



SALAFI JIHADISTS IN THE CENTRAL SAHEL

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POINT-BLANK

WEAPONS SEIZED FROM SALAFI JIHADIST
GROUPS IN THE CENTRAL SAHEL

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SALAFI JIHADISTS IN THE CENTRAL SAHEL

The central Sahel—a large area of West Africa encompassing Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger—is experiencing an extended period of turmoil. Salafi jihadist groups have conducted attacks and expanded territory across the region in recent years, in spite of extensive counterterrorism efforts.¹ These violent insurgencies are destabilising communities, spreading insecurity, and severely challenging state authority.

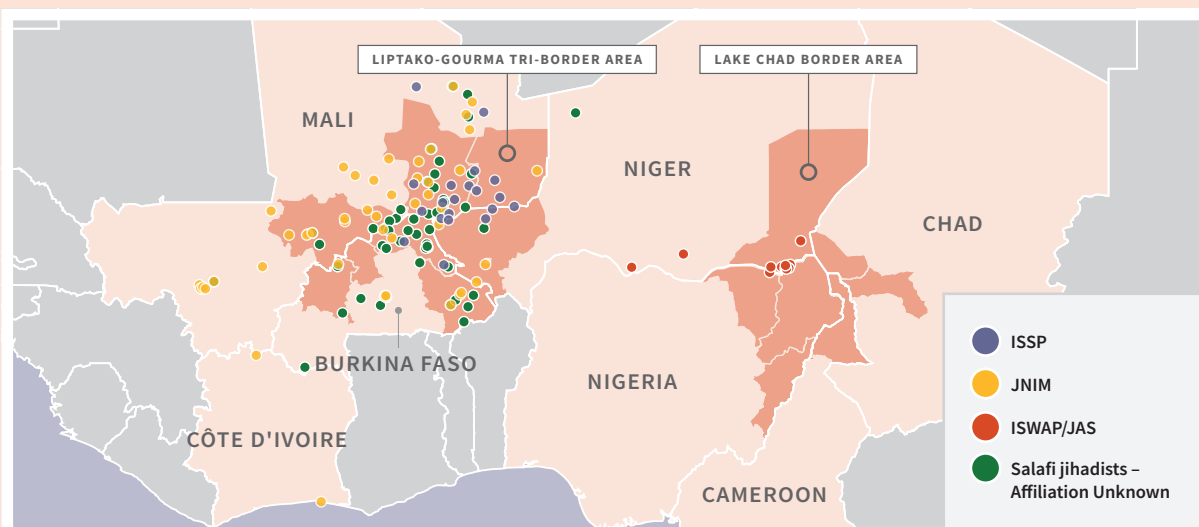
Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger have all experienced military coups since 2020, as well as the associated withdrawal of international security forces, including the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in 2023. The three countries created the Alliance of Sahel States in September 2023 and, by January 2024, they had announced their withdrawal from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).²

Conflict Armament Research (CAR) field investigators have been documenting and tracing recovered weapons and ammunition in West Africa since 2015. In *Salafi jihadists in the central Sahel*, CAR's investigations are focused specifically on four non-state armed groups that claim allegiance to Al-Qaeda or Islamic State (Da'esh), and some of their affiliates.³ The United Nations Security Council has formally designated these groups for conducting acts of terrorism in the central Sahel.⁴ The supply, sale, and transfer of arms and related materiel to these groups is therefore prohibited.

These groups are active in two different areas of the central Sahel (see Map 1):

- in the tri-border area between Burkina Faso, Mali, and western Niger, referred to as Liptako-Gourma:
 - » **JNIM:** Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims); and
 - » **ISSP:** Islamic State Sahel Province;⁵
- in south-eastern Niger, centred around the Lake Chad border area:
 - » **ISWAP:** Islamic State West Africa Province; and
 - » **JAS:** Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'adati wal-Jihad (People Committed to the Prophet's Teachings for Propagation and Jihad), commonly called 'Boko Haram'.

This is the second issue in CAR's Frontline Perspective series on the weapons and ammunition recovered from these groups (CAR, 2024). In this issue, CAR compares weapons seized from different Salafi jihadist groups to identify the types of weapons they are accessing, their main sources of supply, and the extent to which their arsenals overlap.



Map 1

Locations where weapons and ammunition were recovered from Salafi jihadist groups in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area and Lake Chad border area

ABBREVIATIONS

AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb	ISWAP	Islamic State West Africa Province
CAR	Conflict Armament Research	JAS	Jama'atu Ahlis Sunnah Lidda'awati wal-Jihad
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States	JNIM	Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin
ISSP	Islamic State Sahel Province		

KEY FINDINGS

- **CAR has not observed any evidence that Salafi jihadist groups are able to access unique or specific weapon supply sources in a way that would set them apart from other actors using illicit materiel in the central Sahel.** Instead, these groups rely on similar, localised, and predatory procurement mechanisms for their weapons. As a result, their arsenals are relatively homogenous and include very similar weapon types.
- **CAR's analysis shows that at least one-fifth of the weapons seized in relation to Salafi jihadist activity in the central Sahel were diverted from the state custody of eight countries in North and West Africa** (Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Libya, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria). These weapons allow Salafi jihadist groups to build their arsenals and reinforce their positions, thus enabling them to expand their authority over large portions of territory and increasing the threat to state authority and local communities.
- **There is little evidence that ideologically aligned groups operating in different theatres in the central Sahel are able to draw from similar weapon supplies.** Rather, CAR's data shows that Salafi jihadists operating in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area have different weapon sources to those of groups active in the Lake Chad border area, regardless of their affiliation.
- **Two recent seizures of Type 56 assault rifles manufactured in China by State Factory 313 could provide the first indications of a potential overlap in the arsenals of ISSP and ISWAP.** Prior to 2023, CAR had documented these rifles exclusively in the Lake Chad region, after security forces had seized them from ISWAP. Since then, CAR has documented two such rifles in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area, including one after seizure from ISSP. CAR cannot exclude the possibility of a potential common supply source between the two groups and further in-field monitoring is required to determine whether this data is anomalous or part of an emerging pattern.

SALAFI JIHADIST GROUPS' ARSENALS ARE RELATIVELY HOMOGENOUS AND INCLUDE VERY SIMILAR WEAPON TYPES



Assault rifles seized from Salafi jihadist groups in Burkina Faso.

SALAFI JIHADIST WEAPONS: AN ABSENCE OF BESPOKE SUPPLIES

This Frontline Perspective focuses on 726 weapons seized from Salafi jihadist groups in the central Sahel between 2014 and 2023. National authorities recovered these weapons during 131 separate seizures in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger (see Map 1).⁶

They represent 12 per cent of the 5,890 weapons that CAR field investigators documented across the central Sahel, recovered from a wide range of actors, between 2014 and 2023 (see Box 1).

BOX 1 — CAR’S WEST AFRICA AND CENTRAL SAHEL DATA SET

Between 2015 and 2023 CAR field investigators documented illicit materiel recovered by national security forces in eight countries across West Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal. To date, CAR has almost exclusively documented materiel linked to Salafi jihadist groups in three of these countries: Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. These are also the countries in West Africa where CAR has documented the most extensive sample of illicit materiel.

This Frontline Perspective considers only a portion of the weapons that security forces recovered from Salafi jihadist groups in the central Sahel between 2014 and 2023, namely the materiel to which CAR field investigators were able to secure official access for documentation purposes.⁷

CAR’s access to recovered materiel varies across its countries of operation, in line with logistical feasibility and the nature of its partnerships with national authorities. Furthermore, some of the items seized during counterterrorism operations or armed confrontations between defence forces and Salafi jihadist groups are either destroyed locally upon recovery or redistributed to equip frontline troops, rather than being systematically transferred to judicial or investigative authorities.

As a result, this publication does not present a comprehensive baseline analysis. Instead, it provides the first regional assessment of empirical data gathered over nearly a decade of recoveries.

CAR’s data shows striking similarities among the arsenals of the different Salafi jihadist groups operating in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area shared by Burkina Faso, Mali, and western Niger on the one hand, and in the Lake Chad border area of south-eastern Niger on the other. This finding may seem surprising, given that these groups are in direct conflict with one another (see Box 2 on page 6). There appears to be no evidence, however, that the groups are able to access weapons directly from outside of the central Sahel, or that they have established supply sources distinct from those available to other illicit armed actors in the region. Instead, they generally take advantage of the materiel that is already available in their areas of operation, including through attacks on government positions.

Indeed, the weapon types and models recovered from Salafi jihadist groups conform with what CAR has determined to be typical of the wider region. Two general themes drawn from CAR’s analysis help to illustrate this observation: first, a heavy reliance on AK-pattern assault rifles, and second, the age profile of these rifles and the limited quantities of recently produced weapons.

SALAFI JIHADIST GROUPS TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE MATERIEL THAT IS AVAILABLE IN THEIR AREAS OF OPERATION

