



**GLOBAL  
INITIATIVE**  
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL  
ORGANIZED CRIME

# THE TRI-BORDER TANGLE

**Arms trafficking, crime and  
violence in the borderlands of  
Chad, Cameroon and Central  
African Republic**

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## FROM VISION TO ACTION: A DECADE OF ANALYSIS, DISRUPTION AND RESILIENCE

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime was founded in 2013. Its vision was to mobilize a global strategic approach to tackling organized crime by strengthening political commitment to address the challenge, building the analytical evidence base on organized crime, disrupting criminal economies and developing networks of resilience in affected communities. Ten years on, the threat of organized crime is greater than ever before and it is critical that we continue to take action by building a coordinated global response to meet the challenge.

# ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<b>3R</b>	Retour, Réclamation, Réhabilitation (Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation)
<b>ADRS</b>	Armée Dynamique Révolutionnaire du Sud (Dynamic Revolutionary Army of the South)
<b>ANT</b>	Armée Nationale Tchadienne (Chadian National Army)
<b>CAR</b>	Central African Republic
<b>CPC</b>	Coalition of Patriots for Change
<b>DDR</b>	Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of Congo
<b>HMG</b>	Heavy machine gun
<b>IDPs</b>	Internally displaced persons
<b>FACA</b>	Forces Armées Centrafricaines (Central African Armed Forces)
<b>ISWAP</b>	Islamic State West Africa Province
<b>JAS</b>	Jama'atu Ahlis Sunnah lid-Da'awati wal-Jihad (Sunnah Followers' Group for Dawah and Jihad)
<b>MINUSCA</b>	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
<b>MLC</b>	Mouvement de Libération du Cameroun (Movement for the Liberation of Cameroon)
<b>MPRD</b>	Mouvement pour la Paix, la Reconstruction et le Développement (Movement for Peace, Reconstruction and Development)
<b>MRST</b>	Mouvement pour la Révolution du Sud du Tchad
<b>RP-JET</b>	Rassemblement Populaire pour la Justice et l'Égalité du Tchad (Popular Assembly for Justice and Equality in Chad)
<b>SALW</b>	Small arms and light weapons

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**T**his report presents a snapshot of arms trafficking, and the violence that follows it, in one of the least-studied borderland regions of West Africa – the tri-border area of Chad, Cameroon and the Central African Republic (CAR). It also offers an updated analysis of the conflict dynamics affecting this region.

The tri-border region is growing in strategic importance. Following the 2023 coup in Niger, and with instability continuing in Libya, Sudan and the Lake Chad Basin, Cameroon has become the main trade artery for Chad and the CAR. The majority of imports and exports into these countries now pass through the tri-border region.<sup>1</sup> Further destabilization of this area would cause damaging economic ripples across the region.

Unfortunately, the extent of illicit activity in the area increases this risk of further destabilization. The confluence of international borders offers myriad opportunities to profit from illicit activities and to exploit the relatively open crossings to evade authorities.<sup>2</sup> In terms of conflict dynamics, this report identifies an increased displacement of violence by non-state armed groups over the tri-border region's borders. Armed groups from western CAR have taken to using the border regions of eastern Cameroon as a rear base, under pressure from military and Wagner Group activity in the CAR. Likewise, southern Chadian armed groups have made multiple incursions into northern CAR because of military pressures.

The illegal arms trade is an accelerant market, driving conflict and violence in the tri-border region. © Florent Vergnes/AFP via Getty Images



The collected evidence in this report points to an apparent growth in the use of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in violent crime, which can exacerbate armed conflicts, and militarize existing socio-economic divides. Arms trafficking often begets other forms of violent crime, which are enabled by greater access to weaponry. The clustering of different types of violent crime – especially prolific and large-scale kidnappings and cattle rustling – in areas with high levels of arms trafficking, is a pattern that has been identified across other hotspots of illicit economic activity.

This report finds that the perpetrators of these crimes have often been armed forces personnel, members of rebel groups or vigilantes who use their easy access to weapons to moonlight as criminal actors. This makes identifying the precise perpetrators extremely difficult, and makes such crime exceptionally difficult to tackle. But there is also evidence of a growing professionalization of violent crime in the area. As a result, violence in the tri-border region is at high risk of becoming self-perpetuating.

