

Curbing Small Arms and Light Weapons Trafficking, and Increasing Border Security

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Introduction

In July 2014 armed men attacked and killed 21 Egyptian border guards (Geogry, 2014). Malian security forces lost more than ten men in an attack in January 2015, with the attackers targeting civilians as they fled (LeMonde, 2015). And in February 2015 four border guards were killed in the Tunisian region of Kasserine (Huffington Post, 2015). The combination of the increased availability of small arms and light weapons and border insecurity is a large and growing problem in North Africa. This combination is largely the result of the uprisings and conflicts that have swept over the region in the past four years. It has resulted in a variety of non-state actors—civilians, armed groups, and criminal groups—possessing and using small arms and light weapons. Ultimately, it is the people of the border regions who are ‘paying the price’ for their security and economies (both formal and informal) becoming increasingly affected by the circulation of small arms and light weapons and the infiltration of armed groups.

How did this happen? Informal trade has long been a characteristic of the border regions in North Africa and the Sahara-Sahel, and it remains a major source of income. Border economies in the region are transnational and interconnected. Yet trafficking in the area has undergone important transformations in recent years. The ways and means used for centuries by traffickers in informal trade are now being used for new classes of goods, including small arms and light weapons, drugs, and migrants (Kartas, 2013). These newer types of trade have increased in both volume and value and are increasingly intertwined with transnational crime. The instability of the border regions has increased in the wake of Libya’s dissolution in 2011. The dispersal of Libya’s huge small arms and light weapons arsenal and the continuing presence of large numbers of armed groups outside government control have further destabilized the border. The new players have not only seized control of important regional trafficking networks, but are now involved in smuggling to hotspots across the continent.

Currently, regional governments are facing tremendous challenges from armed groups and informal trade in small arms and light weapons. Recognizing the problem, these governments have organized a series of regional security meetings. The struggle against these groups and the threat that they represent, however, remains a problem.



**Security Assessment
in North Africa**



a project of the small arms survey, geneva

SANA workshop

The Security Assessment in North Africa (SANA) focuses primarily on two dimensions of improving community safety. Firstly, the project identifies issues related to effective weapons and ammunition stockpile security. Secondly, it addresses security sector reforms, particularly the security sector's transition from having a primarily repressive function to effectively providing community safety. The project monitors government and international efforts to reconstruct and rehabilitate security institutions and their management of weapons and ammunition stockpiles.

Acknowledging the increasing importance of border management and national tools for the reduction of illicit flows of weapons, SANA organized a workshop in Tunis in March 2015. The workshop gathered 38 participants, including government officials from North Africa, the Sahel, and the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as practitioners and experts from academia and NGOs. The workshop took as its starting point the need to engage local populations when designing a successful strategy to curb illicit weapons flows and improve the economic health of these communities.

The workshop had six goals:

1. to determine who the small arms and light weapons traffickers are in the border regions and identify the modalities used in the trade;
2. to understand the economic and social context of illicit arms trafficking in the border regions, including how economic development relates to this trade;
3. to ascertain opportunities and understand potential pitfalls in engaging communities to manage borders and improving community safety;
4. to discuss policy options available at all levels of government that might mitigate illicit arms flows;
5. to identify discrete projects in the region designed to support the engagement of communities in border management; and
6. to begin an ongoing dialogue on these issues in the region that will last beyond the workshop and continue to fruitfully engage workshop participants, policy-makers, and others with an interest in the topic.

To meet these goals the workshop was split into two parts. The first focused on the analytical frameworks that would be the necessary foundations for any actions (goals 1 and 2). Essentially, the workshop sought to shed light on patterns and transnational linkages between border communities and informal trade, on the one hand, and on trafficking networks in North Africa and the Sahara-Sahel, on the other. The second part sought to identify potential responses to the problem, including best practices, future policy options, and other measures to combat illicit proliferation, the potential diversion of small arms and light weapons, and illicit arms trafficking (goals 3 through 5).