RELIANCE ON AK-PATTERN ASSAULT RIFLES

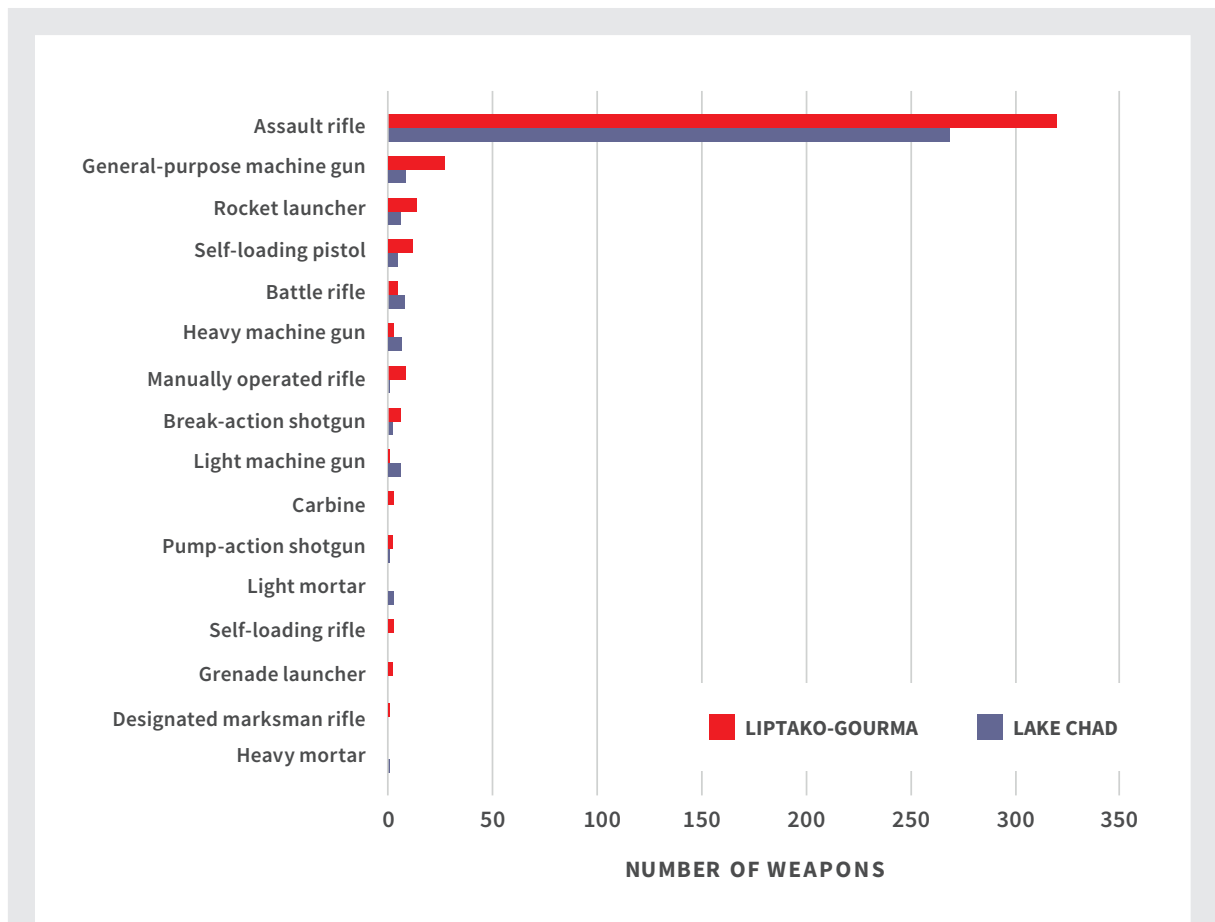
The weapons recovered from Salafi jihadist groups in both areas were almost exclusively military-grade weapons, such as assault rifles, battle rifles, grenade launchers, machine guns, mortars, and rocket launchers. As discussed in Issue 1 of this series, the vast majority of ammunition recovered from these groups similarly corresponds to military calibres (CAR, 2024).⁸

CAR investigators documented 16 different weapon types as part of this sample. As shown in Graph 1, assault rifles are by far the most common weapon type seized from Salafi jihadist groups, making up 78 per cent of recovered weapons in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area (320 of 408) and 85 per cent in the Lake Chad border area (269 of 318). CAR documented more than 40 different assault rifle models manufactured in 20 different countries (see Graph 2 on page 6).

The majority of these assault rifles were manufactured in China or the Russian Federation

(see Graph 2).⁹ CAR’s central Sahel data shows that non-state armed actors who are not affiliated with Salafi jihadism—such as criminal groups or unauthorised individuals—rely equally heavily on similar weapon types. Chinese assault rifles, for example, make up 38 per cent of assault rifles recovered from Salafi jihadist groups, compared to 31 per cent of rifles recovered from other actors. Similarly, Russian assault rifles account for almost identical proportions of rifles associated with Salafi jihadists (28 per cent) and those recovered from other actors (27 per cent).

The three most documented models of assault rifles recovered from Salafi jihadist groups were the same in both the Liptako-Gourma and Lake Chad border areas: the Chinese Type 56 and Type 56-1, and the Russian AKM. These three models are extremely common across CAR’s countries of operation; they are used by many armed actors and security forces in West Africa, including in the central Sahel.



Graph 1

Weapon types seized from Salafi jihadists in the Liptako-Gourma and Lake Chad border areas between 2014–23

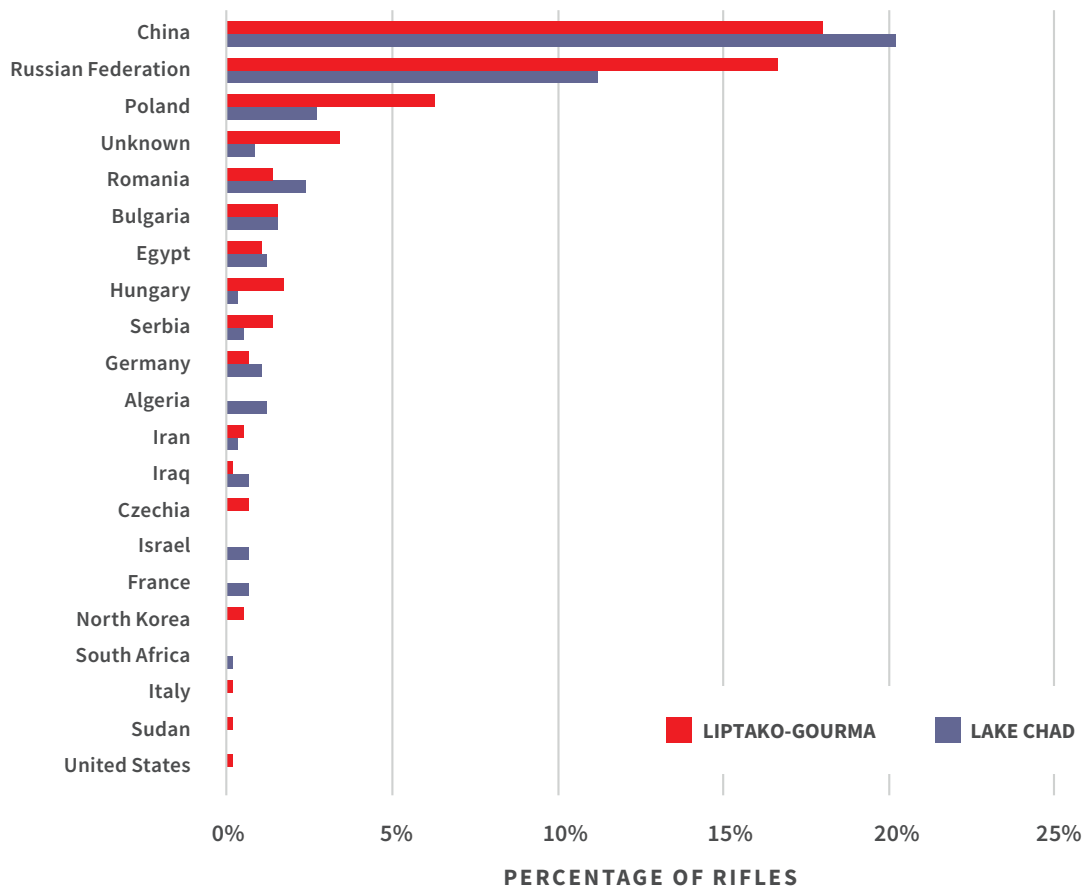
BOX 2 — COMPETING SALAFI JIHADIST GROUPS IN THE CENTRAL SAHEL

A patchwork of shifting affiliations, many Salafi jihadist groups sprang from splits and divisions with others in the region. They are therefore sometimes in direct and open conflict with one another, even if some rivals do form local, short-term alliances.

In the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area between Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, the two main groups—JNIM and ISSP—advocate different ideologies and governance models. JNIM was formed through a merger of four groups, including Al-Mourabitoun and Ansar Dine, and maintains allegiance to Al-Qaeda. ISSP split off from Al-Mourabitoun in 2015 and is the Sahelian affiliate of the transnational Islamic State (ACLED, 2023). While competing

to impose their differing models of economic, political, and religious governance, JNIM and ISSP fight for control over territory, populations, and resources. In 2019 and 2020 alone, hundreds of fighters were killed in 125 clashes between the two groups (Thompson, 2021).

The two main groups active in the Lake Chad border area—ISWAP and JAS—are similarly opposed. Conflict between ISWAP and JAS has intensified over differences regarding governance and the treatment of civilians. According to the International Crisis Group, ‘ISWAP and JAS have lost more fighters sparring with each other since 2021 than in confrontations with state militaries’ (ICG, 2024).¹⁰



Graph 2

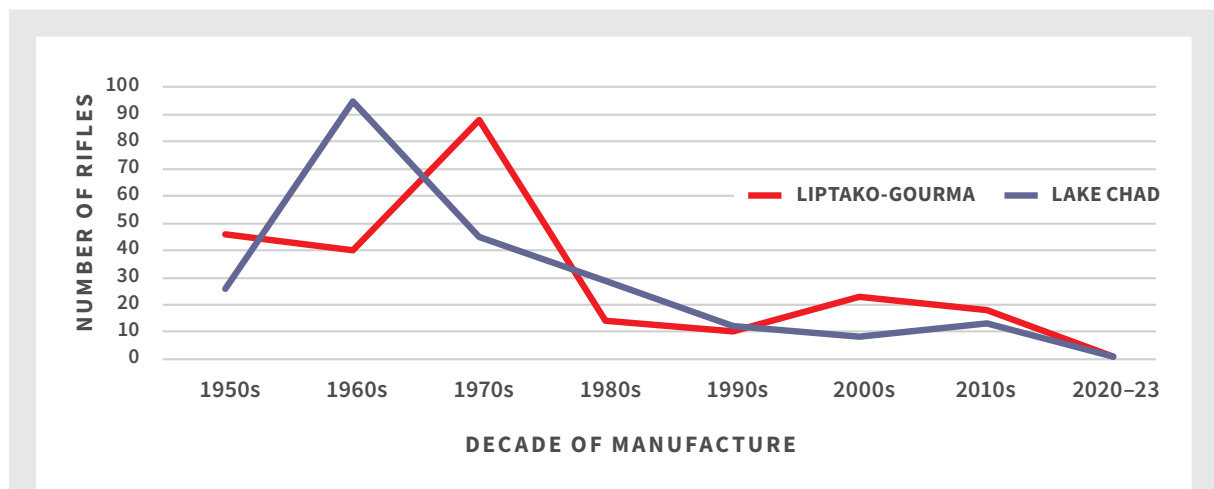
Percentage of assault rifles seized from Salafi jihadist groups in the central Sahel, by country of manufacture

DOMINANCE OF DECADES-OLD WEAPONS

As illustrated in Graph 3, Salafi jihadist groups in both the Liptako-Gourma and Lake Chad border areas generally rely on assault rifles that are several decades old, particularly from the 1960s and the 1970s. Recently manufactured weapons—those produced and exported to the region after the fall of the Libyan regime in 2011—account for a very small proportion of the documented items (see Box 3). Although this analysis may appear to suggest that Salafi jihadists have built their arsenals systematically over a number of years—and that these weapons have thus been circulating illicitly in the region

for a long time—weapons that date back decades are still in service with several security forces in the region, meaning that some older items may have been diverted from state custody relatively recently.

