

Armed Groups and Guided Light Weapons

2014 Update with MENA Focus

The increasingly sophisticated arsenals of guided light weapons held by non-state actors pose an international security threat. Small Arms Survey research indicates that since 1998 at least 84 armed groups from 40 countries either possess or have possessed such systems. These include man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS) and anti-tank guided weapons (ATGWs)—systems operable by a single user or a small crew, where the weapons' missiles are either manually targeted or self-guided after launch. This Research Note is based on new information in the Survey's database (Small Arms Survey, 2014) since its last update in March 2013 and complements Research Note 31 (Rigual, 2013). It describes global patterns in the guided light weapons holdings of armed groups, noting both the types of weapons held and their relative sophistication. It also focuses on patterns of proliferation in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

Armed groups' reported holdings: global update

Since the previous assessment, the Survey recorded 25 new groups as having either MANPADS or ATGWs, raising the worldwide total to 61 active groups. More than half of these newly listed groups are based in Syria. Guided light weapons were reported in the hands of armed groups in Tunisia (al-Qaeda affiliates) and Ukraine (pro-Russian separatists) for the first time.

The models and types of guided light weapons identified since Research Note 31 (Rigual, 2013) suggest significant changes in patterns of proliferation in some countries. Early generations of Soviet-designed systems such as Strela-2 or 2M (SA-7a and b) MANPADS and 9K11-series ATGWs continue to constitute the majority of guided missiles that armed groups possess (see Table 1). Newer generation



The central distribution warehouse at the 70-bunker weapons storage facility in Ajdabiya, in March 2011, was freely accessible to Libyan rebels. It contained hundreds of MANPADS (most notably 9K32) and ATGWs (9K11 Malyutka, 9K111 Fagot, and the advanced 9K135 Kornet). © Human Rights Watch 2011.

Table 1 **MANPADS and ATGWs reportedly held by armed groups (by type of guidance system), 1998–2014**

MANPADS			
Type of guidance	Selected ^a models ^b (country of origin) ^c	Active non-state armed groups ^d reportedly possessing missile systems with this type of guidance	Total number ^a of groups since 1998 (number of additional groups since last update)
Passive infrared seeker	9K32 Strela-2 and 2M (SA-7a and b Grail) (Soviet Union)	Abkhazian Congregation of the Caucasus Emirate (Georgia); al-Ansar Brigades (Palestinian Territories) ; al-Asala Watanmya (Syria) ; al-Nasser Salah al-Deen Brigades (Palestinian Territories) ; al-Qaeda affiliates (Algeria, Kenya, Mali, Tunisia) ; al-Shabaab (Somalia); Ansar al-shariaa (Libya) ; Burundi insurgents; Chadian Union of Forces for Democracy and Development; Chechen rebels; Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia; Free Syrian Army (FSA)-Knight of the Right Brigade (Morek, Syria) ; Hezbollah; Hizbul Mujahideen (Kashmir); Iraqi insurgents; Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas); Islamic State (IS) (Iraq/Syria) ; Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) (Turkey); Libyan Revolutionary Brigades; Lord's Resistance Army (Uganda); Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad (Mali); Palestinian Islamic Jihad; Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine; Rassemblement des forces pour le changement (Chad); Shan State Army (Myanmar); Somaliland (unilaterally declared government); Sudanese Revolutionary Front; Syrian anti-government armed groups; Taliban (Afghanistan); United Wa State Army (Myanmar); pro-Russian separatists (Ukraine)	56 (+8)
	9K34 Strela-3 (SA-14 Gremlin) (Soviet Union)	Iraqi insurgents; Hezbollah	6
	9K310 and 9K38 Igla series (SA-16 Gimlet/18 Grouse) (Soviet Union)	Abkhazian Congregation of the Caucasus Emirate (Georgia); al-Asala Watanmya (Syria) ; Ansar al-Islam (Iraq) ; al-Shabaab (Somalia); Brigades Ibn Taymiyyah (Syria) ; Chechen rebels; Democratic Republic of Congo insurgents; Harakat Hazm (Syria) ; Hezbollah; Iraqi insurgents; IS (Iraq/Syria) ; Jamaat Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (Ansar Jerusalem) (Egypt)	16 (+6)
	9K338 Igla-S (SA-24 Grinch) (Russian Federation)	Al-Asala Watanmya (Syria) ; FSA-Farouq Brigade (Harakat Hazm 9th Unit, Syria)	(+2)
	FIM-92 Stinger (United States)	Chechen rebels; PKK (Turkey); Taliban (Afghanistan)	4
	HN-5 (China)	Taliban (Afghanistan); United Wa State Army (Myanmar)	4
	FN-6 (China)	Al-Asala Watanmya (Syria) ; Daraa Revolution Commission (Syria) ; Douou al-Thawra (Syria) ; IS (Iraq/Syria) ; Kataib al-Qasas (Syria)	(+5)
Manual command to line of sight (MCLOS)	Blowpipe (United Kingdom)	Chechen rebels; Taliban (Afghanistan)	2
Number ^a of groups having held MANPADS		Active groups: 50 (+15)	All: 72 (+15)

