

ILLICIT WEAPON MARKETS IN SOMALIA

FRONTLINE PERSPECTIVE

THE RISE OF THE G3 RIFLE ON THE ILLICIT MARKET IN SOMALIA

November 2025

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ABBREVIATIONS

ATMIS African Transition Mission in Somalia

CAR Conflict Armament Research

FGS Federal Government of Somalia

SNAF Somali National Armed Forces

KEY FINDINGS

- **Since 2015, when CAR data collectors first observed a G3 7.62 × 51 mm rifle in Somalia, sightings in the country’s illicit market have increased significantly, particularly since 2020.** CAR’s Somalia data set for the period 2020–23 contains 306 G3 rifles, almost half of which were documented in 2023.
- **CAR’s illicit market price analysis suggests that demand for the G3 may be increased in connection with localised conflict dynamics and political tensions, as well as the availability of compatible ammunition.** CAR has seen initial indications that 7.62 × 51mm ammunition, which previously has been extremely uncommon in Somalia, is growing more commonplace. Of the 17 total instances in which CAR data collectors have documented this calibre of ammunition for sale in illicit markets in Somalia, 12 were in 2023.
- **CAR investigators identified a common set of customisations on 25 per cent of the documented G3 rifles, a data subset that this report refers to as ‘ALMRENZ’ G3s.** First documented in May 2021, the ALMRENZ rifles feature modifications such as shortened barrels and retractable stocks, as well as distinctive post-production and counterfeit markings. These weapons were almost certainly modified by independent gunsmiths in Yemen before being trafficked to Somalia.
- **It is CAR’s assessment that the ALMRENZ G3 rifles have been modified primarily to increase their market value.** Similarly, ALMRENZ G3s often employ counterfeit markings to obfuscate the weapons’ country of manufacture, allowing for a higher price to be commanded both locally in Yemen and abroad in Somalia.
- **Weapons with optical sights are currently rare in Somalia’s illicit markets.** As such, it is noteworthy that two-thirds (76 per cent) of the weapons with optical sights in CAR’s data set are G3 rifles. Of the G3s with optics, 93 per cent are ALMRENZ rifles. These figures suggest that a high proportion of scoped weapons in Somalia’s illicit arms markets share a single source of supply. The optics themselves are of low quality and probably fitted onto the weapons by dealers, allowing them to command a slightly higher premium.
- **Only four (1 per cent) of the G3 rifles in CAR’s sample bore end user markings associated with security forces in Somalia,** suggesting that government stockpiles are not a significant source of supply of these rifles to the illicit market.

G3 RIFLES HAVE GROWN MORE PREVALENT IN SOMALIA SINCE 2020

A modified G3 fitted with optics, documented in Somalia in 2021.



METHODOLOGY

CAR often contracts local data collectors, whom it has trained to support data gathering in sensitive locations. This Frontline Perspective draws on information gathered through CAR's network of data collectors in Somalia, who record primary data on weapons and ammunition available for sale at illicit markets throughout Somalia and photograph all items on site. To verify the accuracy of collected information and to ensure as high a degree of confidence as possible, CAR analysts examine the imagery and data related to the exact location, custodian, and sale price of each item.

The data in this Frontline Perspective has some geospatial and temporal limitations. For example, it was not possible for the data collectors to gather a consistent amount of information in each location, largely due to changing levels of access and security. As a result, the sample does not represent a comprehensive national baseline. Nevertheless, the data allows for an unparalleled level of granularity in the analysis of illicit market dynamics in Somalia, to the extent that it allowed CAR to identify inflows of weapons and instances of diversion.

CAR has attempted to trace all weapons featured in this report that were documented by its local data collectors. CAR does not employ formal tracing activities to verify provenance claims on social media or other external sources. In the absence of formal tracing results regarding G3 rifles documented in Somalia, however, CAR analysed additional primary and open-source data in an attempt to identify their provenance. For security purposes, CAR does not always identify individuals or companies associated with social media posts or websites.

Using price data for weapons observed for sale in Somalia, CAR models market demand over time. This Frontline Perspective compares the cost of G3 rifles against an 'AK index'—the average reported price of an AK-pattern assault rifle over time. Since the AK-pattern assault rifle is the most documented weapon in CAR's Somalia data set, it serves as a useful proxy, or 'index', for understanding changes in local weapon demand and market availability.

**THE DATA ALLOWS FOR
AN UNPARALLELED
LEVEL OF GRANULARITY
IN THE ANALYSIS
OF ILLICIT MARKET
DYNAMICS IN SOMALIA**

BACKGROUND

CAR has worked in Somalia for more than a decade and in that time has developed a large data set of weapons and ammunition available for sale at illicit markets in the country. Comprising some 7,000 weapons, this data set was built through a network of data collectors. It has offered CAR and its national partners unparalleled insight into the types of illicit arms circulating in the country and, by extension, in the wider Horn of Africa region. Furthermore, the data set has provided a baseline understanding of what is typical of the market in Somalia. Through its remote surveillance of these markets, CAR

investigators are able to flag emerging trends, instances of recent diversion in near-real time, and fluctuations in demand- and supply-side factors.

This Frontline Perspective examines key trends and observations from CAR's unique illicit market weapons data set for Somalia, as well as recommendations for policy-makers and stakeholders in the region. This publication focuses on the increasing prevalence of the G3 7.62 × 51 mm rifle and its variants in illicit markets in Somalia since 2020.

BOX 1 — THE HECKLER & KOCH G3

The German Heckler & Koch G3 is among the most widely deployed rifles in modern history. Many variants of the platform are currently or were previously licensed for production, including in Bangladesh, France, Greece, Iran, Luxembourg, Mexico, Myanmar, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Sweden, Türkiye, and the United Kingdom.¹

Despite its broad production base and prolific deployment history, the G3 rifle is rare in Somalia, particularly in relation to the ubiquitous AK-pattern assault rifle

chambered in 7.62 × 39 mm. AK-pattern rifles account for 76 per cent of the weapons that CAR's local data collectors documented in Somalia between 2020 and 2023, and 51 per cent of all the weapons in CAR's global database. The affordability, resilience, reliability, and widespread availability of AK-pattern rifles, combined with an abundance of ammunition and longevity-enhancing component interchangeability across models, have entrenched it as the most common weapon across the full range of armed actors in Somalia, as well as with armed groups in many other conflict-affected states.



Figure 1
An unmodified Portuguese G3 rifle manufactured by Fábrika de Braço de Prata.
Source: Image courtesy of the Royal Armouries, UK²

THE G3 RIFLE IN SOMALIA

The recent emergence of the G3 rifle on the illicit market in Somalia represents a notable development in the profile of illicit weapons in the country, for two reasons.³ First, the G3 rifle is chambered in the NATO calibre 7.62 × 51 mm. CAR's data indicates that ammunition in this calibre has been relatively uncommon in Somalia and that it is therefore more expensive than 7.62 × 39 mm rounds (see Box 2 on p.8). Second, the G3 is larger, heavier, usually more expensive, and more conspicuous than the more prevalent AK-pattern rifle.

CAR's data collectors have documented 314 G3 rifles in Somalia, having first observed the weapon in 2015. CAR's data set includes only eight G3 rifles

documented prior to 2020, when the number of G3s in illicit markets began to grow. Between 2020 and 2023, CAR's network documented 306 G3 rifles in Somalia (see Graph 1), an average of 78 per year, compared to just 2 per year between 2015 and 2019. This report uses the data sample collected during the four-year period from 2020-2023 as its framework for analysis.

Comparisons over time are difficult, given fluctuations in security and other access barriers. Nonetheless, Graph 1 highlights some notable spikes in the prevalence of G3 rifles, with increases observed in mid-2021—particularly in June and July—and again in the second half of 2023, with a peak in October.

