to small arms and light weapons and their associated ammunition. This distinctive feature is not necessarily an indicator or predictor of coordinated external support in general but does indicate an ability to coordinate concurrent access to a relatively wide array of material types. In this specific context, it helped investigators to identify matching models and material types across seizures—and to show that these items were linked to common supply sources.

The presence of obliterated markings was the third distinctive feature of the seizures documented in Bahrain. Unique identifiers, including serial numbers, had been removed from a particularly high proportion of weapons in this data sample, typically through grinding. While it is not possible to determine when or where this obliteration took place, CAR considers the activity itself a reliable indicator of coordinated covert supplies and recognises it as a deliberate effort to obscure provenance and undermine attempts to trace illicit weapons. CAR investigators are actively working with partners to overcome this practice to ensure that counter-diversion investigations may continue unhindered.

This analysis is an attempt to recognise and identify some signifiers of coordinated, covert, external supply sources to non-state armed groups. Covert supply networks are inherently challenging to evidence. During the timeframe of CAR's field documentations in Bahrain, Iran was widely alleged to be providing illicit support to non-state groups in the Gulf region, a claim disputed by Iran itself. External supply to allied non-state actors is a feature of many of the conflict zones in which CAR operates. Detecting common features across seizures, including marking obliteration practices, may help investigators to link illicit materiel to specific supply networks with a greater degree of certainty.

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# ENDNOTES

1 The Panel of Experts was established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014). The Security Council first introduced a targeted arms embargo relating to designated individuals and entities, and called on all Member States to immediately 'prevent the direct or indirect supply, sale or transfer to, or for the benefit of' those designated actors, 'and those acting on their behalf or at their direction in Yemen, from or through their territories or by their nationals, or using their flag vessels or aircraft […]' UNSC (2016).

2 In addition, CAR documented 51 weapons and 3,850 units of ammunition that Saudi Arabian security forces had captured during operations in 2017 in the Eastern Province, while targeting non-state armed actors with links to counterparts in Bahrain.

3 See, for example, UNSC (2015a).

4 Two N588 training grenades, manufactured by Chemring Defence in the United Kingdom in 2011 and recovered during a number of operations between August 2017 and February 2018 in Bahrain. On 23 April 2019, the Government of the United Kingdom (UK) responded promptly to a formal trace request issued by CAR on 8 March 2019. This response confirms that: 1) between 1 January 2010 and 31 July 2017 the UK granted export licenses for N588 training grenades, subject to CAR's trace request, to the following countries:

a) six Standard Individual Export Licences (SIELSs) to Bahrain, Belgium, Kuwait (x2), Mauritius, Qatar.

b) one Open Individual Export Licence (OIEL) to Australia, Belgium, Bermuda, Brunei, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Ireland, Italy, Malaysia, Malta, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, USA and;

c) the UK export licensing authorities do not hold information on batch/lot numbers or quantities of materiel.

5 For a headstamp to be considered unique each of its identifying marks (typically those indicating the producer, the year of production, and sometimes the calibre) must be different to others in the sample. In some cases, CAR might identify more than one headstamp with the same markings but if produced in a different calibre, each is still considered unique.

6 A total of 41 seizures were reported during this period in Bahrain.

7 Records of these seizures are mentioned in various reports by United Nations Security Council (UNSC, 2015a, 2018a, 2018b, 2021, 2022; USDIA, 2024). These seizures have continued into 2024. In January, US naval forces recovered illicit materiel in two separate incidents (USDIA, 2024).

8 See for example UNSC (2022), p. 27.

9 There is evidence that some of this materiel may have been onward transferred into Somalia, Bahadur (2021).

10 For a comprehensive analysis of the AM-50, see CAR (2021).

11 Two of the launchers recovered by HMAS *Darwin* were confirmed as being of Iranian manufacture. UNSC (2018).

12 On 13 December 2024, the Government of Bulgaria responded to a trace request issued by CAR on 26 June 2019. This response confirms that the Government of Bulgaria holds no records of the OG-7V rocket bearing the lot number [11 in double circle]-46-86, the subject of CAR's trace request, because according to Art. 65 of the Defense-Related Products (DRP) and Dual-Use Items and Technologies (DIUT) Export Control Act, the individuals working under these Acts are obliged to keep a separate register of exports for a period of 10 years.

13 On 8 March 2019, CAR issued a formal trace request to the Islamic Republic of Iran. At the time of writing, CAR had not yet received a response. Given the absence of a trace response, CAR cannot pronounce on the legality of the transfer/s in question.

14 CAR documented 66 per cent of the total number of rounds (5,851) recovered in Bahrain between 2013 and 2018.

15 Bahraini security forces also documented 399 rounds of Iranian ammunition manufactured in 1995. This was not part of CAR's documentation sample (Michetti, 2020). The sample documented by CAR in Bahrain consisted of three calibres:

- 7.62 × 39 mm: 11 headstamps (39 per cent of the Iranian ammunition sample);
- 7.62 × 54 mm R: 5 headstamps (50 per cent); and
- 9 × 19 mm: 2 headstamps (11 per cent).

