

BICC FEATURE

The Challenge of Managing State-owned Small Arms and Light Weapons in South Sudan

By Marius Kahl

Countries emerging from a long period of armed conflict have to find solutions for getting widespread possession of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and related trade flows under control. The Republic of South Sudan (RSS) is a case in point.

According to estimates, 2.7 million SALW are available in the whole of the former Sudan, with around 720,000 in the hands of civilians in the RSS¹. The reasons for small arms possession in the RSS vary greatly. Cattle raiding is just one example of how the availability of SALW furthers destruction. Cattle are central to the pastoralist cultures in South Sudan, and young pastoralist men value cattle highly because they are essential as a dowry. Cattle rustling has a cultural background, but with the easy availability of automatic weapons, fatalities from cattle raids and retaliatory revenge attacks have risen alarmingly². The combination of demand for cattle, prevalence of SALW, and revenge deaths is central to numerous inter-communal conflicts. It shows how the prevalence of SALW can turn cultural patterns into a nightmare.

SALW—A legacy of four decades of civil war

The SALW problem is one of the legacies of the four decades of civil wars in Sudan. It has been aggravated by arms flows inside South Sudan

as well as diverse cross-border supply channels, pointing to the regional character of SALW-related insecurity. The proliferation of arms tends to exacerbate existing tensions and to encourage the return of violent conflict.³

The government of the RSS has committed itself to continue earlier efforts to address the issue of civilian arms possession and resulting insecurity. A SALW Control Policy has recently been completed and forms the basis for the new Arms Law.

Not only the civilian population, but also the RSS's security sector Services (especially Police, Correctional Service, Wildlife, Customs, Army and even Fire Brigade) possess SALW to fulfill their duties. Keeping these SALW and ammunition safe and secure is a precondition for the ability of RSS to defend itself, as well as for its internal stability. SALW and ammunition, however, are stored in unsafe and unsecure buildings and surroundings and are therefore prone to theft, thus inviting crime and subsequent insecurity in the country. Old and unstable ammunition can spontaneously explode and destroy entire SALW stocks causing loss of life and destruction of infrastructure. These risks can be significantly reduced or mitigated when stockpiles are maintained effectively⁴. Daniel Deng Lual, Head of the RSS Bureau for Community Security & Small Arms Control said at a recent conference in Juba⁵:



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Unintended explosions of ammunition stocks are something we can and should avoid, as we should avoid the injury or loss of children who play with ammunition and arms. We need to prevent licit weapons and ammunition from becoming illicit through leakage to the civilian population. This can be the case as long as we don't yet have safe stores all over our country. This needs to change. For this we will need the help and support of your international friends and partners.

Challenges to proper storage of SALW and ammunition

Lack of resources, technical knowledge and infrastructure, as well as the local climatic conditions pose major challenges to proper storage of SALW and ammunition. Safe Storage is as yet rudimentary. It is no surprise—given the long history of violent conflict, civil war and bush armies in South Sudan—that basic international standards for storage are not yet kept. If stores are available at all, frequently unsecure mud huts (*tukuls*), unused schools, hospitals or other facilities made of concrete, and even metal sheet huts are converted into makeshift stores for arms and ammunition. Marine cargo containers are used as bulk storage facilities mostly without any ventilation holes or sun protection.

High temperatures in the containers have a negative effect on the life span of ammunition and can make them prone to unintended explosions.



A police SALW/ ammunition store (BICC)



A typical SALW/ ammunition storage container (BICC)

The situation in the counties outside the capital Juba is dire. The Army in particular lacks safe storage structures. High hazard class ammunition is in some cases accessible to the public, unprotected and/or not sufficiently guarded—an extremely dangerous situation.



Ammunition stockpile outside (MAG South Sudan)

Incidents have been reported where children picked up ammunition and were injured or killed when it exploded. Unsafe storage also promotes leakage of SALW and ammunition into civilian communities and increases the problem of civilian arms possession as mentioned above. This danger is exacerbated by the fact that the various security Services often do not have a clear picture of how many weapons are in use in their service and where they are, as inventory and bookkeeping practices are not yet consistently kept and updated. Finally, there is a general absence of safe storage rules and regulations



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(i.e. Standing Operating Procedures, SOPs) resulting from the lack of technical knowledge and training.

It is obvious that the improvement of SALW storage conditions in the RSS through Safe Storage Improvement Programs (SSIP⁶) is urgently required. Fortunately, the Services are aware of the lack of safe and secure storage and the risks associated with this. What is extremely valuable is the fact that there seems to be the necessary political will in the Services and Government to improve the situation. There is, therefore, a window of opportunity to proceed with programs for improvement which should not be missed.