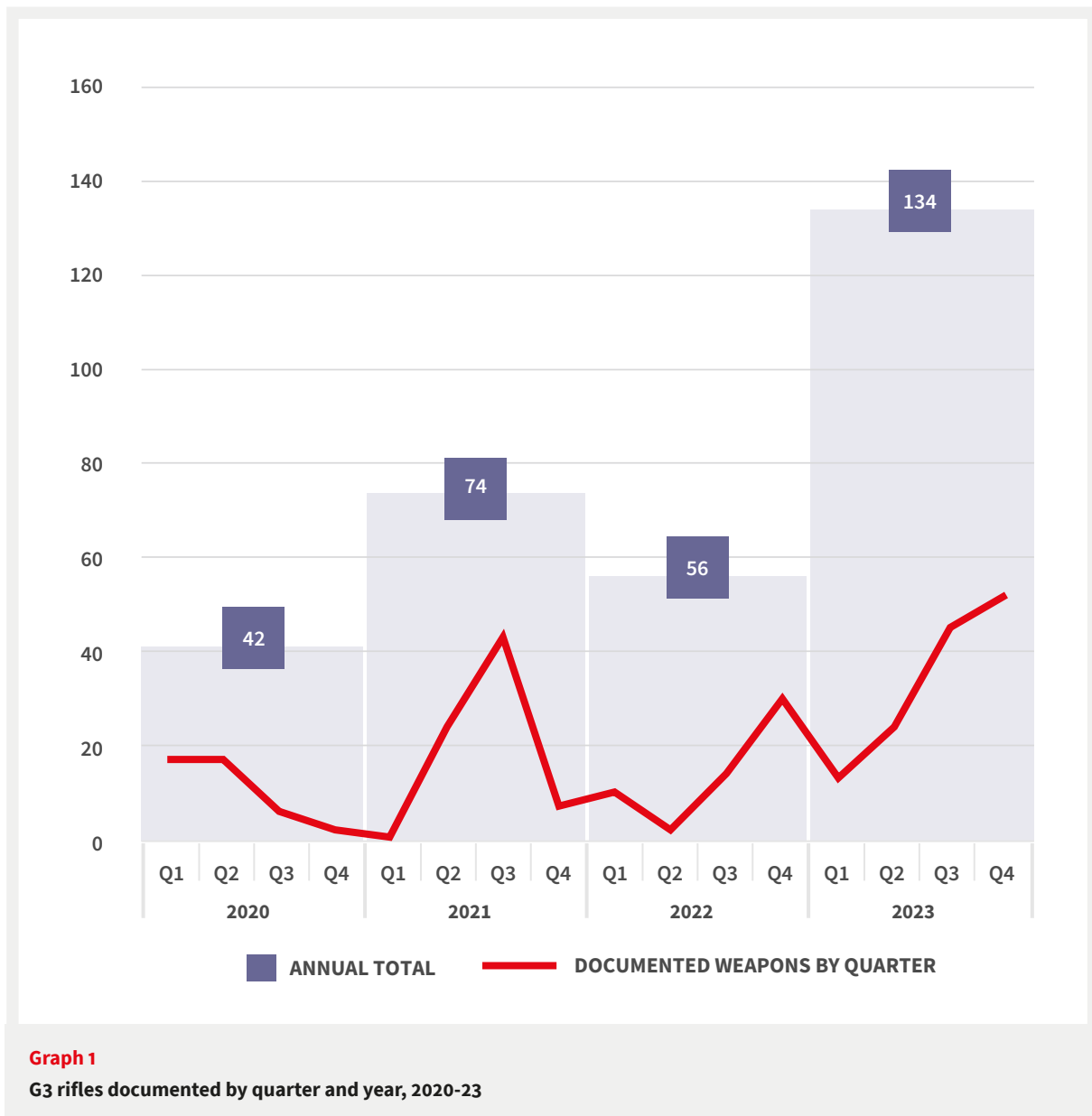


Table 1
G3 rifles documented in illicit markets in Somalia in 2020–23, by country and decade of manufacture

	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s	Unknown	TOTAL
Saudi Arabia		17	63	48	12	1	3	144
United Kingdom		52	1				21	74
Portugal	7	6	2					15
Germany			6					6
Pakistan		6						6
Türkiye		3	1					4
France							1	1
Iran		1						1
Unknown			14				41	55
TOTAL	7	85	87	48	12	1	66	306

As shown in Table 1, the most common variant of the G3 in CAR’s data set was manufactured in Saudi Arabia. The second most common was assembled in the UK, using parts manufactured in Germany⁴. CAR was able to determine the year of manufacture for 240 (78 per cent) of the 306 documented rifles. Of those, 72 per cent were manufactured in the 1970s and 1980s. CAR analysts could not confidently identify the country of manufacture for 55 (18 per cent) of the G3 rifles, many of which bore unusual serial number patterns or counterfeit markings (Box 3, p.13).

All the G3s manufactured after 1990 are from Saudi Arabia, with the most recent example produced in 2017. These rifles are most likely to have leaked onto illicit markets in Yemen before reaching Somalia, in the context of Saudi Arabia’s involvement in the Yemeni civil war since 2015.

**THE MOST COMMON
VARIANT OF THE G3
IN CAR’S DATA SET IS
MANUFACTURED IN
SAUDI ARABIA**

BOX 2 — G3 AMMUNITION (7.62 × 51 MM)

Data for ammunition in illicit markets in Somalia is less comprehensive than it is for weapons. Nevertheless, two key observations emerge from CAR's analysis of evidence collected in the country since 2020:

- First, 7.62 × 51 mm ammunition—compatible with the G3 rifle—appears to be in comparatively scarce supply in Somalia, especially compared to other, more common calibres. Between 2020 and 2023, CAR data collectors documented just 17 instances of 7.62 × 51 mm ammunition for sale in illicit markets, compared to 276 instances of 7.62 × 39 mm ammunition.⁵
- Second, 7.62 × 51mm ammunition may be becoming more readily available in Somalia. Of the 17 instances in which this ammunition was documented for sale in illicit markets, 12 were in 2023.

CAR understands from its analysis and interviews with its network in Somalia that market demand for the G3 rifle used to be limited, due in large part to the difficulty—and therefore expense—of obtaining ammunition in the corresponding calibre. The increasing prevalence of 7.62 × 51mm ammunition in CAR's data since 2021 may thus be correlated with the increasing frequency of G3 rifles on illicit markets in Somalia.

While CAR's sample is limited, it does suggest that changes in the supply of new types of ammunition to the illicit market reflect shifts in demand for the corresponding type of weapon. Diversion of ammunition—including through leakages from State stockpiles and battlefield capture in the context of highly kinetic operations—may also be driving correlated demand for newer and more high-powered weapons to be smuggled into Somalia. From a policy perspective, these findings highlight the importance of safeguarding and controlling ammunition stockpiles.

DIVERSION OF AMMUNITION MAY DRIVE CORRELATED DEMAND FOR NEWER AND MORE HIGHLY POWERED WEAPONS TO BE SMUGGLED INTO SOMALIA



7.62 × 51 mm cartridges documented by local data collectors in Somalia.

MARKINGS AND MODIFICATIONS

POST-PRODUCTION MARKINGS

THE 'ALMRENNZ' MARKING

CAR has observed distinctive post-production marks and modifications on 77 (25 per cent) of the 306 G3 rifles documented in Somalia. Local data collectors first observed these modified rifles in May 2021.

The sample contains 77 rifles that are marked with the word 'ALMRENNZ' or slight variations thereof. CAR has observed seven versions of this mark (Table 2), applied to the left side of the trigger group housing in all cases (Figure 2).