This Report is the result of these discussions and reflects the conclusions of individual contributors and participants. Conclusions include the following:

1. Trafficking in the region follows traditional trafficking routes and is embedded in an established system of illicit trade across national borders.
2. Smuggling is an important source of income for border communities and is often central to local economies.
3. In recent years the dynamic of the goods that are smuggled and the actors involved in smuggling has started to shift. It appears that volumes of higher risk goods like weapons and drugs have increased. This brings new actors into trafficking and results in the 'criminalization' and 'militarization' of trafficking networks. The economic and political dynamics of border regions are thus affected.
4. The current situation in Libya poses an important challenge to the whole region: without an improvement in the Libyan situation it will be difficult to find a sustainable solution.
5. Many countries in the region face enormous challenges in terms of resources to control their border areas. The support of external actors is needed in this regard. There is also a need for more cooperation among the countries in the region in terms of finding and implementing solutions to

- the problems of arms and ammunition trafficking.
6. International instruments and tools are available to control illicit small arms and light weapons flows, but are not being used optimally at present.
 7. Only a holistic and inclusive approach to the trafficking issue is likely to have any sustainable impact on the problem. Working with stakeholders and focusing on local communities can help to reduce trafficking and stem the flow of weapons and ammunition in the region.

Mapping the issue

Definitions

There are no standard definitions of the concepts discussed at the workshop. As such, we are adopting the definitions used by most of the workshop's participants when discussing the findings:

- **Formal trade:** the legal exchange of legal goods.
- **Informal trade:** the exchange of legal goods outside the legal framework of the countries of origin, transit, and destination.
- **Smuggling:** illegally transporting goods that are otherwise legal.
- **Smuggling of migrants:** a crime involving the procurement for financial or other material benefit of the illegal entry of persons into a state of which these persons are not nationals or residents.
- **Trafficking:** the illegal exchange of illegal goods or the illegal transportation of persons across borders.
- **Human trafficking:** the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion like abduction, fraud, deception, the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, or the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.¹

Informal trade and trafficking: networks

Informal trade represents a large proportion of all economic activities in North Africa and the Sahara-Sahel. Towns close to official crossing points and along traditional trade routes are now bustling economic centres that are connected with other such hubs across the region. The expansion of informal trade has created new demand for services and accommodation for participants, bringing with it the attendant employment and knock-on economic effects. This increase began in the 1970s with low-scale smuggling between communities with long-standing relationships on both sides of the frontier. Libya played a key role in accelerating this development, due to its many migrant workers, the large subsidies on many basic products provided by the government, and the comparatively low tariffs the government imposed on the import of many consumer goods.²

The volumes of goods involved in informal trade meant that it complemented formal trade, if not superseding it in terms of both value and its importance to the communities involved. Over the past two decades cities like Ben Guerdane (Tunisia), Sallum (Egypt), Djanet (Algeria), Agadez (Niger), and Dongola (Sudan) have become distribution points for 'souks Libya'. These markets (souks) sprang up throughout the region: by the 1980s over 50 emerged in Tunisia alone. Khartoum's souk Libya, established by Libyan immigrants (from the Darfur region), is now one of the largest markets in the region, although Libyan products now comprise a fraction of the goods sold there.

The cities most heavily involved in informal trade are usually at the margins of national territories and their relative remoteness often means that they are largely neglected by central governments. Left on their own they develop 'economies of resistance' to guard the prosperity of their communities against the indifference of the government. But these economies cannot be built in isolation. Rather, they require links to other, similarly situated communities. In this regard it is instructive to note that

(at least in most cases) the cross-border networks used for informal trade, smuggling, and trafficking are established along tribal lines and through tribal alliances. For example, in the Jefara region spanning the Tunisian–Libyan border the Werghemma confederation (Tunisia) and the Nwayel (Libya) are long-time allies and partners in cross-border trade.³ From a single alliance in a single area new connections are made until there is a veritable web of tribal alliances connecting larger urban centres to smaller cities and markets across North Africa, the Sahara-Sahel region, and beyond.