Unlike the documented weapons, more than half of the small-calibre ammunition seized from Salafi jihadists in the region was manufactured within ten years of its recovery. As discussed in Issue 1 of this series, much of this ammunition had been supplied to, and diverted from, the custody of militaries in the central Sahel (CAR, 2024).



Graph 3

Assault rifles seized from Salafi jihadists in the Liptako-Gourma and Lake Chad border areas, by decade of manufacture (n=468)

BOX 3 — WEAPONS MANUFACTURED AFTER 2011

Of the 726 weapons seized from Salafi jihadist groups in the central Sahel and documented by CAR, just 34 were manufactured after 2011. This date is significant in the context of illicit weapon flows in the region because it marked both the fall of the Qaddafi-era Jamahiriya regime in Libya and the early stages of the conflict that erupted in northern Mali in 2012—two security crises in which large amounts of weapons were diverted from national stocks.

Broken down by area, the post-2011 weapons account for only 5 per cent (20 weapons) of the Liptako-Gourma sample and 4 per cent

(14 weapons) of the Lake Chad border area sample.

One of these weapons was an ATGL-L2 rocket-propelled grenade launcher with the serial number KO 54 1080, manufactured in Bulgaria in 2014 (see Figure 1). CAR formally traced the item with the Bulgarian authorities, who confirmed that the rocket launcher was exported under a permit issued in 2015 for the Office of the National Security Adviser of Nigeria.¹¹ Nigerien forces subsequently seized the item from local JAS or ISWAP-affiliated fighters in Diffa in 2021.

BOX 3 — WEAPONS MANUFACTURED AFTER 2011 (CONTINUED)

**Figure 1**

An ATGL-L2 rocket-propelled grenade launcher bearing the serial number KO 54 1080, manufactured in Bulgaria in 2014.

Documented by CAR in Diffa, Niger, on 22 June 2021.

Separately, CAR investigators documented an M91 designated marksman rifle with the serial number 2242, manufactured in Serbia by Zastava Arms in 2013 (see Figure 2). International forces seized the rifle from JNIM in Mali in 2021 and subsequently transferred it to Malian forces.

The weapon bears a marking that complies with the provisions of the ECOWAS convention, indicating that it was imported for service with the Malian Armed Forces. In both of these cases, states in the region legally imported the weapons prior to their diversion to illicit markets.

**Figure 2**

An M91 designated marksman rifle with the serial number 2242, manufactured in Serbia by Zastava Arms in 2013.

Documented by CAR in Bamako, Mali, on 18 June 2021.

LOCALISED AND OPPORTUNISTIC WEAPON ACQUISITION

CAR's data shows that the arsenals of Salafi jihadist groups in the central Sahel are broadly similar to those of other illicit actors in the region. The general homogeneity of the sample collected by CAR in the region since 2015 suggests that Salafi jihadist groups largely operate in the same markets as other unauthorised users and therefore draw

on the same sources of supply. By ambushing patrols or isolated outposts of security forces (opportunistic acquisition) and taking advantage of this and other materiel that is readily available in their area of operations (localised acquisition), the arsenals of these groups increasingly mirror those of the states in which they operate (see Box 4).

BOX 4 — HOW SALAFI JIHADIST GROUPS' ARSENALS COME TO PARTIALLY MIRROR THOSE OF THE STATES IN WHICH THEY OPERATE

Since 2015, CAR has documented a total of 53 machine guns recovered from Salafi jihadist groups. Of these, 22 were seized in the Lake Chad border area and 31 in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area.

Fourteen of the 20 machine gun models that CAR documented were only observed in one area or the other. CAR was able to establish that some of these models were previously in the custody of state forces operating in the same area.

In the Lake Chad border area, for example, CAR documented four HK21-series general-purpose machine guns—one manufactured in France and three in the United Kingdom—following their seizure from ISWAP or JAS-affiliated fighters in the Diffa region of south-eastern Niger (CAR, 2022; see Figure 3). These four weapons were most likely diverted from the custody of one or more of the states bordering Lake Chad, and CAR was able to confirm that at least one machine gun was diverted from Nigeria's national custody.¹² CAR has not documented any HK21 machine guns in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area.



Figure 3

An HK21 general-purpose machine gun with the serial number EN 50937, manufactured in the United Kingdom by Royal Small Arms Factory, Enfield. Nigerien security forces seized the machine gun at some point between 2014 and 2019, during counterterrorism operations targeting ISWAP and JAS-affiliated fighters.

Documented by CAR in Diffa, Niger, on 31 October 2019.

BOX 4 — HOW SALAFI JIHADIST GROUPS' ARSENALS COME TO PARTIALLY MIRROR THOSE OF THE STATES IN WHICH THEY OPERATE (CONTINUED)

Similarly, in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area, CAR documented four Serbian M84 general-purpose machine guns (Figure 4) that were seized in the aftermath of three Salafi jihadist attacks, at least one of which was carried out by JNIM. CAR was able to confirm that at least three of these M84s were exported to Burkina Faso, in 2012 and 2019.¹³ CAR did not document any M84s among the weapons seized in the Lake Chad border area.

These two examples highlight how the arsenals of Salafi jihadist groups can come to reflect the arsenals of the national forces in the countries and regions in which they operate. These findings also underscore the localised and predatory nature of the groups' procurement activities.



Figure 4

An M84 general-purpose machine gun with the serial number 42884, manufactured in Serbia by Zastava Arms. Burkinabè security forces seized the machine gun on 20 March 2020 during counterterror operations in Yagha Province.

Documented in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, on 7 April 2020.

WEAPONS DIVERTED FROM REGIONAL CUSTODY

One-fifth of the weapons seized in relation to Salafi jihadist activity in the central Sahel were most likely diverted from the state custody of eight countries in North and West Africa.¹⁴ This proportion is almost certainly a significant underestimate. It does, however, underscore the opportunistic nature of Salafi jihadist procurement methods, which rely significantly on the stocks of the countries in which they operate.

In the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area, CAR determined that 22 per cent of weapons seized from ISSP, JNIM, and other Salafi jihadist groups had once been in the arsenals of the area's constituent countries—Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. CAR also

identified loss of weapons from the custody of authorities in Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia, to the south of the area, as well as in Libya, to the north-east.¹⁵

CAR data on the Lake Chad border area shows that at least 18 per cent of weapons seized from ISWAP and JAS were likely diverted from state custody in Chad, Niger, and Nigeria, the three countries that border Lake Chad. In addition, a small number of weapons are linked to diversion from state custody in Libya, Mali, and Rwanda.¹⁶

CAR bases its assessment on three key factors, which it seeks to triangulate wherever possible. These factors are:

- responses to formal trace requests submitted to identified manufacturers and exporters of weapons;
- information shared by national partners; and
- analysis of weapon markings.

Tracing

Wherever possible, CAR has formally traced diverted weapons that its investigators documented in the central Sahel. Tracing is critical to CAR's investigations; responses from transfer parties provide vital insights into the onward chain of custody. CAR would like to acknowledge the cooperation of the governments, companies, and individuals whose responses to CAR's trace requests and provision of additional information have been critical in its ongoing investigations.

One trace example involves two Bulgarian 7.62 × 39 mm AR-M1F assault rifles, which CAR documented in the Diffa region of Niger on 5 March 2022 (see

Figure 5). Security forces had recovered these weapons from ISWAP or JAS- affiliated fighters at some point between June 2021 and March 2022. Bearing the serial numbers 1N 50 8616 and 1N 50 8771, both assault rifles were manufactured in 2010. CAR initiated a formal tracing procedure with the Bulgarian authorities to confirm their origin and supply route. In their response, the Bulgarian authorities confirmed that the weapons were of Bulgarian origin and had been shipped to Nigeria in 2015, with the Office of the National Security Adviser listed as the importer and end user.¹⁷

Information shared by national partners

CAR also provides its partners in the region with tracing support. This work can yield additional contextual information on a given weapon's chain of custody, including by establishing links to Salafi jihadist groups that may otherwise not be apparent. Such was the case with a 7.62 × 39 mm AKM assault rifle with the serial number UR-2293-06, which was produced in 2006 and documented by CAR in March 2021 (see Figure 6). Malian security forces seized the



Figure 5

AR-M1F assault rifles with the serial numbers 1N 50 8616 and 1N 50 8771, seized by Nigerien security forces during counterterrorism operations in Diffa between June 2021 and March 2022.

Documented by CAR in Diffa in March 2022.



Figure 6

An AKM assault rifle bearing the serial number UR-2293-06 and a marking that complies with the provisions of the ECOWAS convention, seized by Malian security forces from a suspected ISSP fighter in Soudeheri on 13 June 2020.

Documented by CAR in Mali in March 2021.

Note: CAR has edited the label to remove sensitive information.

rifle from a suspected ISSP fighter in Soudeheri, in the Gao region of central Mali, in June 2020. The weapon, with the serial number UR-2293-06, bore a marking that complies with the provisions of the ECOWAS convention, that reads ‘BFPN UR-2293-06’, indicating it was marked when in the custody of the National Police of Burkina Faso.¹⁸ Burkinabè authorities subsequently confirmed to CAR that the weapon had been diverted from the custody of the National Police in the aftermath of a terrorist attack against the police station of Sebba, in north-eastern Burkina Faso, on 29 February 2020.¹⁹ Separated by just over 200 km, Sebba in Burkina Faso and Soudeheri in Mali are within the areas of operation

of various Salafi jihadist groups active in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area.

Regional weapon markings

Under Article 18 of the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, all small arms and light weapons are to be assigned a unique and specific marking upon manufacture or import by an ECOWAS member state. The article also applies to weapons held under national custody prior to the entry into force of the Convention (ECOWAS, 2006).²⁰ These markings provide CAR investigators with a key source of information to clarify a weapon’s chain of custody.