missiles—superior in range, engagement method, and guidance systems—are, however, increasingly documented. In Syria, for instance, a minimum of two groups were seen with Russian-designed Igla-S MANPADS (see Schroeder, 2014, p. 8). This system, fielded in 2002, is able to reach targets at ranges of up to 6,000 m (KBM, 2014), twice as far as the 1960s-era Strela-2 (O'Halloran and Foss, 2011, p. 37). At least four groups in Syria—and the non-state armed group Islamic State (IS)¹ operating in Iraq and Syria (Binnie, 2014b; Semple and Schmitt, 2014)²—are known to possess the Chinese-produced FN-6, which also has a range of 6,000 m (O'Halloran and Foss, 2011, p. 7).

Focus: guided light weapons proliferation across the MENA region

Among the 25 new groups reported to possess guided light weapons, 24 are based in the MENA region and more than half (16) are located in Syria. They include FSA-aligned rebels, IS, and al-Qaeda affiliates such as Jabhat al-Nusra.³

Although armed groups acquire guided light weapons in many ways, a significant cause of MANPADS proliferation in the MENA region is the collapse of the Qaddafi regime in Libya, which held significant stockpiles (UNSC, 2012a, paras. 14–18). As

of 2014, thousands of these MANPADS were still in the arsenals of armed groups (UNSC, 2014b, annex XIII). UN investigators have documented the presence of MANPADS from Libya in at least four countries: Chad, Lebanon, Mali, and Tunisia. In two cases the weapons were 'clearly part of terrorist groups' arsenals' (UNSC, 2014b, annex XIII). Indeed, the Tunisian authorities recovered at least eight complete Strela-2M systems in al-Qaeda affiliates' weapons caches near Medenine (UNSC, 2014b, paras. 102–9). In Mali, among the 13 Strela-2M MANPADS French authorities seized from al-Qaeda-affiliated groups, two were identified

ATGWs			
MCLOS	9K11 Malyutka (AT-3 Sagger) (Soviet Union)	Al-Shabaab (Somalia); Hezbollah; Iraqi insurgents; IS (Iraq/Syria); rebel groups from Tripoli (Libya); Syrian anti-government armed groups	9 (+2)
Semi-automatic command to line of sight (SACLOS)	9K111 Fagot (AT-4 Spigot) (Soviet Union)	Al-Nasser Salah al-Deen Brigades (Palestinian Territories) ^a ; Hezbollah; Hamas/al-Qassam Brigades (Palestinian Territories) ^a ; Iraqi insurgents; Libyan Revolutionary Brigades, pro-Russian separatists (Ukraine)	7 (+2)
	9K111-1 and 1M Konkurs (AT-5a and b Spandrel) (Soviet Union)	Ahfad al-Rasul (Syria); Hezbollah; Iraqi insurgents; Libyan Revolutionary Brigades; Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas)	5 (+1)
	9K115 Metis and 9K115-2 Metis-M (AT-7 Saxhorn and AT-13 Saxhorn-2) (Soviet Union)	Al-Shabaab (Somalia); Hezbollah; Libyan Revolutionary Brigades; pro-Russian separatists (Ukraine); Syrian anti-government armed groups	6 (+1)
	9K135 Kornet and Kornet E (AT-14 Spriggan) (Russian Federation)	Hezbollah; IS (Iraq/Syria); Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas); Libyan Revolutionary Brigades; pro-Russian separatists (Ukraine); Syrian Revolutionary Front	6 (+3)
	Missile d'infanterie léger antichar (MILAN) (France)	Al-Shabaab (Somalia); Harakat Ahrar as-Sham (Syria); Iraqi insurgents; Jabhat al-Nusra (Syria); Libyan Revolutionary Brigades; Liwa al-Mouhajirin wal Ansar (Syria); Liwa al-Haqq (Syria); Peshmerga (Iraq)	9 (+5)
	HJ-8 (China)	FSA (several locations and sub-groups, Syria); Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya (Syria); Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North	(+3)
	TOW (United States)	Al-Omari Brigades of the Syrian Revolutionary Brigade; Ansar al-Islam (Iraq); Firket Fajr el Islam (Syria); FSA-Liwa al-Aadiyat (Syria); FSA-Yarmouk Brigades (Syria); Harakat Hazm (Syria); Hezbollah	(+5) ^e
Number ^a of groups having held ATGWs	Active groups: 27 (+17)		All: 36 (+17)
Number ^a of groups having held guided light weapons since 1998	Active groups: 61 (+25)		All: 84 (+25)