Actors

A key question in any attempt to understand the current dynamics of the informal trade and smuggling is to determine who the participants are: do the people who smuggle consumer goods, textiles, or petrol also traffic weapons or drugs? Currently the answer appears to be that smugglers tend to specialize in specific types of goods. In the Sahara-Sahel, the balance of trade is favourable for Algeria and Libya, where the ‘bosses’ (heads of the trade networks) maintain close contacts with the authorities. High-value goods are smuggled southwards, towards northern Mali and Niger, where the bulk of the smuggled goods are dispersed in smaller amounts to drivers moving the goods further south or small resellers selling them locally. On the Tunisian–Libyan border the *sarafa* (money changers) head the trading networks (often called cartels) along with their Libyan counterparts, the wholesalers.

As noted above, a wide variety of actors are involved in informal trade and trafficking below the bosses: wholesalers, resellers, drivers, *‘passeurs’* (smugglers who ensure the transborder passage of goods or people), lookouts (often shepherds), and others. Given their connections with the authorities, the bosses serve as the primary interlocutors between border communities and the central government, giving them considerable local influence. They also play a key role in financing the activities of the trade networks, distributing the profits, and paying the necessary bribes. And, where a driver or passeur will usually only smuggle consumer goods, while others handle petrol, a boss may head multiple networks and, for example, be involved with smuggling both consumer goods and petrol.

In the past few decades new actors have emerged to disrupt the established order. The first change came with the smuggling of cigarettes, which created parallel trading networks headed by new bosses. The ‘criminalization’ of smuggling was further accelerated with the emergence of drug traffickers, beginning with hashish and cannabis (mostly from Morocco) and moving to cocaine (from Latin America).⁴ Counterfeit medicines and synthetic drugs (for example, methamphetamines, LSD, and pain killers such as Tramadol) play an increasing role in this new trade. The result has been a considerable shift in the dynamics of informal trade. The bosses of these new criminalized networks are usually based in northern Mali and, due to the higher risks associated with the cigarette and drug trades, employ a different sort of passeur who is willing to take these risks. Furthermore, most of the goods that these networks move are transited through the region rather than consumed within it; apart from a small share of cannabis, the drugs are not sold on local markets.

Weapons trafficking also appears to be of a different order. Most participants in informal trade networks do not appear to be involved with smuggling arms or ammunition at any scale. On the other hand, the so-called ‘ant trade’, where small numbers of weapons are smuggled among otherwise traditional cargoes, can increasingly be observed. Although weapons are not the primary goods smuggled, the fact that they are being mixed with other goods blurs the line between arms smugglers and other participants in informal trade.

Drug trafficking and violent extremist groups

In the past decade drug trafficking has affected the Sahara-Sahel border region by destabilizing traditional modes of governance and strengthening violent extremist groups (jihadists). As the volume and value of the drug trade has increased in northern Mali, Algeria, Niger, and Libya, the bosses of the drug-smuggling networks have become richer and more powerful. They use their newfound wealth to buy influence at both the local and national levels by mobilizing funds for electoral campaigns. Their wealth and access to weapons also give these bosses a very practical power over local authorities and law enforcement: disrupting the drug-trafficking networks would have a significant

effect on the strength of the local economy, not to mention the health and safety of local organs of government and law enforcement. Drug traffickers are thus largely left to their own devices.

Especially in Mali, the link between drug traffickers and jihadists is symbiotic, where both groups are now concentrated in similar areas in the northern parts of the country. The two groups remain distinct, though: the jihadists have neither sought nor gained control of the drug trade, nor have the drug smugglers become involved in political-religious struggles.⁵ Rather, the bosses of the drug cartels, recognizing the capabilities of the jihadists, employ these groups as part of their trafficking networks, largely to provide protection. Thus, although they do not smuggle drugs themselves, the jihadists still profit from the criminalization of smuggling, both directly (via revenue from their protection activities) and indirectly (from easier access to weapons and ammunition).