CAR observed these markings on 10 February 2020 while documenting two Russian 7.62 × 39 mm AK-103 assault rifles that were produced in 2017 and bore the serial numbers 171153211 and 171167071.²¹ Security forces had seized the weapons from suspected Salafi jihadist fighters near the town of Dori in Burkina Faso between December 2019 and February 2020. Dori is in the Sahel region of Burkina Faso, which borders the Gao region in central Mali. Both are at the epicentre of the area of operations of Salafi jihadist groups active in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area. The ECOWAS markings had been applied to the right side of each receiver, indicating that the weapons were marked while in the custody of two specific entities of the Malian Armed Forces (see Figures 7 and 8).

Similarly, on 22 March 2022, CAR investigators observed a marking that complies with the provisions of the ECOWAS convention on a Bulgarian 7.62 × 39 mm AR-M1F41 assault rifle, manufactured in 2017 and bearing the serial number KO 57 6251 (see Figure 9).²² Security forces had seized this rifle from a suspected ISSP fighter on 15 June 2021 in Timétrine in the Kidal region of Mali, bordering Niger in an area where Salafi jihadist groups are active. The right side of the receiver was marked with an ECOWAS logo as well as the letters ‘NE-FAN’. The marking indicates that the weapon had been marked while in the custody of the Forces Armées Nigériennes (Nigerien Armed Forces), although it lacks a code identifying the unit to whom the weapon belonged.



Figure 7

An AK-103 assault rifle with the serial number 171153211 and a marking that complies with the provisions of the ECOWAS convention: ‘ML FAMA 171153211 EMAT’, ‘EMAT’ referencing the office of the chief of staff of the army (état-major de l’armée de terre).

Documented by CAR in Ouagadougou on 10 February 2020.



Figure 8

An AK-103 assault rifle with the serial number 171167071 and a marking that complies with the provisions of the ECOWAS convention: 'ML FAMA 171167071 DGGN', 'DGGN' referencing the Headquarters of the Gendarmerie Nationale (Direction Générale de la Gendarmerie Nationale).

Documented by CAR in Ouagadougou on 10 February 2020.



Figure 9

An AR-M1F41 assault rifle with the serial number KO 57 6251 and a marking that complies with the provisions of the ECOWAS convention.

Documented by CAR in Bamako on 22 March 2022.

CIRCULATION OF LEGACY WEAPONS

The opportunistic nature of Salafi jihadist weapon acquisitions in the central Sahel is also evidenced by the presence of similar ‘legacy weapons’ in their arsenals. These are weapons that remain in circulation in the region although the custodians or conflicts with which they were previously associated are no longer active, and the political contexts that initially fuelled their supply have since changed or subsided. Salafi jihadists tend to acquire legacy weapons by accessing illicit weapon markets, rather than through direct diversion from authorised end users.

Defunct custodians

Among the weapons that CAR documented in the central Sahel are 26 7.62 × 39 mm Model 89-1 assault rifles recovered from different groups in Niger. These rifles were manufactured in 2001 by Entreprise de Construction Mécanique Khenchela in Algeria. All are marked with serial numbers that appear to be closely related and that use the same eight-digit format, beginning with ‘0101’.

CAR documented 20 of these rifles in Agadez, following their seizure in 2022 from a weapons cache belonging to the now defunct local insurgency Nigerien Movement for Justice (Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice). Active in Niger between 2007 and 2009, the insurgency was

not a Salafi jihadist group. The remaining six rifles were seized under unknown circumstances between 2014 and 2019 from ISWAP or JAS- affiliated fighters operating in the Lake Chad border area.²³

CAR considers it likely that all 26 rifles were previously in the custody of a single state in the region. This assumption is supported by the fact that CAR has not documented any other Model 89-1 assault rifles in the region.

Changing conflict dynamics

The fall of the Libyan Jamahiriya in 2011 triggered significant outflows of materiel across the central Sahel (CAR, 2016; 2022; see Box 5). Nevertheless, the regime’s collapse has played only a minor role in the ability of Salafi jihadist groups, such as JNIM, JAS and the Islamic State affiliates, to build their arsenals. Just 7 per cent of the Salafi jihadist weapons in CAR’s data set can be linked back to the Jamahiriya-era stocks.

Furthermore, CAR has not seen any evidence that Salafi jihadist groups in the central Sahel are systematically relying on long-range supply sources, including from Libya. Rather, weapons in Salafi jihadist holdings that originated in the Jamahiriya-era stocks were most likely sourced from local markets.

WEAPONS IN SALAFI JIHADIST HOLDINGS THAT ORIGINATED IN THE JAMAHIRIYA-ERA STOCKS WERE MOST LIKELY SOURCED FROM LOCAL MARKETS

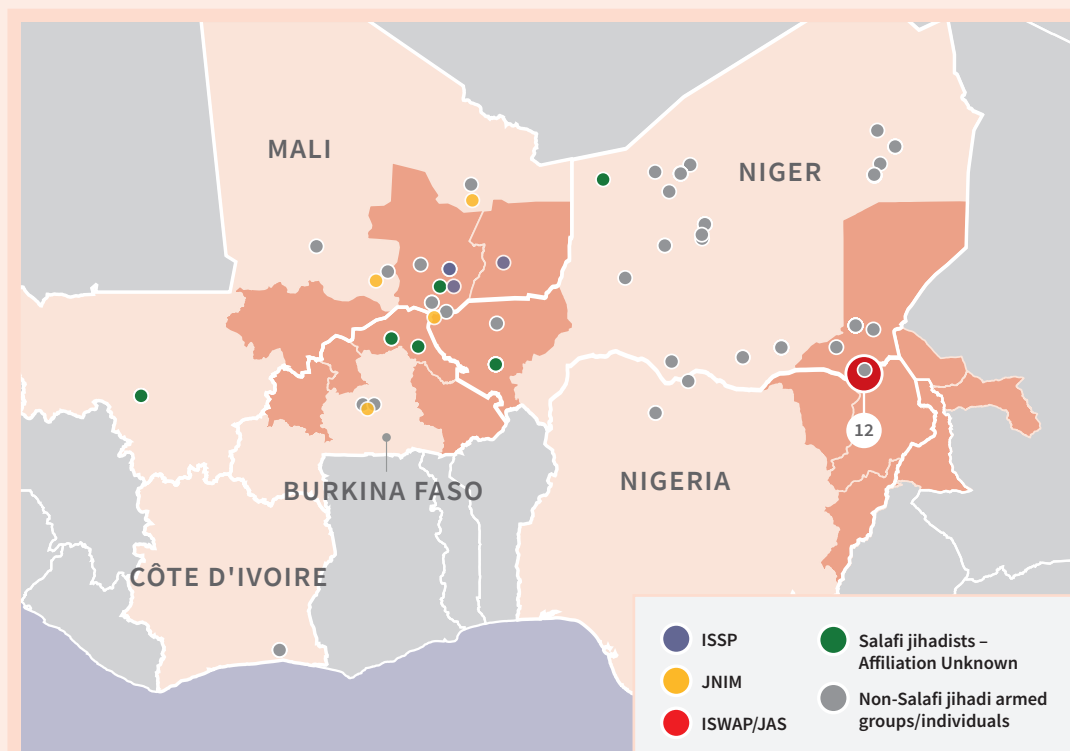
Seized assault rifles in Agadez, Niger.



BOX 5 — WIDE DISPERSAL OF RIFLE SERIES LINKED TO LIBYA

CAR has previously identified and reported on a series of Polish 7.62 × 39 mm Kbk-AKMS assault rifles as originating in the Jamahiriya-era stocks (CAR, 2022). Manufactured between the 1970s and late 1980s, all these rifles feature a distinctive Arabic rear-sight mark. In total CAR has documented 127 of these rifles across West Africa. This includes 11 recovered from Salafi jihadist groups in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area and 12 in the Lake Chad border area.²⁴

Map 2 shows that these rifles have been recovered not only from Salafi jihadist groups, but also from other non-state armed groups and unauthorised individuals. The presence of this rifle series in these two distinct areas in the central Sahel points to the general widespread availability of such legacy weapons and their deep permeation of local markets.



Map 2

Seizure locations of illicit Polish Kbk-AKMS assault rifles that originated in the Jamahiriya stocks, documented by CAR in the central Sahel

SALAFI JIHADISTS IN BOTH AREAS LARGELY MAINTAIN, REPLENISH, AND EXPAND THEIR ARSENALS BY EXPLOITING NATIONAL STOCKS

Overall, CAR observes a high degree of homogeneity in the weapon types and models used by Salafi jihadist groups in the Liptako-Gourma and Lake Chad border areas. CAR's investigations have shown that this alignment is mainly the result of the groups' reliance on similarly limited, localised, and opportunistic acquisition efforts. Salafi jihadists in both areas largely maintain, replenish, and expand their arsenals by exploiting national stocks and drawing on readily available legacy weapons.

GEOGRAPHY OVER IDEOLOGY: UNDERSTANDING WEAPON DISTRIBUTION

CAR's analysis of the distribution of specific weapon serial number series indicates that geography—rather than ideology or allegiance—determines how different Salafi jihadist groups in the central Sahel access weapons.²⁵ Rival groups operating in the same territory, such as JNIM and ISSP, tend to have similar weapons in their arsenals.

In contrast, despite being affiliated, ISSP (operating in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area) and ISWAP (in the Lake Chad border area) use weapons belonging to different series and sub-series. Crucially, there is no significant evidence that linked groups share or redistribute weapons; each is isolated within the territory it seeks to control.

The analysis highlights three specific dynamics:

- Once acquired by Salafi jihadist groups, weapons tend to stay under tight control in their possession and are generally not redistributed beyond the group itself.
- There is little evidence that ideologically-aligned Salafi jihadist groups that operate in different regions—such as the two Islamic State affiliates, ISSP and ISWAP—share weapons with each other.
- In specific instances, rival Salafi jihadist groups that are engaged in active conflict with each other—such as JNIM and ISSP in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area—have used weapons from the same series, indicating that they rely on similar (if not common) procurement mechanisms.