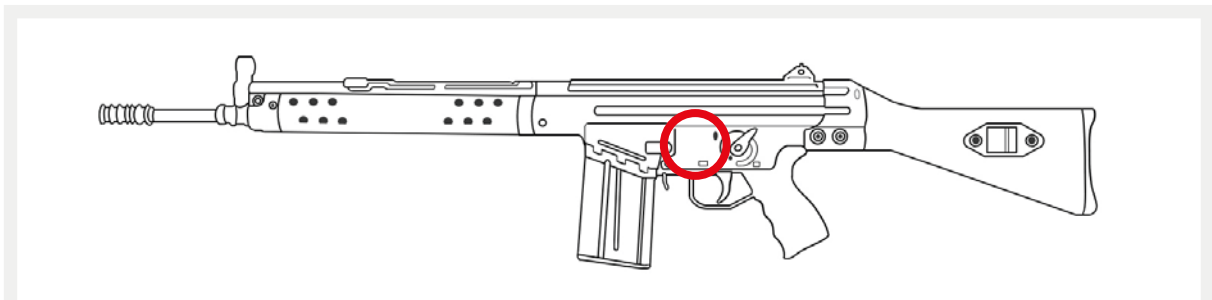


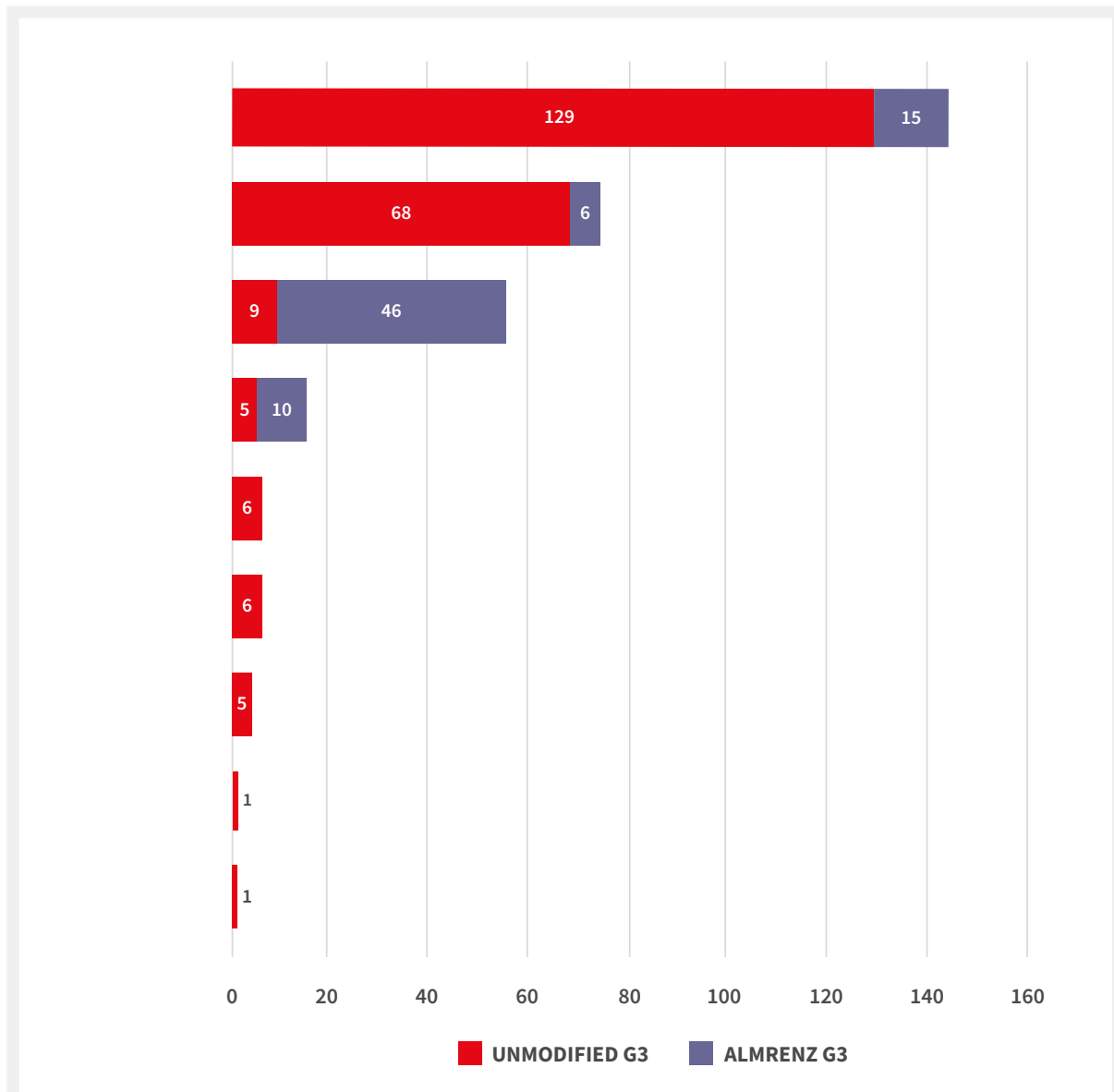
Figure 2
 Location of the 'ALMRENNZ' mark on the left side of a G3 rifle.
 Source: AC-Illust.com

Table 2
 Variations of the 'ALMRENNZ' post-production mark on G3 rifles ⁶

Example	Spelling	Number of rifles	Percentage
	ALMRENNZ	17	22.1%
	ALMARNEZ	17	22.1%
	ALMARNZ	15	19.5%
	ALMARENZ	14	18.2%
	ALMERNZ	11	14.3%
	AL-MRANEZ	1	1.3%
	MARINZ	1	1.3%

Overall, the markings are of a similar size and placement. CAR has also determined that the font is broadly the same across the sample, albeit with apparent inconsistencies in the depth, width, and spacing of letters. One distinct exception is the ‘MARINZ’ mark, which is arranged in a radial manner (see Table 2). Most of the markings have been embellished with red paint; CAR observed yellow or white paint used on only a few weapons in the sample. The diversity in terms of spelling, spacing, and colouring suggests that different gunsmiths applied the marks with different tools—most likely letter stamps, chisels, or, in one case, laser engraving. It is CAR’s understanding that ‘ALMRENZ’ and its variations are a transliteration of ‘the Marines’ in Arabic.⁷

CAR observed ‘ALMRENZ’ markings on G3s manufactured and assembled in Portugal, Saudi Arabia, and the UK (Graph 2), indicating that their application is not specific to G3s manufactured by any single country. Of the 55 G3s for which CAR could not reliably determine the country of manufacture, owing primarily to counterfeit markings and unknown serial number patterns, 46 (84 per cent) featured the ‘ALMRENZ’ mark. This suggests that the presence of the ‘ALMRENZ’ mark is strongly correlated with the presence of other obfuscating—and potentially counterfeit—markings on G3 rifles. Box 3 (p.13) compares suspected counterfeit weapons documented in Somalia with authentic G3 rifles, including one made available for comparison by the Royal Armouries in the UK.⁸



Graph 2
G3s featuring ‘ALMRENZ’ marks as a proportion of the sample collected in 2020–23, by country of manufacture

THE 'USA' MARKING

CAR observed the counterfeit post-production mark 'USA' on 49 (64 per cent) of the ALMRENZ rifles. CAR has not observed the same mark on any other weapon in Somalia. In almost all cases, the 'USA' mark is located on the left side of the receiver near the serial number, manufacturer, and proof marks, as indicated by the red circle in Figure 3. In only two cases has the 'USA' mark been applied adjacent to the 'ALMRENZ' mark on the trigger group housing, as shown by the blue circle in Figure 3; a photograph of one of these marks is provided in Figure 4.

The analysis that follows focuses solely on the 'USA' mark applied to the receiver, as it is the most common.

As is the case with the 'ALMRENZ' markings, red paint has been applied to most of the 'USA' lettering. CAR has observed the use of white paint in only one case (see Figure 5). Although the 'USA' marks are consistent in terms of positioning on the left side of the receiver, the font, size, and paint colour vary. In some cases, spaces or dots separate the letters (see Table 3).



Figure 3

Locations of the 'USA' mark on the left side of ALMRENZ G3 rifles: common (red circle) and atypical (blue square).

Source: AC-Illust.com



Figure 4

An atypical 'USA' mark applied above the 'ALMARNZ' mark on the left side of the trigger group housing of a G3 rifle.

Documented by a local data collector in Somalia, June 2021.



Figure 5

Differing formats and colourings of ‘USA’ markings on G3 rifles manufactured in Saudi Arabia,⁹ Portugal,¹⁰ and an unknown country.¹¹ All of these marks appear on the left side of the receiver.

Documented by local data collectors in Somalia in June 2021, July 2021, and August 2023, respectively.

Analysis of these two-mark variations allows patterns to emerge (see Table 4). For instance, 15 of the 17 rifles marked with the ‘ALMRENZ’ spelling do not feature the ‘USA’ mark. In contrast, the other most frequent spelling, ‘ALMARNEZ’, which also appears on 17 weapons in the data set, is always accompanied by the ‘USA’ mark in red paint with dots. The only rifle with the ‘USA’ mark in white paint also bears the unique spelling ‘AL-MRANEZ’. This variety in marking combinations reinforces the supposition that multiple gunsmiths are involved in the application of the ‘ALMRENZ’ and ‘USA’ markings on G3 rifles.

Having developed an understanding of other counterfeit markings observed in Somalia, CAR infers that the ‘USA’ post-production markings were probably applied to increase the sale price of the weapons by making them appear as though they had been manufactured in the United States. Similarly, the ‘ALMRENZ’ markings were probably applied to give the impression that these weapons were previously in the service of the US Marines, with the aim of conferring additional prestige to the weapons and thus increasing their monetary value.¹²

Table 3

Different combinations of ‘ALMRENZ’ and ‘USA’ markings on G3 rifles documented in Somalia

‘USA’ mark format and colour		‘ALMRENZ’ mark spelling								
		ALMRENZ	ALMARNEZ	ALMARNZ	ALMARENZ	ALMERNZ	AL-MRANEZ	MARINZ	N/A	Total
	No mark	15		1	9	2		1		28
U.S.A	Red paint with dots	2	17	11	3	1			1	35
USA	Red paint without dots			3	1	7				11
U.S.A	White paint with dots						1			1
USA	No paint and no dots				1	1				2
	Total	17	17	15	14	11	1	1	1	77

No Value
 1-5
 5-10
 11+

CAR understands from interviews with multiple local parties, as well as from data gathered through its documentation of weapons available for sale in illicit markets, that the price a weapon commands in Somalia depends in large part on its country of manufacture. For example, AK-pattern rifles from

the former Soviet Union and former Warsaw Pact countries—especially Poland—are commonly among the most highly valued weapons. This is explored in depth in the section analysing market dynamics (pp. 21-24).