Ammunition stockpile inside (MAG South Sudan)

The expensive undertaking of managing stores and armories, however, is a wise investment and will pay back through increased trust in the security Services, their professionalization, respect by the people, cost saving through reduced corrosion, decelerated ageing of arms and ammunitions, as well as a decline in accidents and related social and infrastructure costs. Unfortunately, as experience shows, these types of programs are prone to failure if donors and recipients do not prepare properly before they set up such programs and then are hardly able to achieve the objectives set.⁷ Such programs require “the proper management of a complex relationship between the host state (assisted state) and the donor and assisting entity.”⁸

Recommendations for Safe Storage Improvement Programs

How can the problem of unsecure storage be tackled? In the case of South Sudan, two separate but interlinked Safe Storage Improvement Programs are required: one for the security sector Services operating under the Ministry of Interior and one for the Army. A recent project executed by BICC and funded by the German Foreign Office, assessed the RSS's approaches and practices of SALW and ammunition storage, suggested a road map towards improvements, and developed recommendations for the Government. Accordingly, Safe Storage should become a fixed element of training and operations at all levels of all security sector Services. The sustained provision of training and successful application of the new knowledge and skills in practice will depend on the progress of institutional improvements (standardized rules & regulations) and adequate infrastructure. Training, rules & regulations as well as adequate infrastructure are interdependent and should be addressed together. Training without rules & regulations or adequate infrastructure in place is not sustainable. Measures to enforce new rules & regulations should be introduced and this requires independent institutions (e.g. departments inside the security sector Services) to execute oversight of safe and secure storage practices.

To implement the recommended steps, the new state will have to execute some activities on its own initiative and funding whereas more complex activities, such as the building of new infrastructure or technical assessments will require assistance by the international community. This assistance must be contingent on sufficient time to assess the best approach to meeting the needs of South Sudan's security sector Services.

The realities on the ground and competition for funds in the young nation will only allow a step-by-step approach to modernization, infrastructure-building and the introduction and improvement of

processes and personnel's qualification in handling SALW and ammunition safely. "Such programmes require significant attention and support from senior leaders, since they are designed to create conditions for long-term, structural improvements to a nation's security forces."⁹

Based on a needs analysis, the number and type of new facilities as well as refurbishments need to be specified. Basic infrastructure refurbishments do not require a lot of money but some initiative, such as reducing the risk of fire by mowing the lawn and cutting trees, organizing stores, fencing in facilities, access control, building simple racks to organize stores, and by specifying key-lock access procedures. Existing containers can also play a role in the storage concept but would need to be provided with sunroofs and ventilation holes. They can be regrouped on concrete foundations under bigger roof constructions and protected with ramparts if ammunition is stored. New storage containers and facilities should ideally be equipped with individual weapon storage racks (see picture). Creative solutions are required and the use of existing and locally available materials should be prioritized.



Inside in-use SALW storage container (MAG Burundi)

The aim is simple: SALW and ammunition stocks are secure, accurately accounted for, and well managed. Staff is trained and surpluses

are removed. While the journey to this level is complex and long, efforts will be rewarding both for the security sector and the entire new nation. As Daniel Deng Lual put it:

Let us not make a mistake to assume that modern science that gave us weapons might also give us the technology of controlling them. History suggests that the solution to the problem of technology is better politics and better policies rather than better technology. No doubt, the conditions of SALW storage in South Sudan are so difficult and the consequences of failure to address it so terrible that we must all act together!

- ¹ Human Security Baseline Assessment. 2009. "Supply and demand - Arms flows and holdings in Sudan." *Sudan issue brief*. Geneva: Small Arms Survey, December.
- ² According to a report by Frank Langfitt, in 2009, the UN estimated that 2,500 people died in tribal violence in Sudan's southern region, much of it from cattle raids (Langfitt, 2011). "Cattle Rustling A Deadly Business In Sudan." NPR Social Media at <http://www.npr.org/2011/04/17/135486358/cattle-rustling-a-deadly-business-in-sudan>.
- ³ McEvoy, Claire. 2009. "Powder keg - Unfettered arms flows reflect Sudan's instability." *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 18 November.
- ⁴ King, Benjamin (ed.). 2011. "Safer Stockpiles – Practitioners' Experience with Physical Security and Stockpile Management (PSSM) Assistance Programmes". *Occasional Paper 27*. Geneva: Small Arms Survey, p. 1.
- ⁵ August 2011
- ⁶ Also called Physical Security and Stockpile Management (PSSM) Programs.
- ⁷ See Benjamin King (ed.). 2011, p. 4.
- ⁸ See Benjamin King (ed.). 2011, p. 8.
- ⁹ See Benjamin King (ed.). 2011, p. 9.