TIGHT CONTROL OF CAPTURED WEAPONS

In its 2022 report on the Lake Chad security crisis, CAR details two Type 56 assault rifles, both manufactured in China by State Factory 313 and bearing seven-digit serial numbers beginning with '520'. Security forces had seized these weapons from ISWAP or JAS- affiliated fighters in the Diffa region of south-eastern Niger (CAR, 2022, pp. 22–23). CAR traced these two rifles to the national stocks of the Nigerian armed forces and established that they were seized during battles with ISWAP or JAS- affiliated fighters at some point between 2013 and 2017.²⁶

Between 2017 and 2023, CAR documented a total of 11 Type 56 rifles from the 520XXXX sub-series, all of which were manufactured in China by State Factory 313. These weapons had been seized from ISWAP and JAS- affiliated fighters between 2014 and 2022, all in the Lake Chad border area (see Map 3).²⁷

Notably, CAR has not documented Type 56 rifles from the same 520XXXX sub-series anywhere else in the central Sahel. Two inferences arise. First, ISWAP and JAS have managed to retain close control over weapons—acquired up to ten years ago—within their specific geographic areas of operation. Second, their fighters have not commonly sought to

use the weapons to provision other actors, affiliated or unaffiliated, outside these areas.

These tendencies appear to be typical of Salafi jihadist groups, as they seek to maintain close control over weapons held by their fighters. CAR has only rarely encountered weapons seized from unaffiliated criminal actors that Salafi jihadist groups had previously captured from regional security forces.²⁸

One such weapon was an AK-pattern assault rifle seized in the Diffa region of Niger in 2018. It bore the serial number 1980 KR 2192 and was equipped with a distinctive quad rail handguard (see Figure 10).²⁹ CAR identified the rifle as originating in the stocks of a Sahelian country's counterterrorism unit. The unit itself was established in 2013, meaning that although the rifle itself was more than 40 years old, its illicit acquisition by ISWAP or JAS- affiliated fighters was relatively recent. In 2018, however, Nigerien forces recovered the same AK-pattern assault rifle from an individual engaging in petty crime. Although it is possible that this criminal had ties to ISWAP or JAS, CAR does not know how the weapon moved from conflict use to the criminal realm.³⁰

**Map 3**

Seizure locations of 11 Type 56 rifles from the 520XXXX sub-series (see example), documented by CAR in the central Sahel

Although CAR's documentation data indicates that Salafi jihadists generally exert close control over their arsenals, ongoing field investigations suggest that groups in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area do occasionally sell captured weapons in order to acquire financing, mainly in the form of gold. Such funds can help them pay militants or acquire supplies and equipment.³¹ Alongside

booming local demand for small arms and light weapons, as well as a growing artisanal gold mining industry, this practice may lead to an increase in the illicit circulation of diverted government-issued weapons beyond Salafi jihadist circles. Additional field investigations, in partnership with Sahelian authorities, are required to quantify and precisely map the phenomenon.

**Figure 10**

An AK-pattern assault rifle with the serial number 1980 KR 2192, manufactured in Romania in 1980 and seized by Nigerien security forces in Diffa on 11 December 2018.

Documented by CAR in Diffa on 31 October 2019.

LIMITED SHARING OF WEAPONS ACROSS REGIONS

CAR has found little evidence that Salafi jihadist groups that share a similar ideology but operate in different regions—such as the Islamic State affiliates ISSP and ISWAP—also share weapons with each other. Analysis of the distribution of the three most documented assault rifle models—namely the Chinese Type 56 and Type 56-1, and the Russian AKM assault rifles—shows that these groups do not typically move weapons between the two distinct areas.

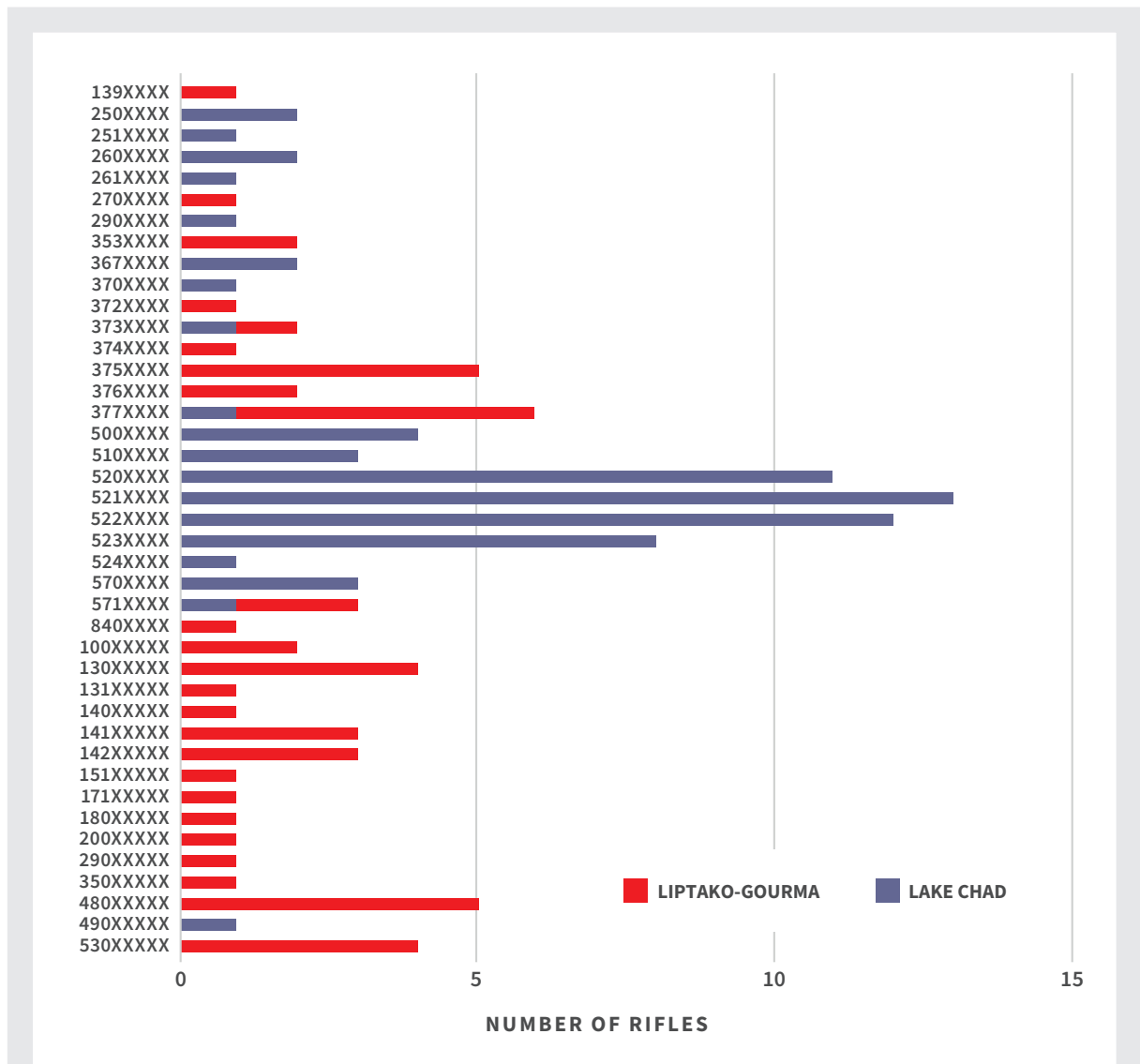
Type 56 assault rifles

CAR has documented a total of 120 Type 56 assault rifles recovered from Salafi jihadists.³² The first three digits in the serial numbers of these rifles fall

into 41 separate sub-series, 93 per cent of which were documented solely in the Liptako-Gourma or Lake Chad border areas. This points to the restricted ability of groups to transfer weapons to affiliates.

As shown in Graph 4, just three of the sub-series were documented in both the Liptako-Gourma and Lake Chad border areas:

- **373XXXX** (Jianshe Machine Tool Factory);
- **377XXXX** (Jianshe Machine Tool Factory); and
- **571XXXX** (State Factory 313).



Graph 4
 Sub-series of Type 56 assault rifles seized from Salafi jihadists in the Liptako-Gourma and Lake Chad border areas (n=120)³³

Over multiple field deployments between 2015 and 2023, CAR investigators documented particularly large numbers of Type 56 rifles in some of these sub-series. For instance, 45 of the rifles fall into a cluster of five consecutive sub-series (520XXXX, 521XXXX, 522XXXX, 523XXXX, and 524XXXX). Security forces recovered all of these from ISWAP and JAS-affiliated fighters in the Lake Chad area of south-eastern Niger. These five sub-series alone account for 65 per cent of all the Type 56 rifles that CAR field teams have documented in the Lake Chad border area. The fact that so many of the rifles fall into one cluster suggests that these weapons may have been diverted from the custody of a single state in the region.

In contrast, CAR has not documented any Type 56 assault rifles with serial numbers that start with ‘52’ in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area, where ISWAP’s affiliate, ISSP, operates. Nor has CAR come across rifles in this cluster of sub-series anywhere else in its global areas of operation—except for two additional locations in Niger where ISWAP and JAS are also known to be active: Madarounfa and Mai-