16 As Table 1 shows, some headstamps were documented in multiple seizures.

17 All photographs of materiel seized from the Jihan 1 were provided by a UN Member State and are credited to © United Nations.

18 In total, Bahraini Security Forces recovered 85 hand grenades in seven seizures between 2013 and 2018, see Michetti (2020).

19 Defense Industries Organization (n.d.). On file with CAR.

20 On 17 September 2021 sent a formal trace request to the Permanent Mission of Iran to the United Nations regarding this grenade. CAR is yet to receive a response to trace request issued for this item. In the absence of a trace response, CAR cannot assess the legality of the transfer(s) in question.

21 CAR did not document items featuring this mark and have therefore not attempted to trace this lot number.

22 CAR investigators subsequently documented this PKM-pattern machine gun in the custody of United States authorities on 3 February 2021.

23 Iran does advertise a PKM-pattern general purpose machine gun in its 2023 catalogue. On file with CAR.

24 The UN Panel of Experts has also noted the possibility that these weapons were 'assembled using repurposed parts of older PKM-pattern machine guns.' UNSC (2022), p. 191.

25 On 17 September 2021 CAR submitted a formal trace request for this item to the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations. CAR is yet to receive a response to its trace request issued for this item. In the absence of a trace response, CAR cannot assess the legality of the transfer(s) in question.

26 CAR interview with a Bahraini security official. On file with CAR.

27 CAR is yet to receive a response to trace requests issued for these items. In the absence of a trace response, CAR cannot assess the legality of the transfer(s) in question. While CAR cannot be conclusive in its assessment of serial number relationships without more detailed information on the marking practices for this model and production facility, documentation of weapons with similar-appearing serial numbers is suggestive of a common connection.

28 CAR further details this mark in its 2021 technical report 'Iranian AM-50 12.7 × 99 mm Anti-Materiel Rifle.' CAR (2021).

29 CAR is yet to receive a response to trace requests issued for these items. In the absence of a trace response, CAR cannot assess the legality of the transfer(s) in question.

30 Several of these rifles appear to have been refurbished: they feature wooden furniture and rear sights that may have been taken from other weapons. CAR could not confirm the presence or absence of the secondary serialisation mark on the underside of the receivers of these six weapons documented in Somalia.

31 CAR interviews with Somalia-based arms dealers and individuals with knowledge of the arms trade in Somalia, January 2021. On file with CAR.

32 CAR is yet to receive a response to trace requests issued for these items. In the absence of a trace response, CAR cannot assess the legality of the transfer(s) in question.

33 UNSC (2018).

34 For further examples of this phenomenon see, for example, CAR (2024). 'After the Caliphate: Islamic State Weapons in High-Profile Operations in North-East Syria.' January.

35 The sole exception was Seizure 6.

36 The weapons with obliteration marks were recovered in seizures 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 8, and include four Bulgarian 7.62 × 39 mm AKKS assault rifles, seven Chinese 7.62 × 39 mm Type 56-1 assault rifles, one Iranian 7.62 × 39 mm KLF assault rifle, five Russian 9 × 18 mm Makarov-pattern pistols, one Turkish 8 mm P.A.K.M6 blank pistol, and one 7.62 × 54 mm R PKM-pattern machine gun of unknown manufacturer, as detailed in Section 1.

37 In total, the Bahrain Public Security Forces recovered 19 Type 56-1 assault rifles during seizures between 2013 and 2018. Of these, 13 featured obliterated serial number and manufacturer marks (Michetti, 2020).

38 Information for the circumstances of this seizure come from non-public documents reported in Michetti (2020). The Iranian Exclusive Economic Zone is mapped by the Flanders Marine Institute and the Maritime Boundaries Geodatabase and is available at Marineregions.org. It shows the Zone to encompass much of the Persian/Arabian Gulf, and parts of the Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea https://www.marineregions.org/gazetteer.php?p=details&id=8469

39 A 'series' refers to a discrete weapon model produced by the same manufacturer, with the same year of production, and with the same number of digits and the same prefix for the serial numbers. For Chinese rifles, the first digit (in the case of seven-digit serial numbers) and first two digits (in the case of eight-digit serial numbers) of the serial number likely refer to a date code signifying the year of production. Specifically, the first two digits are added to 1956, and 1 is subtracted from the total as 1956 itself is counted as the first year of production. Rifles in the '140' sub-series therefore were manufactured in 1969, the '150' sub-series in 1970, and the '182' sub-series in 1973.

40 On 5 August 2021, CAR submitted a formal trace request for this rifle to the Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations. CAR is yet to receive a response to trace request issued for this item. In the absence of a trace response, CAR cannot assess the legality of the transfer(s) in question.

41 The standard Makarov pistol is not designed to accept a sound suppressor.

42 One seizure falls outside the main scope of this report, as it occurred in 2009 and in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea (merchant vessel MV *Francop*). However, it has been included for its relevance.


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