BOX 3 — COUNTERFEIT MANUFACTURER AND PROOF MARKINGS

CAR has compared the markings observed on G3 rifles in Somalia with those on authentic G3 rifles manufactured in different countries, made available by the Royal Armouries in the United Kingdom.¹³ This exercise highlighted the presence of what CAR believes to be counterfeit manufacturer and proof markings on both unmodified and ALMRENZ G3 rifles observed on illicit markets in Somalia. Figures 6 and 7 provide examples of suspected counterfeit markings, probably designed to obfuscate the origin of the weapons.

In CAR's assessment, as with the case of the 'ALMRENZ' and 'USA' markings, the application of counterfeit manufacturer and proof marks is aimed at adding value to the weapons. Some of the weapons that feature the 'ALMRENZ' and 'USA' marks also display suspected counterfeit German and British manufacturer markings.

Figure 6

A Portuguese G3 rifle with the serial number 182836,¹⁴ made by Fábrica de Braço de Prata in 1970 and featuring suspected counterfeit proof and manufacturer marks.

Documented by a local data collector in Somalia, on 28 June 2021.



Figure 6 compares the marks observed in Somalia with two genuine marks: the genuine 'EN' mark is from a UK-assembled G3 rifle that CAR photographed on 30 May 2023 at the Royal Armouries in the UK. The genuine Ulm proof mark (antler mark) was featured on a G3 documented in Somalia, in October 2023.

Figure 7

A G3 rifle bearing the serial number 07772,¹⁵ manufactured by the Military Industries Corporation in Saudi Arabia in 1976.

Documented by a local data collector in Somalia in June 2021.



The G3 rifle in Figure 7 bears several suspected counterfeit proof and manufacturer marks. For comparison, the example of genuine markings was taken from a G3 rifle documented by CAR in Sudan in May 2012.

MODIFICATIONS

All the G3 rifles bearing ‘ALMRENZ’ marks have the same distinctive modifications:

- short barrels;
- a retractable stock; and
- a ‘South African R2-style’ hand guard.¹⁶

In addition, many of the G3s are either already fitted with an optical sight or feature a mounting rail to accommodate one.

Such features are likely to make the ALMRENZ G3s more attractive to potential buyers. These rifles may even constitute a localised ‘brand’ of G3 and may therefore be more profitable for dealers, as examined in the next section. Shorter, more compact weapons offer users greater ease of carrying—and concealing—than do longer, fixed-stock weapons (as shown in Figure 8).¹⁷

The short-barrelled ALMRENZ rifles are visually most similar to the G3KA4 variant of the G3—the

shortest variant of the rifle, which has a 12.9-inch (322-mm) barrel and retractable stock.¹⁸ Unlike the rifles documented in Somalia, however, no section of the barrel is visible between the muzzle device and front sight block of the original, extremely rare G3KA4 variant (Vickers et al, 2024, pp. 111-119). Furthermore, some of the rifles appear to have slightly differing barrel lengths, indicating a degree of inconsistency in the suspected post-production modifications. These observations help to rule out the possibility that the short-barrelled G3s are original G3KA4 variants.

CAR assesses that the barrels of the ALMRENZ G3s were most probably modified by independent gunsmiths in Yemen. This deduction is supported by interviews with CAR’s local data collectors, promotional material available on social media, such as the post shown in Figure 9, and publicly available research (Silah Report, 2019). All these sources attest to the common practice of weapon customisation and modification in Yemen, a practice that is the focus of the next section of this Frontline Perspective.



Figure 8

Two Portuguese G3 rifles. Top: A G3A3 with a fixed stock and original handguard. Bottom: A modified, more compact version of the above rifle, featuring a retractable stock, shortened barrel, and cut-down, R2-style handguard.

Top: Photographed by CAR investigators at the Royal Armouries in the UK in May 2023.

Bottom: Documented by a local data collector in Somalia in November 2021.¹⁹

OPTICAL SIGHTS

The presence of optical sights, or ‘optics’, on a large number of the G3 rifles is noteworthy given that less than 2 per cent of weapons in CAR’s broader Somalia data set documented between 2020 and 2023 feature optics. Of the 59 weapons with optics, 45 (76 per cent) are G3s, and of those, 42 (93 per cent) are ALMRENTZ rifles. These figures suggest that a high proportion of the scoped weapons for sale in illicit markets in Somalia may have a common source—potentially the same one supplying the ALMRENTZ G3 rifles.

CAR considers the documented optics, including ones with integrated laser pointers, to be relatively cheap and of low quality, corresponding to types that are commonly available on online consumer retail sites (see Figures 10-11). CAR has not confirmed the country of manufacture for these optics, none of which appear to be products for military or sporting use. They are most probably aimed at the airsoft or airgun consumer market and thus serve little to no tactical value, principally owing to their tendency to be damaged or misaligned by the effects of weapon recoil.

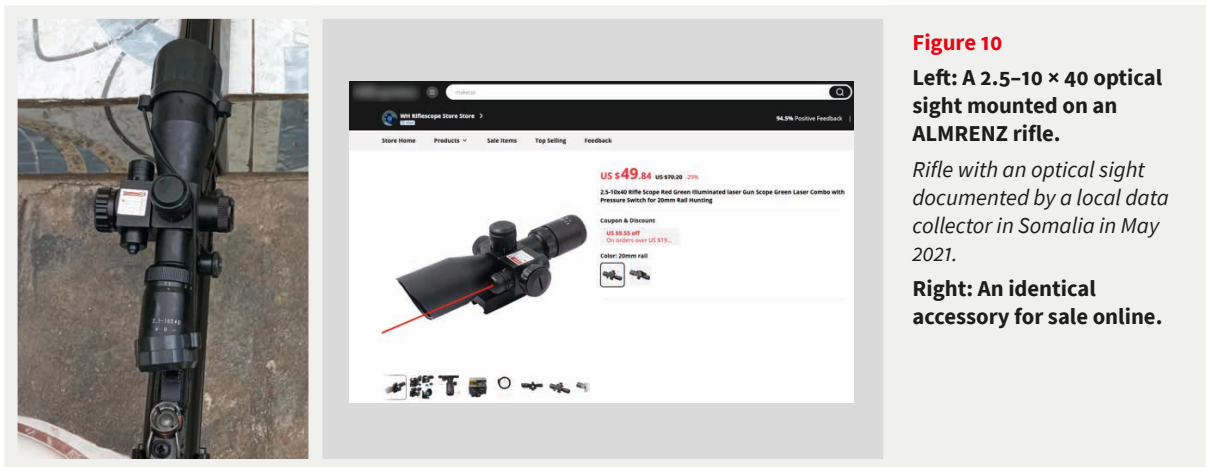


Figure 10

Left: A 2.5–10 × 40 optical sight mounted on an ALMRENTZ rifle.

Rifle with an optical sight documented by a local data collector in Somalia in May 2021.

Right: An identical accessory for sale online.

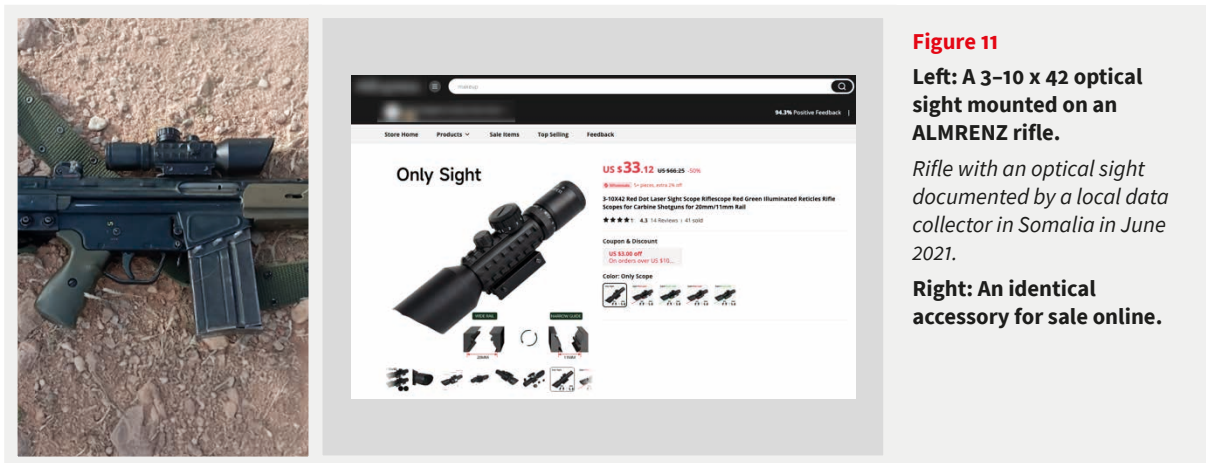


Figure 11

Left: A 3–10 x 42 optical sight mounted on an ALMRENTZ rifle.