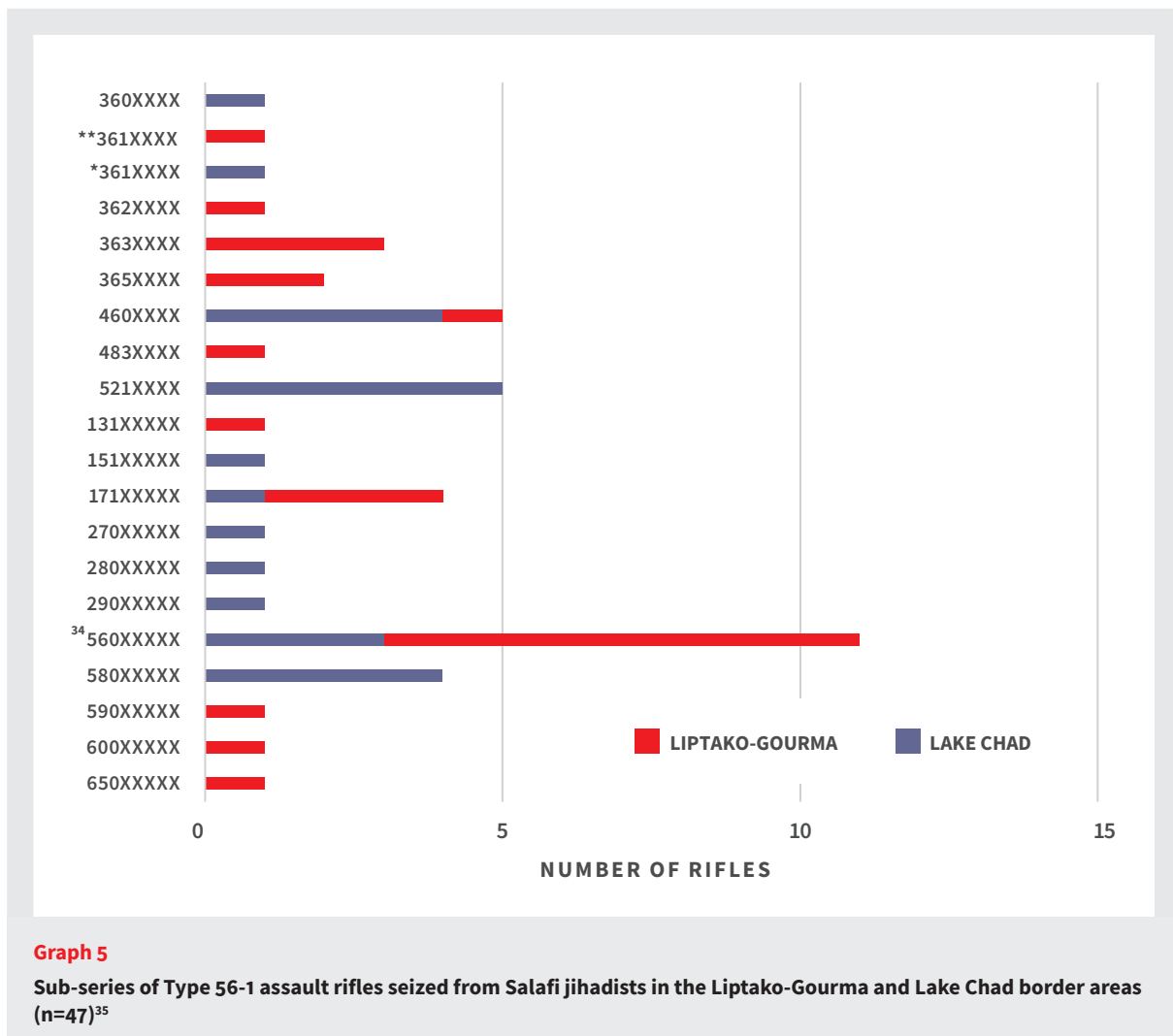
Melaram, approximately 500 km and 100 km west of Diffa, respectively. That CAR has documented rifles from these sub-series only in southern and south-eastern Niger underscores the highly context-specific availability of these weapons.

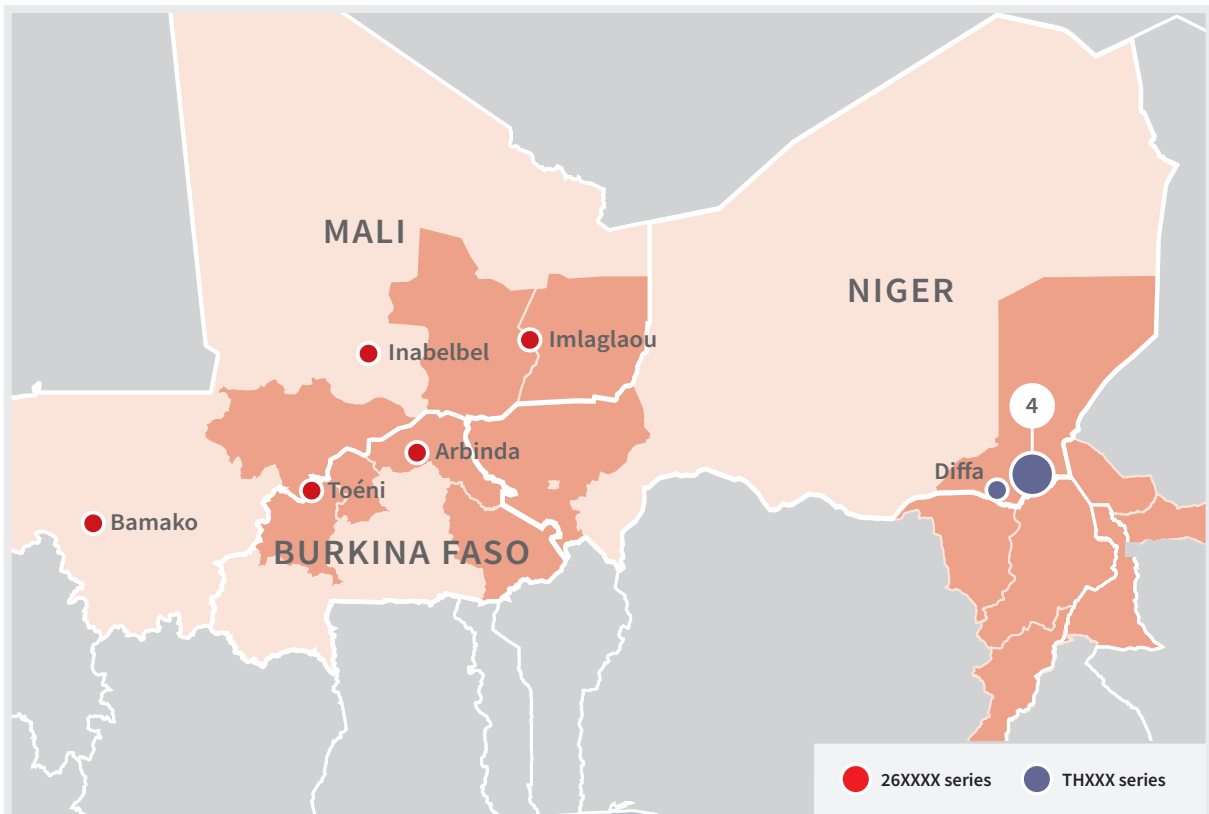
Type 56-1 assault rifles

CAR has documented a total of 47 Chinese Type 56-1 assault rifles that were recovered from Salafi jihadists. As shown in Graph 5, these weapons span 20 separate sub-series, only three of which (15 per cent) were documented in both the Liptako-Gourma and Lake Chad border areas:

- **460XXXX** (State Factory 313);
- **171XXXXX** (Qinghua Machine Tool Factory); and
- **560XXXXX** (Jianshe Machine Tool Factory).

As is the case with the Type 56 rifles discussed above, CAR documentation indicates that rifles from multiple serial number sub-series are clustered together in a single area.





Map 4
Seizure locations of AKM assault rifles from the 26XXXX series in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area, and from the THXXX series in the Lake Chad border area, 2014–22

AKM assault rifles

CAR has documented five Russian AKM assault rifles produced by Izhmash in 1974. Their serial numbers form part of the 26XXXX series.³⁶ Security forces seized these rifles from different Salafi jihadist groups in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area—in Mali and Burkina Faso—between 2018 and 2020. One rifle was recovered from Ansar Dine—a founding group of JNIM, two from ISSP, and two during a pair of attacks coordinated by Salafi jihadists whose precise allegiance could not be identified. CAR has not documented any AKM

assault rifles from the 26XXXX series in the Lake Chad border area, or anywhere else in its global operations.

The geographical reverse is true of Russian AKM assault rifles in the THXXX series. CAR documented five of these weapons, all of which were seized from ISWAP or JAS-affiliated fighters in the Lake Chad border area, specifically in the Diffa region of Niger, between 2014 and 2022 (Map 4). CAR has not documented any rifles from this series in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area.³⁷



Bolt carrier from a Kbk-AKMS assault rifle documented in Bilma, Niger.

COMPARABLE ARSENALS AMONG RIVAL SALAFI JIHADISTS IN THE SAME AREA

In areas where Salafi jihadists rely on local weapon sources, rival groups end up with similar arsenals. In the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area, ISSP's arsenal resembles that of its local rival, JNIM, more than that of its affiliate ISWAP, which operates in the Lake Chad border area.

Between 2018 and 2023, security forces seized 15 Type 56 assault rifles in the 375XXXX sub-series in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area. Five of these were recovered from Salafi jihadists including two from ISSP, two from JNIM and one from an unidentified group.³⁸ CAR documented all 15 rifles and has ascertained that they all originated in the custody of one of the three countries that constitute the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area.³⁹ Since ISSP and JNIM are active in the same territory and compete for access to the same sources for weapons, they most likely did not procure these weapons as part of a joint effort. Rather, the groups may have separately attacked different units of a national security force.

In a second example, on 2 March 2018 JNIM fighters conducted a complex attack on the French embassy in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. One of the weapons recovered after the attack was a Type 56 assault rifle with the serial number 3772659.⁴⁰ Four years later, Malian and international security forces, as part of Task Force Takuba, arrested 20 ISSP members and confiscated weapons in Indélimane, Ménaka region, eastern Mali. One

of the seized weapons was a Type 56 assault rifle with a serial number just 101 units from the weapon used by JNIM in the attack on the French embassy (see Figure 11). Both weapons were most likely diverted from the custody of a country in the region.⁴¹

CAR's data shows that Salafi jihadists are highly dependent on weapon sources in their areas of operation. Analysis of the distribution of commonly documented assault rifles shows that Salafi jihadist group arsenals in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area consistently differ from those in the Lake Chad border area. In most cases, specific series and sub-series of common weapon models are available in only one area and not the other. The extremely limited overlap of materiel between the two areas is indicative of the highly localised nature of Salafi jihadist groups' procurement and their reliance on readily available, local supplies. It also highlights the limited nature of weapon transfers between ideologically affiliated groups operating in different regions, such as ISSP in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area and ISWAP or JAS in the Lake Chad border area.

CAR is aware of only one example of closely sequenced weapons from the same sub-series appearing in seizures from ISSP and ISWAP (see Box 6). This rare exception raises the possibility of a shared supply source or transfers between the groups.



Figure 11

A Type 56 assault rifle with the serial number 3772760,⁴² seized by Malian security forces in the course of counterterrorism operations targeting ISSP in Indélimane, Mali, between 1 and 8 February 2022.

Documented by CAR in Ménaka on 10 February 2022.