The value of the drug trade and its links with jihadists mean that cracking down on drug trafficking is quite problematic. The destabilization of the smuggling networks has the potential to push them to seek greater protection by jihadists. Such a crackdown would also increase the costs of doing business for drug traffickers and entice young men who cannot earn as much money from smuggling to join the ranks of drug-smuggling networks, taking greater risks for greater rewards. The result would likely be increased insecurity and instability that are more likely to generate greater profit for the drug traffickers and a more fertile ground for jihadists to become more powerful and increase their numbers.

The impact of the Libyan crisis on informal trade and trafficking

The Libyan crisis caused an even larger shock to the informal trade networks and the system of governance in border regions around Libya than the emergence of drug trafficking. With the loss of Qaddafi's weapons stockpile and the protracted conflicts engendered by the fall of his government, the number of armed groups in the region ballooned alarmingly. The failure of transitional authorities to dismantle these armed groups and integrate their members into formal structures entrenched the problem. Despite the fact that many armed groups received salaries and funding from the new Libyan authorities, most of them immediately began to pursue economic opportunities of their own, either through protection deals with the government or by working with or even coopting smuggling and trafficking networks.

The changes wrought can be divided into four phases:

1. **Struggles for control:** from late 2011 to early 2012 (the fall of the Qaddafi regime), there were struggles regarding influence over and control of territory, border areas, and smuggling routes. Arms were trafficked out of Libya and were seen or seized in a number of countries in Africa and the Middle East.
2. **Consolidation:** between 2012 and 2013 the new territorial order consolidated and with it Libya experienced a steady increase of drug and alcohol trafficking. At the same time informal trade exploded, notably with the tariff-free import of used vehicles from Europe through Libyan ports. These cars were subsequently smuggled onward to neighbouring countries like Tunisia and Egypt, or into the Sahel.
3. **Expansion:** from mid-2013 until mid-2014 the flows of migrants and human trafficking increased considerably, likely as a result of Italy's Operation Mare Nostrum.⁶
4. **Contraction:** from mid-2014 to the present the escalation of tension and the renewal of fighting in Libya disrupted the various trafficking networks and their routes. Shortages in subsidized products, the destruction of Tripoli International Airport (the main entry point for synthetic drugs), Algeria's mobilization on its borders, and the deployment of French forces in the Sahel (Operation Barkhane) reduced the illicit flows of goods out of Libya. Instead, the problem became the flow of weapons and ammunition into the country to meet the increased demand of the various parties to the renewed conflicts.⁷

It seems clear that the renewed crisis in Libya has accelerated the criminalization and 'para-militarization' of trafficking, notably in the Sahara-Sahel, where armed groups have multiplied. The economies of resistance (also known as 'coping economies') were sidelined by these developments, with the most lucrative types of trade (in arms and drugs) taking more resources. Traditional power structures are also affected negatively: as the bosses of the drug-smuggling networks and the jihadists

assume more power they are displacing traditional tribal elders. As a result the tribes are no longer able to regulate and mediate conflicts as they once were. One concrete example of this is the phenomenon of the *diyya* ('blood price'): since 2011 the number of *diyya* payments (monies traditionally paid in compensation for the death or injury of a family member) has skyrocketed.

The renewal of conflict in Libya has also accelerated the entry of new actors into informal trade, smuggling, and trafficking in the region. For example, the Tunisian cartels of Ben Guerdane now face competition from new actors from the interior of the country (the regions of Kairouan, Sidi Bouzid, and even Sousse). The Libyan armed groups (largely tribal based) currently dominating the Libyan–Tunisian border have significant capital at their disposal, are seeking new partners in Tunisia, and are actively trying to circumvent the Ben Guerdane cartels allied with their foes.