## Defining the tri-border area

The tri-border area contains the following regions of the East Sudanian savannah:

- The Adamaoua, Nord and Extrême-Nord regions in Cameroon;
- The Ouham-Pendé, Ouham, Nana-Grébezi, Nana-Mambéré, Mambéré-Kadéï, Bamingui-Bangoran and Vakaga regions in the CAR; and,
- The Mayo-Kebbi Ouest, Mayo-Kebbi Est, Logone-Occidental, Logone-Oriental, Mandoul and Moyen Chari regions in Chad.



**FIGURE 1** The tri-border area between Chad, Cameroon and the Central African Republic.

Using interviews, pricing data and photographic evidence collected by analysts in the region between 2022 and 2023, this report fulfils two objectives. The first is to document the present state of arms trafficking and the arms market in the tri-border area, as well as how conflict dynamics have changed in the wake of major regional developments, including the crisis in Sudan, regime change in Chad and the activity of the Wagner Group in the CAR. (Security considerations and access constraints limited the number of respondents, and further research will be necessary to develop these findings.)

The second is to consider how violence in the tri-border area is being shaped by the availability of SALW. Local demand for this kind of weaponry is increasing and this report delves into the factors driving it.

## Arms trafficking as an accelerant market

**G**lobal Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) research on hotspots of illicit economic activity has found that arms trafficking is a major driver of conflict and violence in such areas. Arms trafficking exacerbates conflict and social tensions, by equipping and empowering those who are willing to use force for advantage or profit – such as non-state armed groups, petty bandits and other violent criminal actors. Arms trafficking also overlaps with other illicit economies known to have destabilizing effects, such as cattle rustling and kidnapping for ransom.<sup>3</sup> ■

## Methodology

In addition to reviewing relevant academic and grey literature, this research draws on in-person and remote interviews with 36 stakeholders in northern Cameroon, north-western CAR and southern Chad. The stakeholders interviewed in the region included army officers, officials, cattle herders, farmers, traders, drivers, journalists, arms traders and researchers. Interviews were conducted between November 2022 and August 2023, with a mix of semi-structured interviews, structured questionnaire-based interviews and triangulation with additional sources. In the course of these interviews, GI-TOC researchers were supplied with a cache of photographs of SALW by intermediaries working for clandestine arms shops. These photographs were analyzed, in collaboration with Conflict Armament Research, to identify a sample of the SALW that are currently available in the tri-border region.



## REGIONAL INSTABILITY DRIVING DEMAND FOR ARMS

*In Mbaimboun [a Cameroonian village five kilometres from the border with the CAR], there is one border post with four Cameroonian officials. They don't have a vehicle; they do not conduct patrols. I travelled to the actual crossing. There is a 50-metre-long bridge over the M'bere River that separates CAR from Cameroon. On the Cameroonian side there was only one police officer. He was unarmed and was only posted there from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. before being redeployed to the border with Chad in the afternoon. They really lack personnel.<sup>4</sup>*

This quote, taken from a conversation with a Cameroonian researcher, is a compelling illustration of the way that borders function within the region. A second visitor to Mbaimboun in December 2022 confirmed to the GI-TOC that, even in the presence of border guards, Chadian and Central African nationals would frequently cross into Cameroon unhindered, including those conspicuously carrying weapons.<sup>5</sup> Mbaimboun highlights a critical problem throughout the tri-border region: its highly porous borders cannot serve as a meaningful barrier to small arms flows, especially in an unstable area where demand for armaments is high.

The tri-border region is a major destination for arms flows from conflicts in North, East and West Africa. Weapons used in Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin, the separatist conflicts in south-west and north-west Cameroon, the Sahel and Sudan, continue to pour into the tri-border area and play a crucial role in animating existing tensions.<sup>6</sup>

Actors involved in more remote conflicts are also flooding into the tri-border region from multiple directions. The 2023 conflict in Sudan has led to a mass displacement into southern Chad and the influx of fleeing Sudanese fighters, as well as civilians seeking to protect themselves, appears likely to drive the regional demand for arms. Meanwhile, the Wagner Group's presence in the CAR, and its efforts to push rebels out of strategic areas in the west of the country, has encouraged armed groups to cross the border into Chad and Cameroon in order to set up rear bases, seek temporary refuge and engage in criminal markets.<sup>7</sup> In southern Chad, rebel groups mobilizing against the military government (led by Mahamat Deby following his father's death in April 2021) have clustered along the border with the CAR. As a result, both armed groups and the Chadian National Army (Armée Nationale Tchadienne, ANT) have been running incursions into northern CAR.<sup>8</sup>

The following country profiles summarize the conflicts and other drivers of instability on each side of the tri-border area, providing context for the spike in demand for SALW.