Rifle with an optical sight documented by a local data collector in Somalia in June 2021.

Right: An identical accessory for sale online.

OF THE 45 G3S WITH OPTICS, 93 PER CENT ARE ALMRENTZ RIFLES, SUGGESTING A POSSIBLE COMMON SUPPLY SOURCE FOR BOTH THE SIGHTS AND THE MODIFIED G3 RIFLES

TRADE LINKS TO YEMEN

CAR found very limited evidence to suggest that Somali government stockpiles are a contributing source of G3 rifles into the illicit market. Official import notification data shows that the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) has imported limited numbers of G3 rifles, all of which have been manufactured in Türkiye and that the FGS has used to equip certain units of the Somali National Armed Forces (SNAF). Having strengthened its weapon-marking capacity in recent years, the government now applies end-user markings on close to 100 per cent of weapons that are officially imported into Mogadishu.²⁰ Officially imported G3s are therefore extremely likely to bear government end-user markings identifying them as belonging to the SNAF.

Only four of the 306 G3s—and, critically, none of the ‘ALMRENZ’ rifles—documented in Somalia between 2020 and 2023 bore FGS markings, suggesting that government stockpiles represent a negligible source of supply of G3s to the illicit

market. The same holds true for G3 rifles deployed by the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS): not one of the documented G3 rifles bears the markings of ATMIS contingent forces, which also make it a regular practice to apply end-user markings on their weapons.²¹

Having largely ruled out internal diversion as a significant factor in the supply of G3 rifles into illicit markets, CAR undertook international tracing as the second line of inquiry. However, due to the age of the G3 rifles in the data set, CAR was unable to obtain meaningful trace responses for the majority of the rifles. Furthermore, CAR was unable to confidently identify the country of manufacture for 55 (18%) of the G3 rifles, thus further undermining tracing efforts.²² In the absence of trace information to illuminate the original supply chains of the G3 rifles from their manufacturers, CAR has additionally gathered and analysed primary and open-source data to help examine the provenance of the rifles in Somalia.



Figure 12

A G3 rifle with post-production ‘ALMARENZ’ and ‘USA’ markings, for sale on the Telegram channel of a private arms dealer in Sana’a, Yemen, April 2023.

Source: Telegram

Based on this research, CAR is confident that the modifications seen on ALMRENZ G3 rifles were not carried out in Somalia and that these rifles were almost certainly supplied illicitly from overseas, most likely from Yemen. Yemen has long been a regional nexus for the inflow of arms, whether from Iranian-linked dhows funnelling weapons to Ansar Allah ('Houthi') forces or through leakage from weapon shipments supplied by the Saudi coalition (Bahadur, 2020; UN Monitoring Group, 2018, para. 57). Lethal aid entering Yemen in recent years has further contributed to a one-sided illicit arms trade flow between Yemen and Somalia. Buttressing these transfers are centuries-old trade networks linking Somalia and Yemen across the Gulf of Aden, as well as Somalia's consistently buoyant demand for weapons—exacerbated by flaring internal conflict and, until December 2023, a UN arms embargo (UNSC, 2023).²³

The illicit weapons market in Yemen is far more developed than that in Somalia (Gardner, 2024; Horton, 2017). Yemen's market appears to offer a wide array of choice, ranging from AK-pattern weapons from the 1950s to 1970s, to 'status'



Figure 13

G3 rifles with post-production 'ALMRENZ' and 'USA' marks, shortened barrels, and retractable stocks, for sale in Sana'a, Yemen, posted on X on 30 August 2023.

Source: X, on file with CAR. Last accessed 30 August 2023

weapons, characterised by laser designators and other attachments that lend them a 'special forces' aesthetic. Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen, such as Sana'a, have proven to be fertile ground for arms dealers, who conduct their trade freely in markets and bazaars, while also soliciting business openly via social media platforms (Gardner, 2024).

CAR has regularly identified ALMRENZ and other G3 rifles for sale in illicit markets in Yemen, not only through in-person documentation by CAR's data collector network in Somalia, but also via social media platforms such as X and Telegram (see Figure 9 on p.15 and Figure 12 on p.17).

A 2024 report by the United Nations Panel of Experts on Yemen also reported examples of G3 rifles available for sale in Houthi-controlled areas (UNSC, 2024b). The countries of manufacture for these weapons, as highlighted by the Panel, align with the four most prevalent countries identified in CAR's Somalia sample, namely Germany, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, and the UK (UNSC, 2024b, Annexes 122-124, and 147). CAR found several common prefixes between the serial numbers of 26 UK-manufactured G3 rifles reported by the Panel with those in CAR's Somalia data set. In one notable case, a weapon in Yemen and another documented by one of CAR's data collectors in Somalia appear to differ by only 140 serial numbers.²⁴

The ALMRENZ rifles for sale in Yemen conform to the same typology as those documented in Somalia, as well as those seen further afield, including in Sudan (see Box 4 on p.20). They are manufactured in a range of countries and many of them present the same set of modifications, such as a shortened barrel, retractable stock, and low-quality optic, as well as the 'ALMRENZ' and 'USA' markings accented in red, yellow, or white, or sometimes a combination of all three. Figure 13 shows typical ALMRENZ G3 rifles for sale on social networks in Yemen.

THE ALMRENZ RIFLES FOR SALE IN YEMEN CONFORM TO THE SAME TYPOLOGY AS THOSE DOCUMENTED IN SOMALIA

In summary, five key factors support CAR's hypothesis that the G3 rifles in Somalia are of Yemeni origin:

- the high proportion of Saudi-manufactured rifles (47 per cent) in CAR's G3 sample, as detailed in Table 1 on page 7—particularly notable given that Saudi Arabia has reportedly provided material support to allied groups in Yemen during the conflict;²⁵
- ALMRENZ G3 rifles observed for sale on social media in Yemen (Figure 13) exhibiting the same typological features as rifles documented by CAR in Sudan and Somalia;
- the near-total absence of G3 rifles with FGS end-user markings in the sample;²⁶
- testimony and imagery from CAR's data collection network regarding illicit shipments of G3 rifles from Yemen to Somalia (Figure 14); and
- strong linkages between Yemen and Somalia for other types of weapons (most notably Type 56-1 assault rifles), based on serial number groupings and similar post-production markings (Bahadur, 2021, pp. 5–6).

MULTIPLE FACTORS SUPPORT CAR'S HYPOTHESIS THAT THE G3 RIFLES IN SOMALIA ARE OF YEMENI ORIGIN



Figure 14

Short-barrelled G3 rifles in Somalia, in June 2021, immediately after their alleged illicit import from Yemen.

Source: Confidential, on file with CAR

BOX 4 — G3 RIFLES IN SUDAN

Public reports, including multiple social media sources, have identified the distinctive ALMRENZ rifles in Sudan in the context of the conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces that erupted in April 2023 (Amnesty International, 2024, see Figure 15).²⁷ CAR's analysis of the images suggests that the rifles are based on Portuguese and Saudi variants of the G3.

The reported spread of these weapons across the African continent, potentially from independent gunsmiths in Yemen, is striking. It highlights the possible role of Yemen not only as a market for weapon flows to Somalia, but also as a proliferation hub, fuelling other conflicts across the continent.



Figure 15

Alleged members of the Rapid Support Forces holding a G3 rifle posted on X on 28 June 2023. The weapon bears post-production markings and features that were also observed on ALMRENZ rifles in Somalia and Yemen.

Source: X, on file with CAR. Last accessed 6 February 2025

THE SPREAD OF THESE WEAPONS ACROSS THE AFRICAN CONTINENT SUGGESTS YEMEN'S POSSIBLE ROLE IN BOTH WEAPON FLOWS TO SOMALIA AND BROADER PROLIFERATION, FUELLING CONFLICTS ACROSS THE REGION



G3 rifle among a collection of predominantly AK-pattern rifles for sale in Somalia.