Tackling the challenges

Challenges

Beyond the risks associated with the criminalization of smuggling and the para-militarization of trafficking noted above, several other distinct challenges must be met to solve the problem of trafficking and informal trade and its effects. These include the following:

1. **The nature of state involvement:** it is commonly accepted that informal trade, insecurity, and porous borders are the result of the absence of the state, creating a power vacuum in border regions. Strictly speaking, this is not true: informal trade should not be read as an indication that the state is absent, but rather that the state is present in a different guise. That is to say, where informal trade is prevalent the state is a key participant, but uses different means of action (unofficial, often 'covert' in nature) than the traditional ones (bureaucratic or legal and law enforcement means). In some senses this process is a continuation of the colonial legacy of ruling by proxy, where the state attempted to wield its influence in areas it could not directly control by playing on community rivalries and differences, and providing privileges to certain groups in return for the protection of some of the central government's interests. Solutions must take this dynamic into account and deal with it honestly.
2. **The strength of 'localism':** there is a long tradition of suspicion of the state and its security forces in border areas. These communities have long been marginalized and underrepresented in the governments that take decisions directly affecting them. As such, there is an almost reflexive preference for locals to non-locals. In other words, solutions to the problems created by informal trade cannot be naïve about allegiances: the devil local people know will be preferred to the one that lives far away. It will take a great deal of patience and sustained effort to convince populations in border areas to trust security forces rather than the smugglers in their midst, no matter what benefits the community may derive from doing so.
3. **The strength of the market:** price differentials and profits from drug and arms trafficking will continue to attract new entrants into trafficking. Development alone is not enough to halt this dynamic. North Africa and the Sahara-Sahel are not unique in this regard.
4. **A destructive cycle:** informal trade is the main source of income for many people in border regions. The downside of this is the negative feedback loop associated with such trade. The lack of economic opportunity in the border regions may drive the increase of smuggling and trafficking, but if smuggling and trafficking continue to expand, they will reduce economic opportunity in the formal sector even further.

International tools for combating the illicit flows of small arms and light weapons

Combating the illicit flows of small arms and light weapons presents a major challenge in North Africa and the Sahel. A number of existing measures and approaches for curbing arms trafficking are available to African states. Regional organizations, existing frameworks, and the UN Programme of Action (PoA) (UN, 2001) can all play crucial roles in meeting the challenges. It is important, however, to distinguish between activities and actual implementation: the submission of a report (or absence of

it) does not necessarily mean effective implementation (or a lack thereof).

The nexus between peacekeeping operations and counter-proliferation efforts deserves more attention. Peacekeeping operations often help to recover small arms and light weapons already in circulation. But the recovery of these weapons does not always mean that they are permanently removed from circulation. Peacekeeping operations often lose confiscated weapons. Such diversion is neither infrequent nor negligible. A lack of oversight (for example, during the recording of serial numbers, or disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration processes, etc.) is a crucial problem among peacekeeping operations and one that must be considered.⁸

Trafficking: a practitioner's perspective

Historically, at the traditional crossroads of trading routes armed escorts were used for caravans, and this is paralleled by today's protection arrangements for different forms of trafficking. The presence of various armed rebellions (for example, the Tuareg in Mali or Boko Haram in Nigeria); the existence of (tolerated) armed militias; long, porous borders; and, more recently, the collapse of the Libyan state all pose major challenges. All these factors contribute to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the region.

A holistic approach to combating the illicit flow of small arms and light weapons is needed and initiatives at every level are required to solve this problem:

- **Sub-regional cooperation is crucial.** The best way to maintain pressure on terrorist and criminal groups is to overcome the climate of mistrust between and among the regions' governments.
- **Sub-regional cooperation cannot be limited to discussions.** The greatest immediate challenge is the renewed conflict in Libya. Information sharing, mixed patrolling, and improved communication and transportation are all concrete elements of a regional solution. To be effective, neighbouring countries must take the same approach to the problem.
- **Local communities are key to the solution.** Support must be given to affected border communities. Specifically, opinion leaders in these communities should be addressed directly: they are the first to have information and they are pivotal in implementing any programme in border areas. Campaigns to provide information about problems related to illicit arms must be undertaken so that the communities involved understand both the problem and the solution. It is also important to change the incentive structure to provide opportunities for border communities to generate alternative sources of income.