BOX 6 — POTENTIAL SIGNS OF OVERLAP BETWEEN ISSP AND ISWAP ARSENALS

Two recent seizures could provide the first indications of an overlap in the arsenals of ISSP and ISWAP. Prior to 2023, CAR had only ever documented Type 56 assault rifles manufactured by China's State Factory 313 after security forces had seized the weapons from ISWAP and JAS-affiliated fighters in the Lake Chad border area. CAR investigators documented 61 such rifles, all recovered in south-eastern and southern Niger. In 2023, however, and for the first time, CAR documented two such rifles in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area: one in Ayorou, western Niger, and the other in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

The rifle seized from ISSP fighters in Ayorou on 22 June 2023 bears the serial number 5719116.⁴³ This is only 553 units from the serial number of a rifle recovered from ISWAP in Diffa, Niger (5719669) (see Figure 12).⁴⁴ Similarly, the rifle documented in Ouagadougou on 18 October 2023 is marked with the serial number 5718974,⁴⁵ which is just 142 units apart from the serial number of the rifle seized in Ayorou four months prior (see Figure 13).

To date, these are the only weapons in CAR's data set that suggest an overlap of holdings between ISSP in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area and ISWAP in the Lake Chad border area. Further in-field monitoring and analysis will help to determine whether this example is anomalous or part of an emerging pattern.



Figure 12
A Type 56 assault rifle with the serial number 5719669, seized in Diffa, Niger, on 28 May 2021. Documented by CAR in Diffa on 22 June 2021.



Figure 13
A Type 56 assault rifle with the serial number 5718974, seized in Burkina Faso on an unknown date. Documented by CAR in Ouagadougou on 18 October 2023.

CONCLUSION

In this Frontline Perspective, CAR analyses more than 700 weapons that security forces recovered from Salafi jihadist groups in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area between Burkina Faso, Mali, and western Niger and the Lake Chad border area in south-eastern Niger. The data shows that clashes among these groups are largely being fought with the same weapon types, locally accessed from similar sources. CAR has found no compelling evidence of extra-regional weapon supplies or connections to groups outside the central Sahel. Indeed, CAR has found that the arsenals of Salafi jihadist groups are more similar to those of rivals active in the same areas of operation than to those of ideological counterparts active in geographically separated regions.

It follows that the arsenals of Salafi jihadists in the central Sahel are not determined by the groups' ideologies, affiliations, or allegiances, but rather by

logistical, geographic constraints and local conflict dynamics. In that sense, nothing in the weapon holdings of these groups distinguishes them from other illicit non-state actors in the region. For example, Salafi jihadist groups have only acquired a small number of the weapons that flooded out of Libya following the collapse of the Jamahiriya in 2011 and CAR's data shows that those weapons that are in these groups' arsenals have also been documented in the possession of other illicit actors in the region. Likewise, Salafi jihadist groups have limited access to recently produced weapons. The few such weapons that are in their possession were secured principally, if not exclusively, through attacks on national security forces in the region.

Ultimately, Salafi jihadist groups in the central Sahel are operating localised insurgencies. They may espouse international ideologies, but they are firmly embedded in local dynamics, grievances,



Figure 14

'Spoils of war' propaganda published by JNIM on Telegram in the aftermath of an attack in Nassougou, where the group targeted Burkinabè armed forces on 8 August 2024.

Source: Telegram (August 2024)

and networks, including when it comes to their weapon acquisitions. CAR data indicates that, in addition to being highly localised, the groups' weapon procurement is highly opportunistic. In both the Liptako-Gourma and Lake Chad border areas, the groups appear to rely on diversion from state custody, including attacks on security forces and sites, as a key source of supply. These findings echo those presented in Issue 1 of this series, which concentrates on ammunition seized from Salafi jihadist groups in the Sahel.

Salafi jihadist propaganda regarding their 'spoils of war' (الْغَنِيْمَة, or *ghanima*) indicates the groups' hunger for government-issued weapons (see Figure 14). Accessing weapons held under state custody in the region is an integral aspect of their dual strategy of confronting state authorities militarily and procuring weapons to conduct their operations. These findings highlight the challenge facing defence and security forces as they seek to maintain control of their state-issued weapons, particularly during active operations.

Beyond helping analysts understand the procurement capabilities of these groups, the monitoring of Salafi jihadist arsenals also provides indicators of the groups' growth, strength, and areas of operation. Salafi jihadist groups in the

SALAFI JIHADIST GROUPS IN THE CENTRAL SAHEL ARE CONTINUOUSLY EVOLVING IN THEIR WEAPON ACQUISITION EFFORTS, AND CAR'S ANALYSIS OF SEIZED WEAPONS CAN HELP TO TRACK THESE DYNAMICS

central Sahel are continuously evolving in their weapon acquisition efforts, and CAR's analysis of seized weapons can help to track these dynamics. Having carried out sustained fieldwork in the region since 2015, CAR has been able to establish a strong baseline across the central Sahel. As the security climate deteriorates in the region, continued on-the-ground monitoring is the only way to ensure that analysts, policy-makers, and security forces maintain visibility on how Salafi jihadist groups access and distribute weapons.



Weapons and ammunition documented by CAR in Niamey, Niger.

ENDNOTES

- 1 For example, in January 2024 the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team pursuant to UN Security Council resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011), and 2253 (2015) reported that Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims, or JNIM) had 'expanded its presence in Burkina Faso, doubling since 2022 and consolidating in the south where it attacked security forces and civilian populations' (UNSC, 2024, para. 34). In Niger, the Team observed a notable increase in violence since July 2023 and documented an expansion of territorial control for the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (UNSC, 2024).
- 2 For more information, see Obasi (2024).
- 3 Numerous insurgent Salafi jihadist groups operate in the central Sahel. It is not always possible for CAR field investigators to obtain reliable information regarding which group was in possession of which weapons at the time the materiel was recovered. CAR specifies whatever relevant information is known.
- 4 The United Nations designated Islamic State Sahel Province (as Islamic State in the Greater Sahara) as entity QDe.164 on 23 February 2020; Islamic State West Africa Province as QDe.162 on 23 February 2020; Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'adati wal-Jihad (People Committed to the Prophet's Teachings for Propagation and Jihad, commonly called 'Boko Haram') as QDe.138 on 22 May 2014; and JNIM as QDe.159 on 4 October 2018 (UNSC, 2021). The UN has also sanctioned related groups, including Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) as QDe.014; Ansar Eddine as QDe.135; and Al-Mourabitoun as QDe.141.

Security analysts, national and local security forces, and others in CAR's operational context commonly use the term 'Salafi jihadists' to describe these listed groups. Accordingly, this CAR series uses the term as a collective reference to groups aligned with Al-Qaeda or Islamic State forces, as distinct from other non-state armed actors in CAR's wider data set in the region. For definitional guidance on this term, see EUROPOL (2020).
- 5 After Islamic State forces declared the Sahel province autonomous in March 2022, their combatants operating in the region became known as Islamic State Sahel Province. The group largely mirrors the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, integrated in March 2019 within the structure of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP).
- 6 In addition, CAR documented three weapons in Côte d'Ivoire, captured by Ivorian security forces in the aftermath of the 2016 Grand-Bassam attack. CAR chose to include these rifles in the data set of this Frontline Perspective for two reasons: first, because AQIM, the group responsible for the attack, was based in Mali at that time, and second, because CAR previously reported on the similarities between the weapon used in this attack and those used in other terrorist attacks during the same period (CAR, 2016, p. 39).
- 7 CAR field investigation teams document illicit weapons, ammunition, and related materiel in conflict-affected regions and trace their supply sources. The teams document all items photographically, date and geo-reference the documentation sites, and incorporate contextual interview data gathered from the national authorities in control of the items at the time of documentation. For the full methodology, see www.conflictarm.com.
- 8 Of the documented ammunition, 97 per cent corresponds to a handful of calibres widely used by militaries in the region: 7.62 × 39 mm, 7.62 × 51 mm, 7.62 × 54 mm R, 12.7 × 108 mm, 14.5 × 114 mm, and 12.7 × 99 mm.
- 9 This finding does not imply illegality or wrongdoing on the part of the named countries.
- 10 For a comprehensive overview of the groups' history and internal organisation, see UNIDIR (2024).
- 11 On 5 September 2024, the Government of Bulgaria responded to a formal trace request issued by CAR on 15 July 2024. This response confirms that: 1) the Government of Bulgaria authorised the export of the ATGL-L2 rocket-propelled grenade bearing the serial number 'KO 54 1080', the subject of CAR's trace request, to the Office of the National Security Adviser of Nigeria, under a permit issued in 2015; and 2)

the Government of Bulgaria subsequently received a delivery verification certificate from the end user, confirming receipt of the delivery.

- 12 On 26 January 2021, the Government of Nigeria responded to a formal trace request issued by CAR on 23 March 2020. This response confirmed that: 1) the Nigerian Army was in possession of the HK21 machine gun bearing the serial number ‘EN 50937’ the subject of CAR’s trace request; 2) between 2013 and 2017, Boko Haram seized the item from Nigerian troops during encounters in the North East and South East of Nigeria; and 3) neither the Federal Government of Nigeria nor the Nigerian Army authorised the export or transfer of this item.

On 21 May 2021, the Government of France responded to a formal trace request issued by CAR on 25 August 2017. This response confirms that the Government of France has no records of the HK 21 A1 assault rifle bearing the serial number ‘1200243’, the subject of CAR’s trace request.

On 23 July 2023, CAR submitted a formal trace request to the Government of the United Kingdom regarding the HK21 machine gun with serial number ‘DS100064’. On 22 February 2024, CAR submitted a formal trace request to the Government of the United Kingdom, regarding the HK21 machine gun with serial number ‘DS104172’. At the time of writing, CAR had not yet received a response to these trace requests. As a result, CAR cannot assess the legality of the transfers in question.

- 13 On 25 March 2022, the Government of Serbia responded to a formal trace request issued by CAR on 13 January 2020. This response confirms that: 1) Zastava Arms manufactured the M84 machine gun, bearing the serial number ‘42909’, the subject of CAR’s trace request; 2) Zastava Arms sold the item to Bulgarian Industrial Engineering and Management (15-17 Belovodski Pat Street, Sofia, Bulgaria) under export permit number ‘129 (080-01)’ of 24 May 2012, for end use by the Ministry of Defence of Burkina Faso; 3) Zastava Arms exported the item on 28 May 2012.