MARKET DYNAMICS

ALMRENZ RIFLES VS. THE UNMODIFIED G3

Weapons in Somalia exhibit all the market characteristics of a ‘normal’ market good: when tensions boil over or conflict flares, demand for rifles increases and, in response, their prices rise, creating an economic opportunity—in this case, for arms traders. Conversely, a reduction in the market value of particular weapon types in Somalia may indicate a sudden increase in supply, perhaps as a result of a large illicit shipment, or a reduction in demand as tensions ease.

Comparing weapons available in illicit markets in Somalia and Yemen shows that certain rifles typically sell for significantly higher prices in Somalia. In Yemen, for example, CAR observed an ALMRENZ rifle with a mounted optic, originally manufactured by Fábrica de Braço de Prata and in seemingly good condition, advertised for approximately USD 900 via Telegram in Sana’a. In Somalia, an analogous Portuguese G3 rifle—of equivalent age and condition, and with the same type of optic—may sell for over USD 2,000, depending on the factors driving demand at the time. The disparity in pricing between Somalia and Yemen also holds for other assault rifles and handguns in CAR’s database.

On the Somali market, ALMRENZ rifles tend to fetch a notably higher price than their standard, unmodified G3 counterparts (see Figure 16), even

when they are of comparable age and condition, and documented in similar periods and locations. The price differential provides a strong financial incentive to individuals who modify weapons, as doing so can translate into a significantly higher profit margin.

The appearance of ALMRENZ rifles in Somalia coincided with a notable step change in the market value of all G3s. In 2020, the average price for an unmodified G3 rifle in Somalia was less than USD 1,000. In 2021, that average rose to above USD 1,700. In the same year, ALMRENZ rifles started to appear in Somalia, reaching a peak average price of over USD 2,100 in the second quarter of 2021. As shown in Graph 3, the data indicates a clear increase in demand around that time, specifically for G3 rifles relative to AK-pattern rifles in the regions where CAR data collectors documented the weapons.²⁸

Concurrently, the first 7.62 × 51 mm ammunition started to appear in CAR’s Somalia data set in 2021, coinciding with the jump in the market value of the G3 rifle (Box 2 on page p.8). CAR hypothesises that this price increase may have been precipitated by the sudden availability of the associated ammunition. CAR is unable to make a conclusive assessment, however, in part because its data on illicit ammunition is less consistent over time than its data on illicit weapons.



Figure 16

Left: An unmodified, standard G3 rifle for sale for USD 1,400 in Somalia.

Rifle Documented by a local data collector in April 2022.

Right: An ALMRENZ G3 rifle for sale for USD 2,000 in Somalia.

Advertised on Telegram in April 2022, on file with CAR.

Whether the ammunition for G3s came onto the illicit market via internal leakage from state stocks or via illicit external supply into Somalia is unclear. It is possible that both factors have contributed to the overall increase in supply, as large donations

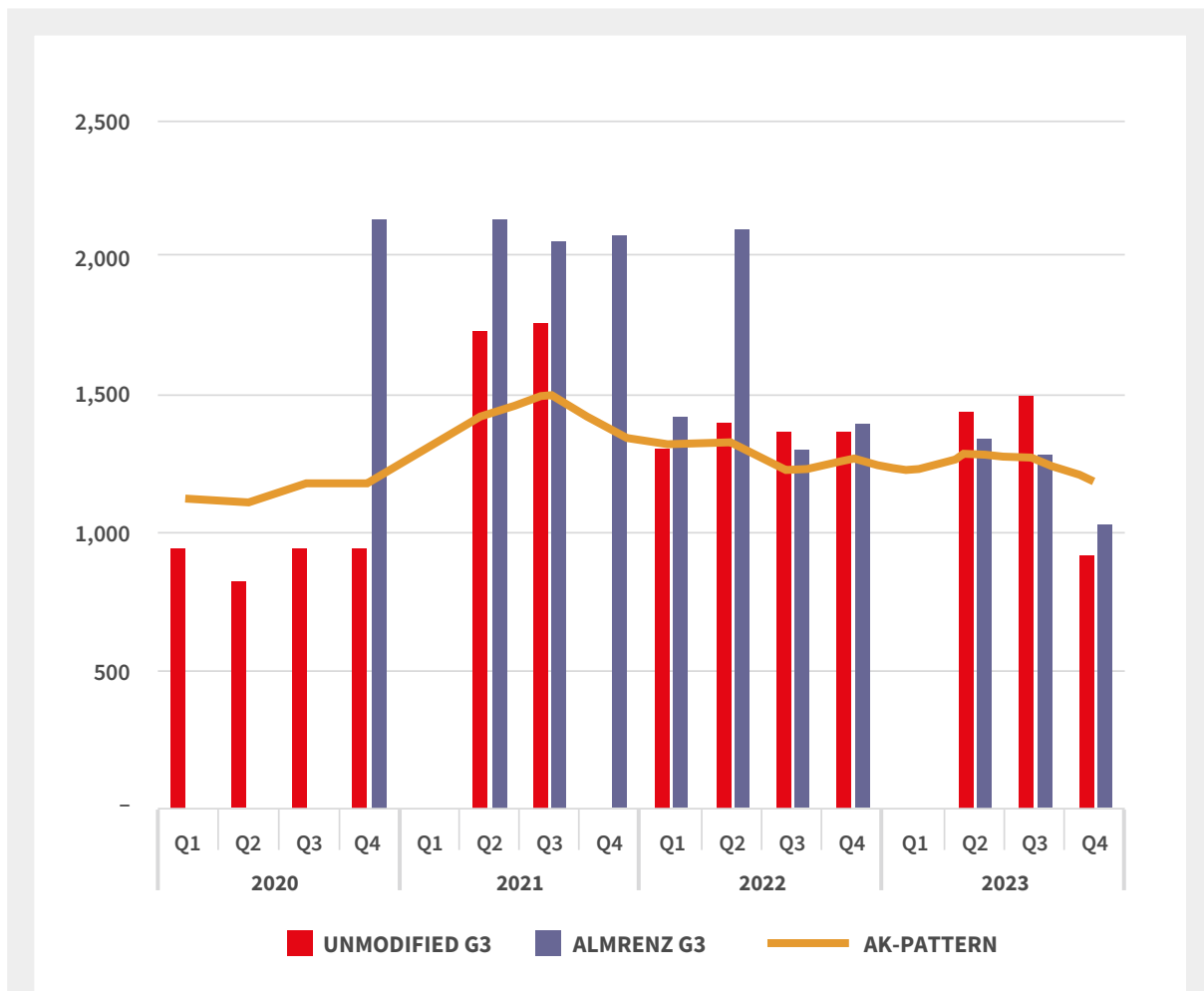
of lethal aid from foreign governments, combined with highly kinetic operations underway in remote parts of the country, have created extremely challenging conditions under which to prevent the leakage of ammunition into the open market.

THE G3 VS. THE ‘AK INDEX’

In Somalia, ALMRENZ rifles also tend to fetch a higher price (USD 1,040–2,136) than AK-pattern rifles (USD 829–1,775), as shown in Graph 3. Testimony provided to CAR by its network suggests that customers deem G3 rifles to be more powerful and significantly louder than AK rifles. The latter characteristic is apparently thought to allow for more effective suppression of the enemy during skirmishes in the bush. Compared to a standard AK-pattern rifle discharging its regular 7.62 × 39 mm ammunition, the report from a shortened barrel discharging 7.62 × 51 mm ammunition is indeed

likely to be far louder, just as the muzzle flash can be expected to be more intense.

Towards the end of 2023, the price of both unmodified G3 rifles and ‘ALMRENZ’ G3 rifles dipped below that of the ‘AK index’.²⁹ A possible explanation for this decline in price is an influx of G3 rifles into Somalia over the same period, as these transfers saturated the market. Around this time, CAR’s network in Somalia provided anecdotal evidence that lent credence to this theory (see Figure 17, p.24).