- a. Selected groups and model types are presented in Table 1. The full list of models and groups reported to have held guided light weapons since 1998 is available on the Survey's website and is updated regularly (see Small Arms Survey, 2014). The number of groups presented here reflect final findings from the database and not totals from Table 1. The table presents conservative estimates.
- b. The weapons' names used here follow producers' nomenclature with any applicable NATO designations in parenthesis. Each category reflects the types of systems rather than the country of production: it may include foreign variants when not otherwise specified. All variances of a given system are not specifically listed here.
- c. Countries of origin are mentioned for background purposes only. They refer to the countries where the weapons were originally designed and are not necessarily the countries of production of the actual weapons documented.
- d. Groups reportedly active as of December 2014. Given the rapid and fluid nature of groups' alliances and defeats, this list of groups is indicative and may be subject to change.
- e. A large number of videos of Syrian armed groups operating TOW missiles are online. Thus, ours may be considered a conservative estimate of the actual number of groups with such weapons. Our estimate reflects the level of uncertainty in tracking weapons in war zones and the reasonable hesitation in relying on posts made by the groups themselves.

Red: New groups/new weapons since the last database update in March 2013. Sub-groups operating in the same country as sub-regional battalions of a common entity are counted once (e.g. the FSA or IS).

Source: Small Arms Survey (2014)

as originating from Libya (UNSC, 2014b, paras. 114–19).

Another source of guided light weapons is transfer from state sponsors. Iran and Syria, for instance, supplied Hezbollah—which remains one of the most well-armed groups in the region—with various types of MANPADS (from 9K32 Strela-2 to 9K310 systems, as well as the Iranian-produced QW-1 Vanguard) and ATGWs (including the BGM-71 TOW, 9K115-2 Metis-M, or 9K135 Kornet) between 1980 and 2006 (Wezeman et al., 2007, pp. 409–11; SIPRI, 2014). Qatar supplied MILAN anti-tank guided weapons to Libyan rebels during the 2011 uprising (UNSC, 2012b, para. 95) and reportedly

played a role in the transfer of Chinese FN-6 MANPADS to Syrian rebels (Mazzetti, Chivers, and Schmitt, 2013).

In the region, Syria is a theatre of uncontrolled proliferation of guided light weapons. Systems originate from battlefield captures, but also from foreign sources. A Russian-produced Konkurs-M ATGW, originally exported to Libya in 2000, was recovered from the Ahfad al-Rasul group (UNSC, 2014b, para. 171). Social media document the circulation of large numbers of US-made TOW 2A ATGWs, with at least five groups reported to possess them (see Table 1).⁴ HJ-8 ATGWs identified in the hands of several armed groups in Syria bear markings linking

them to Bosnian and Sudanese stockpiles (Jenzen-Jones, 2013).⁵ And with the IS expansion in Iraq and Syria, Western states appear to be inclined to support the Kurdish Peshmerga: Germany confirmed authorizing the delivery of 30 MILAN launchers and 500 missiles to the group in August 2014, for instance (Germany, 2014).⁶

Despite international efforts to improve states' physical security and stockpile management measures and collect and destroy guided light weapons, they remain in wide circulation.⁷ As this note suggests, the number of groups possessing them is rising and the weapons they possess are increasingly advanced. These weapons continue