Community engagement in border management

Border protection and its limits

An important dimension of border management is based on systems of border protection and effective control of imports and exports across borders. Although it is important, community engagement cannot be a substitute for integrated border management systems. At the same time, however, all the advanced hardware and systems in the world will be ineffective without community involvement, especially in the initial stages of developing new border management systems. And even the best system implemented with significant community involvement will be influenced by how other cities and towns in neighbouring countries implement their own solutions.⁹

The expense and difficulty of implementation are enough to make governments cautious. For one thing, borders in the region are often remote and lacking in even the minimum requirements for effective border management systems, which can require equipment-intensive architecture reliant on advanced IT systems. Even when the necessary equipment is installed, the practicalities of using and maintaining sophisticated systems in remote locations often mean only more cost without a corresponding increase in effectiveness. Community engagement alone may well deliver the same gains at far less cost.

Indeed, border protections systems and protocols are by their very nature limited. At the far end of the spectrum the solution is simple: close the border and prevent the flows of goods and people altogether. But even in properly implemented systems the goal is to manage the flows and goods and

people by restricting them, with the restrictions based on a single set of rules. Ending all forms of informal trade would result in immediate chaos in border regions, given their economic reliance on such trade. The recent riots in southern Tunisia clearly point to this.

Even minor restrictions can give rise to unintended consequences: increasing the risk of smuggling goods raises prices and gives increased power to networks that are willing and able to bear the risks. Currently, the networks best placed to bear increased risk are criminal networks that smuggle drugs and other high-value illicit goods, including weapons. Smaller, more vulnerable networks would likely seek the protection and support of jihadist groups, which are the only other actors in the region with sufficient firepower and risk tolerance. This in turn would lead to a potential increase in radicalization in these communities, because the choice is reduced to one between criminals and extremists. The likelihood of increased numbers of weapons would also lead to political destabilization and a loss of security as smuggling and trafficking become increasingly para-militarized.

Community engagement approaches: two projects in North Africa and the Sahara-Sahel

The Danish Demining Group currently runs two projects on community safety in border areas that encourage community engagement in border management: one in southern Tunisia on the Libyan border and the other in border regions between Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Both projects use a community-centred approach to border management to broadly engage the population in improving its own safety. The approach consists of several projects in four areas:

1. **Community safety planning and youth empowerment:** stakeholders from the local community identify and prioritize their safety and security needs to develop a strategy and action plan. These plans cover activities such as security provision and governance, conflict prevention, mine action, and safety measures around small arms and light weapons (for example, the reduction of incidents involving firearms, stockpile management, and weapons marking).
2. **Dialogue platforms for communities and (local) security providers** aim to institutionalize a dialogue process where information can be shared and trust is built between the population and security forces.
3. **Cross-border social cohesion and conflict management initiatives:** these aim to reward successful conflict resolution and management across borders.
4. **Developing the capacities of border authorities:** in the Sahel, project support entails the upgrading of police stations, border posts, and weapons-tracing tools. Support is also provided for cross-border coordination and training measures.

A second approach to community engagement can be found in the 'Border for All' project conducted in the Kasserine region of Tunisia. A consortium of three organizations implemented the project: International Alert, Strategic Capacity Group, and Aktis. The project's aim is to support the Tunisian Ministry of the Interior in developing policies to implement community-based border management. This project operates at three levels:

1. **Local population:** the project works with the local population to assess perceptions of insecurity and develop a baseline of the economic, social, and security situation. Additionally, the project holds meetings with security providers to discuss options for community engagement.
2. **Military operations:** the project offers operational commanders training on the '3 Pillar approach' (see box 'The 3 Pillar approach').
3. **Central government:** the project offers the government facilitated sessions for policy development. One of the immediate results was the creation of a hotline to allow citizens get in touch with border guards of the National Guard.