Graph 3
Average price of the ALMRENZ rifle versus the unmodified G3 and AK-pattern rifle, 2020-23

CONFLICT DRIVERS TO MARKET DEMAND

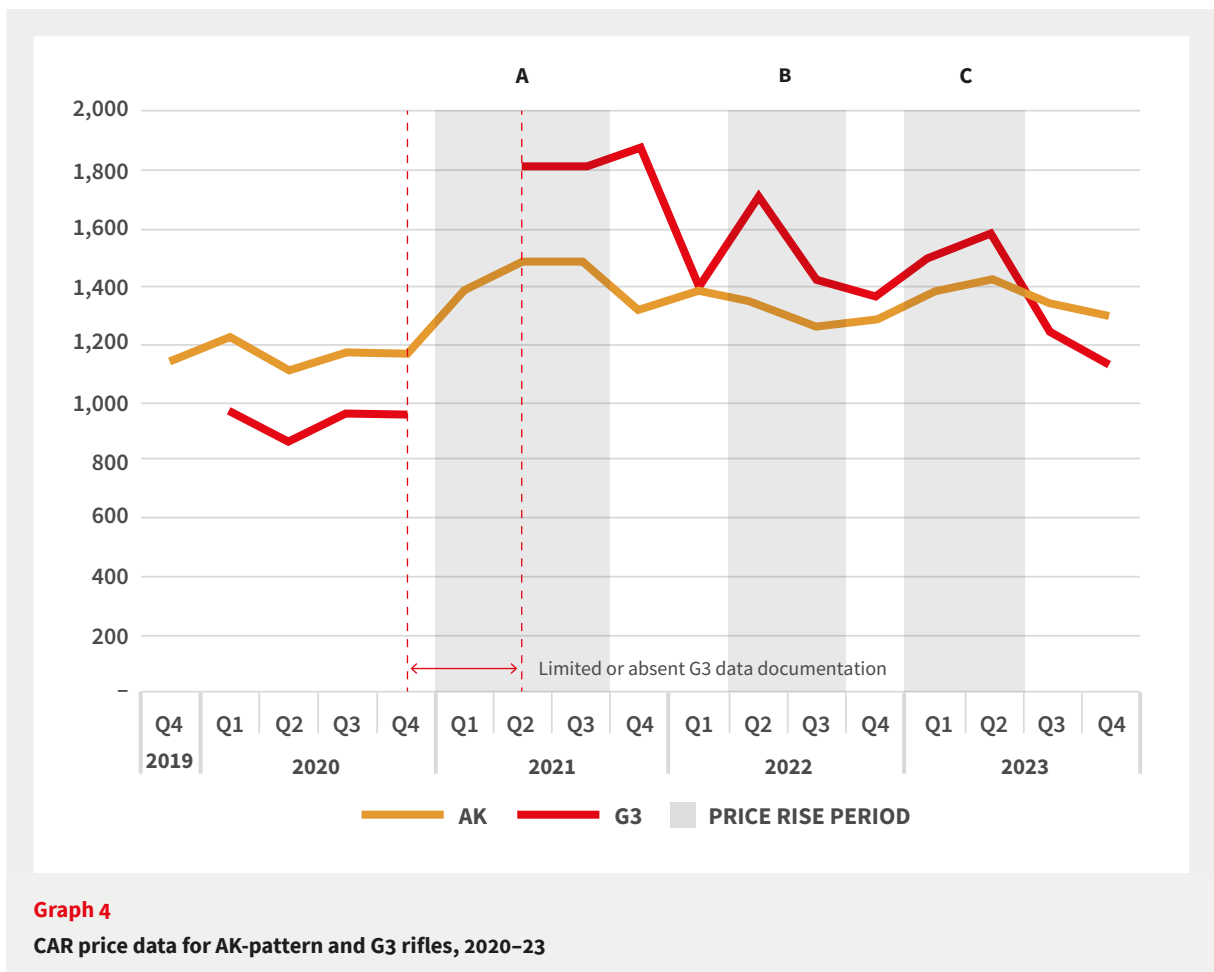
Conflicts and political tensions have directly affected the dynamics of the illicit weapons market in Somalia. In 2021, for example, the prolonged election cycle led to escalating political tensions which in turn resulted in a pronounced rise in the price of weapons (section A on Graph 4). Over the first half of the year the average price of a generic AK-pattern rifle appreciated by about 25 per cent, from around USD 1,200 to USD 1,500, indicating a general increase in market value of weapons as tensions intensified. Indeed, the average price of G3 rifles was also conspicuously inflated in much of 2021.

In mid-2022, the Federal Government of Somalia launched a major counteroffensive against Al-Shabaab, utilising local clan militias known as the Macawisley (section B on Graph 4). The AK index does not reveal a significant surge in the price of AK-pattern weapons during this period, likely reflecting reduced demand due to the fact that Macawisley troops were already partially armed with their own personal weapons or those recovered during the course of fighting.³⁰

Throughout much of 2023, the demand for rifles surged as fighting broke out in northern Somalia. Rifle prices increased accordingly, only to drop again towards the end of the year, as weapons flooded the market to meet demand (section C on Graph 4).

Despite the increasing prevalence of the G3 rifle in Somalia, CAR has yet to see any indication that Al-Shabaab or Islamic State-affiliated fighters are routinely adopting this weapon system, although there is every possibility that this could change.³¹ Notably, Al Shabaab has been stepping up its presence in northern Somalia, including by

THE AVERAGE PRICE OF G3 RIFLES WAS CONSPICUOUSLY INFLATED IN MUCH OF 2021



Graph 4
CAR price data for AK-pattern and G3 rifles, 2020–23

appointing an emir to cover the region. The north of the country has become a fertile recruiting environment due to simmering clan tensions among the Isaaq, as well as a controversial preliminary agreement signed between Somaliland and Ethiopia in January 2024³², granting Ethiopia commercial access to its ports in exchange for the recognition of Somaliland as an independent state. There is growing concern that Al-Shabaab fighters may seek to arm themselves via existing trade networks and associated illicit markets, with an eye to establishing and expanding a foothold in the north. Monitoring fluctuations in demand for certain rifles on illicit markets may provide a degree of early warning as to the likely adoption of certain weapon systems by terrorist actors in Somalia, and the changing threat picture that it represents.

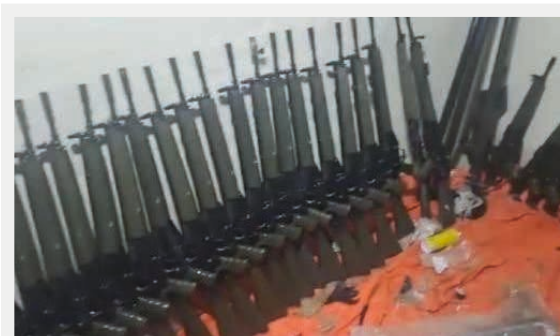


Figure 17

Screenshot of a video showing a consignment of G3 rifles from Yemen delivered to Somalia in early December 2023. Fixed-stock, long-barrelled G3 variants are displayed alongside short-barrelled G3s.

Source: Confidential, on file with CAR



A G3 rifle amongst illicit weapons for sale in Somalia.

CONCLUSION

CAR has seen a stark increase in the prevalence of G3 rifles in Somalia's illicit markets since 2020. Numerous factors, most notably the appearance of the distinctive ALMRENT rifles, all link the G3's rise in prominence to the flourishing illicit weapons market in Yemen. These rifles are also now reportedly appearing in other regional conflicts further afield, such as Sudan.

For decades, AK-pattern weapons have been the most common assault rifles for armed groups active in the Horn of Africa. In the case of Somalia, recent evidence suggests that this dynamic may be shifting. As weapons have flooded into the thriving, unregulated economy of the Yemeni civil war and flowed out via a network of well-established illicit trade links, the range of rifles for sale to militants operating in the wider region has expanded. No longer are buyers confined to purchasing old AK-pattern rifles; today they encounter a broader choice of weaponry, facilitated in large part by arms dealers who are expanding their business from Yemen to Somalia. The further proliferation of alternative weapon types and calibres in Somalia is likely however—in the short term at least—to be limited by the availability of ammunition, a key focus for continuing monitoring efforts.

As this publication demonstrates, the appearance of the ALMRENT rifles signals a possible broadening of the illicit weapons markets in Somalia. Without sustained, intelligence-led maritime border security operations in high-threat areas along Somalia's northern and north-eastern coastline, illicit trade is likely to continue unabated. Policing Somalia's long and remote coastlines requires continuous monitoring, combined with sustained support to regional maritime and law enforcement actors to bolster capacity. Resources pledged to combat this challenge are stretched across numerous competing priorities, while interdicting authorities have decried the absence of effective deterrence to maritime arms smugglers as a result of insufficiently mature judicial systems on either side of the Gulf of Aden (UNODC, 2024, p. 24).