On 25 March 2022, the Government of Serbia responded to a formal trace request issued by CAR on 13 January 2020. This response confirms that: 1) Zastava Arms manufactured the M84 machine gun, bearing the serial number ‘56669’, the subject of CAR’s trace request; 2) Beatronic Supply d.o.o, (Belgrade, Serbia) sold the item to Arnaco Security SARL (Laico Ouaga, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso) under export permit number ‘109 (080-01)’ of 15 April 2019, for end use by the Ministry of Defence and Veterans Affairs of Burkina Faso; 3) Beatronic Supply d.o.o exported the item on 21 June 2019.

On 3 June 2021, the Government of Serbia responded to a formal trace request issued by CAR on 17 February 2021. This response confirms that: 1) Zastava Arms manufactured the M84 machine gun, bearing the serial number ‘42884’, the subject of CAR’s trace request; 2) Zastava Arms sold the item to Bulgarian Industrial Engineering and Management (15-17 Belovodski Pat Street, Sofia, Bulgaria) under export permit number ‘129 (080-01)’ of 24 May 2012, for the Ministry of Defence of Burkina Faso, the declared end user; and 3) Zastava Arms exported the item to Bulgarian Industrial Engineering and Management on 28 May 2012.

On 29 March 2018, the Serbian authorities responded to a formal trace request issued by CAR on 1 December 2017. This response confirms that in 1991, Zastava Arms manufactured the M84 with serial number 11028, subject to CAR’s trace request, and delivered the item to the former Yugoslav National Army.

- 14 The countries are Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia, Libya, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria. In addition, CAR identified one seized weapon as having originated in Rwanda, the only country of origin beyond North and West Africa.
- 15 For Liptako-Gourma, these weapons originated in: Burkina Faso (2.94 per cent), Côte d’Ivoire (0.74 per cent), Liberia (0.74 per cent), Libya (7.84 per cent), Mali (9.07 per cent), and Niger (0.74 per cent).
- 16 For the Lake Chad region, these weapons originated in: Chad (1.89 per cent), Libya (6.92 per cent), Mali (1.89 per cent), Niger (0.94 per cent), Nigeria (5.97 per cent), and Rwanda (0.31 per cent).
- 17 On 10 April 2023, the Government of Bulgaria responded to a formal trace request issued by CAR on 23 February 2023. This response confirms that: 1) the 7.62 x 39 mm automatic rifle AR-M1F bearing the serial number ‘1N 50 8616’ is of Bulgarian origin; 2) it was shipped to Nigeria on 4 February 2015; 3) the importer and end user is the Office of the National Security Adviser in Nigeria; 4) the broker was

Innovative Defense Management” (PTY) Ltd, (South Africa); 5) the originals of the EUC and ECOWAS certificate were submitted to the Bulgarian export control authorities, as well as the DVC by the end user.

On 10 April 2023, the Government of Bulgaria responded to a formal trace request issued by CAR on 23 February 2023. This response confirms that: 1) the 7.62 x 39 mm automatic rifle AR-M1F bearing the serial number ‘1N 50 8771’ is of Bulgarian origin; 2) it was shipped to Nigeria on 4 February 2015; 3) the importer and end user is the Office of the National Security Adviser in Nigeria; 4) the broker was Innovative Defense Management” (PTY) Ltd, (South Africa); 5) the originals of the EUC and ECOWAS certificate were submitted to the Bulgarian export control authorities, as well as the DVC by the end user.

- 18 The code ‘BFPN’ includes both the country and the code of the force that was the weapon’s custodian at the time of its marking, as per the provisions of the ECOWAS convention. ‘BF’ refers to the country, Burkina Faso, while ‘PN’ is the French acronym for the National Police (Police Nationale).
- 19 CAR email communication with partners in Burkina Faso’s security forces, July 2020.
- 20 The ECOWAS Convention requires small arms and light weapons to be marked with a ‘classic’ marking that includes unique identifiers such as serial numbers. In addition, the Convention requires a ‘security’ marking. The instrument does not specify what details should be included in such a mark. The standard format, based on national practice of states in the region, is for this mark to include: the ECOWAS logo; an internationally recognised country code; a code representing the specific custodian entity; and a unique alphanumeric code, often the weapon’s partial or complete serial number. This type of marking format is used by ECOWAS member states in their report to the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons. See, for example, extracts from Liberia’s 2020 report (Gunpolicy.org, n.d.).
- 21 On 15 May 2024, CAR issued a trace request to the Government of the Russian Federation. At the time of writing, CAR had not yet received a response to this trace request. As a result, CAR cannot assess the legality of the transfers in question.
- 22 On 15 August 2023, CAR issued a trace request to the Government of Bulgaria. At the time of writing, CAR had not yet received a response to this trace request. As a result, CAR cannot assess the legality of the transfers in question.
- 23 Between 2020 and 2024, CAR issued eight trace requests to the Government of Algeria for Model 89-1 rifles, recovered in Niger. At the time of writing, CAR had not yet received a response to these trace requests, and as such cannot assess the legality of the transfers in question.
- 24 In response to a series of trace requests relating to Kbk-AKMS assault rifles manufactured in the 1970s and 1980s, and documented by CAR in Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria, the Government of Poland stated that records no longer exist. For instance, on 29 January 2024, the Government of Poland responded to a formal trace request issued by CAR on 31 July 2019. This response confirms that: 1) Fabryka Broni Works 11, Radom, manufactured the Kbk-AKMS assault rifle bearing the serial number ‘1983 NN 20551’, the subject of CAR’s trace request, in 1983; and 2) taking into consideration the time elapsed since the year of manufacture, the producer could not provide details regarding the export of this item.
- 25 A ‘series’ refers to a discrete weapon model produced by the same manufacturer, with the same year of production, as well as 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 probably refer to a date code signifying the year of production. This CAR report provides the third digit of each legible serial number documented by field investigators to show the extent of clustering or spread of related weapons within a common sub-series.
- 26 On 26 January 2021, the Government of Nigeria responded to a formal trace request issued by CAR on 23 March 2020. This response confirmed that: 1) the Nigerian Army was in possession of the Type 56 rifle bearing the serial number 5203280, the subject of CAR’s trace request; 2) between 2013 and 2017, Boko Haram seized the item from Nigerian troops during encounters in the North East and South East of Nigeria; and 3) neither the Federal Government of Nigeria nor the Nigerian Army authorised the export or transfer of this item.

- On 26 January 2021, the Government of Nigeria responded to a formal trace request issued by CAR on 23 March 2020. This response confirmed that: 1) the Nigerian Army was in possession of the Type 56 rifle bearing the serial number 5203051, the subject of CAR's trace request; 2) between 2013 and 2017, Boko Haram seized the item from Nigerian troops during encounters in the North East and South East of Nigeria; and 3) neither the Federal Government of Nigeria nor the Nigerian Army authorised the export or transfer of this item.
- 27 Between 2020 and 2024, CAR issued two trace requests to the Government of the People's Republic of China. At the time of writing, CAR had not yet received a response to these trace requests. As a result, CAR cannot assess the legality of the transfers in question.
 - 28 For more information on the linkages between criminal actors and Salafi jihadists in the central Sahel, see Clingendael Institute (2024).
 - 29 On 22 September 2020, the Government of Romania responded promptly to a formal trace request issued by CAR on 4 September 2020. This response confirmed that: 1) Cugir Factory manufactured the AKM assault rifle with serial number 1980 KR 2192, the object of CAR's trace request, in 1980; and 2) taking into consideration that the rifle was manufactured more than 30 years ago, the manufacturer could not provide details regarding the export of the item.
 - 30 According to Nigerien judiciary officials, some ISWAP and JAS- affiliated fighters may occasionally engage in petty criminal activities without any instructions from the Salafi jihadist group to which they belong. Confidential source, Diffa, Niger, November 2019. On file with CAR.
 - 31 Confidential source, Mali, April 2024. On file with CAR.
 - 32 CAR issued several trace requests to the Government of the People's Republic of China. At the time of writing, CAR had not yet received a response to these trace requests. As a result, CAR cannot assess the legality of the transfers in question.
 - 33 CAR documented two sub-series beginning with '290'. These were produced by two different factories: rifles with seven-digit serial numbers, i.e. 290XXXX, were manufactured by Factory 9696 and rifles with eight-digit serial numbers (290XXXXX) were manufactured by Factory 9336.
 - 34 Weapons in the 560XXXXX sub-series, the largest Type 56-1 sample that CAR has documented in the central Sahel, feature a distinctive obliteration pattern on their rear sight. Salafi jihadists employed them in several attacks starting in 2015 (CAR, 2016; 2022).
 - 35 CAR documented two sub-series beginning '361'. These were produced by two different factories: Factory 386* and Jianshe Machine Tool Factory.**
 - 36 CAR issued several trace requests to the Government of the Russian Federation. At the time of writing, CAR had not yet received a response to these trace requests. As a result, CAR cannot assess the legality of the transfers in question.
 - 37 CAR did document an AKM rifle from the THXXXX series in Nigeria, after it was seized in the state of Katsina, which shares a border with southern Niger.
 - 38 The other ten rifles were not seized from Salafi jihadist groups. They were recovered from at least two militia groups, as well as from individuals without a known affiliation.
 - 39 This assessment is based on analysis provided to CAR by an independent expert in the region. CAR has retained a copy of this information on file.
 - 40 At the time of publication, CAR was not authorised to disseminate the photos related to the Type 56 assault rifle with the serial number 3772659. CAR was therefore not able to trace this item with the relevant authorities.
 - 41 While the small gap between serial numbers in this case is suggestive of a possible link, CAR cannot be conclusive in its assessment of serial number relationships without more detailed information on the production facility and the marking practices for this model.

- 42 On 22 May 2024, CAR issued a trace request to the Government of the People’s Republic of China. At the time of writing, CAR had not yet received a response to this trace request. As a result, CAR cannot assess the legality of the transfers in question.
- 43 At the time of publication, CAR was not authorised to publish the photos related to the Type 56 assault rifle with the serial number 5719116. CAR was therefore not able to trace this item with the relevant authorities.
- 44 On 15 May 2024, CAR issued a trace request to the Government of the People’s Republic of China. At the time of writing, CAR had not yet received a response to this trace request. As a result, CAR cannot assess the legality of the transfers in question.
- 45 On 15 May 2024, CAR issued a trace request to the Government of the People’s Republic of China. At the time of writing, CAR had not yet received a response to this trace request. As a result, CAR cannot assess the legality of the transfers in question.

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