The 3 Pillar approach

Strategic Capacity Group developed the 3 Pillar approach, which stresses the role of communication in community-based border management, with the goal of building trust between citizens and border guards. It also seeks to make the local population aware of the risks of and harm done by smuggling. The three pillars are as follows:

- **Pillar 1:** the first pillar adopts a gradual approach whereby simple but institutionalized means of communication between the security forces and the population are set up that will be constantly 'upgraded' towards the creation of community security councils. Problems of trust are mutual and many security agents are suspicious of the motivations of the population. Security providers need to start activities and see the first encouraging results, then it is possible to increase the degree of participation. The direction, regularity, and level of institutionalization of the communication, as well as the communities' involvement in problem identification and decision making, are used to evaluate progress.
- **Pillar 2:** the second pillar seeks to change the perceptions and values of border communities vis-à-vis smuggling and trafficking. This goes beyond a simple one-off public relations event. The idea is to put in place a continuous mechanism for informing the population about the risks of trafficking. The focus is on dangerous and illegal goods, for example, framing counterfeit medicines, electronics, etc. as health hazards for the family. Awareness building also includes highlighting the importance of the community for the security of the country. For example, in Morocco, the authorities conduct regular events with shepherds who work near the border, presenting them as the first line of security for the country and Europe. The goal is to shift perceptions and increase self-appreciation.
- **Pillar 3:** the third pillar involves building community partnerships for the medium and long term by encouraging community members to participate in reducing trafficking and smuggling because they consider these activities to be harmful to them. Although developing such partnerships is difficult and requires a clear vision and considerable dedication, it is believed to be the most effective long-term solution for community safety in border regions. Community partnerships, however, require a coordinated effort involving the security forces and all other local authorities. Such coordination may include programmes for development and investment in the region, but also the provision of other services needed by the population.

Conclusion

The overarching focus of the workshop was the discussion of solutions to reduce the circulation of weapons and ammunition. As always, there are no simple answers. A meaningful reduction of small arms and light weapons proliferation can only be the result of multiple layers of international and national legislation, as well as regional, national, and local policies, programmes, and actions. The 'security only' approach or the implementation of technical fixes is not sufficient. Certainly, improving training and the provision of better equipment to personnel tasked with border security are necessary—the needs of some countries in the Sahara-Sahel are dire in this regard. But border protection alone is not sufficient to reduce the flows of arms and ammunition. As it has been for centuries, the region is a space of trade and mobility. Furthermore, current border regimes are ill equipped to respond to the needs of populations and are burdened with the colonial legacy of forced settlement, imposed borders that divided a community's land between two or more countries, and the violent repression of uprisings.

Policy options¹⁰

Together with broad recommendations, workshop participants discussed a number of specific policy recommendations. At present, the best approach to reduce the circulation of illegal and dangerous goods is to frame informal trade as distinct from trafficking. This is just a first step, however, and not a solution. Based on past experiences, participants suggested that the following policy options might also be considered:

Local

1. Socioeconomic development in border areas is necessary. Projects should be developed by or at least in close participation and coordination with the local population and civil society. Centrally planned development projects without community input are likely to fail, as they have in the past.
2. Central governments and the population living in border areas need to develop new 'social contracts' to quasi-formalize informal trade by developing a set of locally valid rules. For example, there could be an agreement on differential taxation of the local population's goods, with the tax revenue placed under direct local management for investment in local development and infrastructure.