Notably, CAR's analysis finds that—in the case of the G3 rifle—there is little evidence pointing to internal diversion from within the Somali security

infrastructure itself. In recent years, the Somali government and its international partners have undertaken extensive efforts to strengthen the security of weapons and ammunition held by SNAF. The fact that only four out of 306 rifles in CAR's data set can be linked to the FGS supports the notion that the primary source of supply of the G3 rifles is illicit trafficking from outside Somalia. Current efforts to register and account for Somali state-held weapons and ammunition could be further bolstered via the augmentation of existing end-user verification processes, the implementation of modern accountability systems, backed by legal reform and proactive investigative bodies charged with identifying and prosecuting instances of illicit trade in weapons.

THE APPEARANCE OF THE ALMRENT RIFLES SIGNALS A POSSIBLE BROADENING OF THE ILLICIT WEAPONS MARKETS IN SOMALIA

For security forces, policy-makers, and other regional stakeholders, the increasing prevalence of the G3 rifle on the illicit market in Somalia may be an important indicator of a broadening in the range of weapons arriving illicitly from overseas and symptomatic of deepening trade links to the flourishing arms markets of Yemen. The type and availability of weapons for sale on the illicit market in Somalia therefore require continued monitoring and coordinated action. Through the tracking of arms and ammunition flows, and specifically by monitoring sensitive market indicators like pricing data, CAR is able to provide critical insight into the dynamics of weapon proliferation that may otherwise go unheeded and unconsidered. As the nature of the conflict in Somalia and in the wider region shifts over time, so too will the nature of the materiel available via illicit markets to non-state and terrorist groups operating in the country.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 For additional information about the history of the Heckler & Koch G3, see Jenzen-Jones (2017, p. 24) and Thompson (2019).
- 2 Photograph taken by CAR staff at the Royal Armouries, Leeds, UK, courtesy of museum staff. The weapon was subject to normal safety procedures prior to photographing; its empty magazine was attached for the purposes of the photograph.
- 3 In October 2024, the UN Panel of Experts on Somalia reported the presence of modified G3A3 and A4 pattern rifles in Somalia. The Panel, citing CAR data collection, additionally noted that these weapons were one of several that “falls outside the regular typology of weapons and ammunition observed in Somalia” (UNSC, 2024a).
- 4 CAR understands that the Royal Small Arms Factory (Enfield) in the UK produced customised G3 rifles for Saudi Arabia in the 1970s (IWM, 2025). Estimates based on manufacturer data alone may therefore underestimate the number of rifles in Somalia whose last known legal custodian was Saudi Arabia.
- 5 Field sources have independently confirmed to CAR that the availability of 7.62 × 39 mm ammunition is relatively high, and that 7.62 × 51 mm ammunition commands a higher price and is relatively scarce.
- 6 One rifle was omitted from this table as the images taken during documentation were too low-resolution to discern the format of visible marks.
- 7 CAR communication with local sources. Confidential, on file with CAR.
- 8 A more authoritative conclusion as to the existence and nature of counterfeit G3s in Somalia is only possible with detailed physical documentation, such as that carried out by CAR field investigators. CAR is working to gain direct access to these weapons to be able to undertake such documentation in the future.
- 9 CAR is yet to receive a response to the trace request issued for this item. In the absence of a trace response, CAR cannot assess the legality of the transfer in question.
- 10 On 28 June 2024, the Government of Portugal responded to a formal trace request issued by CAR on 28 June 2023. This response confirms that: 1) Fábrica de Braço de Prata manufactured the G3 pattern rifle bearing the serial number ‘384667’, the subject of CAR’s trace request, in 1984; 2) due to the age of the rifle, the Government of Portugal could not provide details regarding the export of this item; and 3) Fábrica de Braço de Prata closed in 1990.
- 11 CAR could not identify the manufacturer of the rifle and thus has not attempted to trace it.
- 12 The US Marines have never fielded the G3 rifle as a standard-issue weapon.
- 13 The analysis of genuine and counterfeit markings was conducted by CAR and confirmed by an independent expert.
- 14 CAR has formally traced similar G3 rifles manufactured by Fábrica de Braço de Prata before 1974 with the Government of Portugal. Due to the age of the rifles, the Government of Portugal could not provide details regarding the export of these items. See endnote 10 for reference. The analysis of genuine and counterfeit markings was conducted by CAR and confirmed by an independent expert.
- 15 CAR is yet to receive a response to the trace request issued for this item. In the absence of a trace response, CAR cannot assess the legality of the transfer in question.
- 16 CAR has seen both vented and unvented handguards on ‘ALMRENZ’ G3 rifles documented in Somalia. They appear very similar to handguards for the R2 rifle, which is a designation given by the South African Defence Force to a historic consignment of G3 rifles procured from Portugal after its withdrawal from Africa in the 1970s (Brogan and Zarca, 1983, pp. 166–67). The original G3 rear stocks and handguards were exchanged for ones made of a polymer that was more resistant to heat and ultraviolet light

(Forgotten Weapons, 2019). As handguards are interchangeable between compatible rifles, and the R2-style handguard is not unique to South Africa, CAR cannot draw conclusions about the provenance of the rifles seen in Yemen and Somalia based on its observation of these handguards.

- 17 Two previous CAR reports show how some armed groups rely more heavily on rifles with folding stocks than ones with fixed stocks. The first focuses on Taliban and Islamic State fighters in Afghanistan (CAR, 2022); the second documents seizures from Islamic State operations in Syria (CAR, 2024, p. 19). These reports detail how fighters opt for greater ease of concealment and manoeuvrability, which can facilitate smuggling, movement, and use in more confined spaces.
- 18 The barrel length of the standard, full-length G3 is 450 mm (Long, 1991, pp. 14–15).
- 19 CAR has formally traced similar G3 rifles manufactured by Fábrica de Braço de Prata before 1974 with the Government of Portugal. Due to the age of the rifles, the Government of Portugal could not provide details regarding the export of these items. See endnote 10 for reference.
- 20 As part of the Joint Verification Team of Arms and Ammunition, CAR conducts quality checks of SNAF weapon registration data. CAR is therefore in a unique position to be able to verify this statement as accurate and has cleared the disclosure of this data point with FGS counterparts in the Office of National Security.
- 21 The African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) was a multidimensional mission authorised by the African Union and mandated by the United Nations Security Council. It replaced the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which operated from 2007 to 2022. ATMIS was itself replaced with the African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia, which came into effect on 1 January 2025.
- 22 CAR has undertaken formal tracing of the documented G3 rifles for which the country of manufacture could confidently be identified but has received few responses to date. Manufacturing countries are unlikely to retain information pertaining to the production and onward supply of the rifles, whose average age is greater than 40 years. Formal international tracing efforts may thus be impossible for many of these items, as is the case for a number of G3 rifles manufactured in Portugal before 1974 (see endnote 10). CAR has issued trace requests to the Government of Saudi Arabia for similar materiel but has yet to receive a response (see endnote 9).
- 23 The arms embargo on Somalia was in place for more than 30 years (UNSC, 2023).
- 24 Annex 147 of the UN Panel of Experts report detailed serial numbers of 26 G3A3 rifles with technical characteristics and markings that the Panel described as consistent with those manufactured under licence by the UK, presented for sale in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen (UNSC, 2024a). CAR has not sought to independently verify the provenance of these weapons. While the small gap between serial numbers in the case described 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.
- 25 A 2018 investigation by Deutsche Welle and the Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism reported that Saudi-manufactured G3 rifles had been airdropped into Yemen (DW Documentary, 2018). This claim was also reported in a separate Der Spiegel investigation in 2015, see Gebauer, M. (2015).
- 26 Only the FGS is known to have imported Turkish G3 rifles to equip its armed forces.
- 27 The Amnesty International report relies on social media to document other G3 rifles with modifications and 'ALMRENTZ' markings similar to those described in the 'Markings and modifications' section of this report. Like CAR, the Amnesty authors identify Yemen as the location where these weapons were modified prior to their transfer to Sudan (Amnesty International, 2024, pp. 28–29).
- 28 Other studies have also used price analysis as a means of examining the dynamics of illicit arms flows. See for example Bahadur (2022, pp. 7, 9), and GI-TOC (2024, pp. 12–13, 79).
- 29 The term 'AK index' refers to the average reported price of an AK-pattern assault rifle documented over time in illicit markets. The AK-pattern assault rifle is the most documented weapon in CAR's Somalia data set and therefore serves as a useful proxy, or 'index', via which fluctuations in weapon values overall can be assessed.

- 30 CAR interviews with confidential sources. On file with CAR.
- 31 CAR is aware of two recorded ATMIS seizures of G3 rifles from Al-Shabaab, one in 2019 and one in May 2020. The rifles bore the serial numbers 133650 and 6050185, respectively (UNSC, 2022, p. 50).
- 32 For additional information, see (Webb, 2024).

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