National

1. All countries in the region should have a strong national focal point for small arms and light weapons and work towards the implementation of international treaties and the UN PoA. Ideally, each country would have a national commission on small arms and light weapons and armed violence reduction.
2. Countries in the region should shift their perception of borders from lines to protect to spaces to manage. The financial and technical capabilities of the countries in North Africa and the Sahara-Sahel mean that border management is likely to be a more realistic option than traditional border protection. To be successful, however, these countries must use a holistic approach that integrates border guards, customs, local authorities, and other security forces. Community problem-solving platforms will help to drive the participation of the local population.

Border management should be understood as only one part of security services in border regions. Community problem-solving platforms should involve genuine interaction between the security forces and the population. These interactions should not be used only as intelligence-gathering activities, but as a genuine means of communication with the goal of preventing problems in the future and building the capacity to peacefully resolve problems when they occur.

Regional

1. Countries in the region need to coordinate and develop an intelligence-sharing mechanism. Common patrols on each border would also increase the efficiency of cooperation and information sharing.
2. Countries should address cross-border price differentials in goods. This can be done by modifying tariffs, adapting taxes, eliminating trade quotas, or introducing more targeted subsidies.
3. Border management should be a result of broad cooperation across national governments. It should not be solely the task of border guards and customs officials, but should require that all law enforcement and intelligence units cooperate, coordinate, and share information as efficiently as possible.

International

1. The European Union (EU) should open a dialogue with the region's governments on European drug policies. The EU and its member states should coordinate with countries in North Africa and the Sahara-Sahel on policies that will reduce demand for drugs in Europe and thus reduce incentives for trafficking in the region.
2. Law enforcement and intelligence agencies in Europe should work more closely with their counterparts in North Africa and the Sahara-Sahel.

Notes

- 1 Definition adapted from UNGA (2000, art. 3(a)).
- 2 Algeria and other countries in the region offered similar subsidies on a large range of goods, albeit at far lower rates.
- 3 Other cross-border tribal alliances ring Libya as well. On the eastern borders of Libya the Awled Ali tribe is present in both Libya and Egypt and its cross-border trade is well established. Southern Libya features clans of Arab tribes (for example, the Hasawana, Magarha, and Gadhadhfa) whose presence spans the region from the Libyan coast to Darfur, Chad, Niger, and northern Mali. Similarly, the areas populated by the Tuareg and Tebu lie across the borders of the Sahara-Sahel region. Various Tuareg clans live in northern Mali, Algeria, Niger, and the Libyan cities of Ghat, Awbari, Sebha, and Ghadames (among others), and trading links are long standing. Tebu clans are found predominantly in Niger, Chad, and Libya (most notably in the cities of Sebha, Marzouq, and el Qatrun) and have equivalent trading linkages.
- 4 During the workshop there was some disagreement about the extent to which smuggling is problematic. While some participants saw it as a harmless activity that is crucial for local communities and their border economies, others emphasized that it is nonetheless illegal and represents a substantial loss of government revenue. The term ‘criminalization of smuggling’ refers specifically to a shift towards smuggling different types of goods by new actors who are usually less ‘embedded’ in tribal organizations. The term should thus not be read as a judgement about the nature of smuggling as such.
- 5 In that sense, workshop participants noted that the term ‘narcojihadism’ is not a valid description of either the violent extremists or the linkage between them and drug traffickers.
- 6 For more on this operation, see Italian Ministry of Defence and Italian Navy (n.d.).
- 7 As noted by the latest report of the UN Panel of Experts on Libya, much weaponry appears to be delivered by ship and aircraft in areas controlled by the parties to the conflict, in violation of the UN arms embargo (UNSC, 2015, pp. 36–45).
- 8 For a discussion of these issues, see Berman and Racovita (2015).
- 9 The example of Libya is instructive in this regard. As noted above, the level of border management, protection capacities, and import and export schemes varies substantially from country to country around Libya, leading to built-in incentives for illicit trade, smuggling, and trafficking.
- 10 The policy options discussed at the workshop were many and varied. The options discussed in this section represent ideas presented during the workshop and should not be read as the consensus recommendations of participants.

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