## Central African Republic

The seizing of power by the Séléka rebel coalition in March 2013 signalled the transformation of the CAR into a ‘pot-pourri’ of armed groups, bandits, self-defence militia and rebels.<sup>9</sup> In 2020, an alliance of rebel groups coordinated by the ousted president François Bozizé – the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) – attacked the capital in Bangui. They were repelled over the course of the following year by a combination of state armed forces (Central African Armed Forces, FACA), Wagner Group mercenaries, Rwandan detachments and UN peacekeepers. The CPC was substantially weakened in the process.

Military defeats have been compounded by internal tensions. After failing to achieve its formative objective (preventing the 2020 elections), the CPC has struggled to maintain unity, and some analysts believe that the coalition now exists in name only.<sup>10</sup> Internal divisions have ratcheted up since Bozizé, who had been coordinating the rebels from exile in Chad, was removed from the country in March 2023. His relocation to Guinea Bissau has diminished his ability to exert control over the CPC, fuelling contests over the direction of the coalition.<sup>11</sup>

Armed groups in western CAR are far less able to control mines, roads or given territories than their counterparts in the east of the country. There is now limited armed group activity in south-western CAR. The picture is more mixed, however, in the north-western corner – the Cameroon–CAR portion of the tri-border area – at Ouham-Pendé and Nana-Mambéré. Here, CPC component groups, and particularly Retour, Réclamation, Réhabilitation (3R), remain active. But 3R is less influential than it was in the late 2010s, the result of both Wagner activity and leadership disputes (see actor profile of 3R later in this report). Despite some significant attacks in 2023, such as that on the Béloko customs post in January,<sup>12</sup> the situation is more stable than pre-2021.



The Séléka rebel coalition seized power in the Central African Republic in 2013, transforming the region into a ‘pot-pourri’ of armed actors and further driving the illegal trade in arms. © Pacome Pabandji/AFP via Getty Images

According to truck drivers using the RN3 highway (a critical trade route running between Béloko on the Cameroonian border and Bangui), Wagner presence has improved security on the road in 2023.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, CPC component groups are still active in the tri-border area and continue to challenge state and paramilitary forces. In the first three quarters of 2023, CPC-affiliated groups were involved in 53 violent incidents, compared to 32 in the whole of 2022.<sup>14</sup>

Further north, in the Bamingui–Bangoran area on the Chadian border, CPC affiliates are also the most active non-state groups, and continue to attack military forces and civilians. While the main towns in the prefecture, such as Ndélé, are under FACA and Wagner control, CPC and other unidentified armed groups continue to harass civilians with checkpoints, extortion rackets, looting and violence.<sup>15</sup> The northern provinces also experience periodic tensions between farmers and herders, as a result of seasonal trans-humance from Chad.<sup>16</sup>

Ouham prefecture in the north has been caught in the crossfire between Chadian and Central African forces throughout 2023. The governments in N'Djamena and Bangui fear that rebel groups from their countries will be used by their neighbour for their own security objectives – prompting operations and reinforcements along the border by both countries to try and discourage this behaviour.<sup>17</sup> Chadian army incursions in mid-2023 reportedly led to harassment and violence against civilians in Lim-Pendé.

## Chad

Southern Chad has a long history of rebellion against the central government and this dynamic has been rejuvenated by the formation of new rebel groups between 2021 and mid-2023. Several interviewees connected the resurgence of rebellion in the south to the political instability that followed the death of Idriss Déby.<sup>18</sup> They highlighted especially the brutal suppression of protests in N'Djamena in October 2022, in which at least 128 people were killed and many disappeared while protesting against the two-year extension of Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno's transitional rule following the death of his father.<sup>19</sup> The protests were seen as an iconic moment for the political opposition and reportedly led to many youths joining rebel groups.<sup>20</sup>

Rebel groups are typically split along regional and ethno-religious lines. Sudistes (southerners) have often felt left out of the political equation.<sup>21</sup> President Félix Malloum, whose term ended in 1979 leading to a succession of northern presidencies, was the last southern president of Chad.<sup>22</sup> Many Sudistes accuse the Chadian government, led by the Muslim president General Mahamat Déby, of allowing violence to thrive in the predominantly Christian south of the country, reviving secessionist fears.<sup>23,24</sup> As such, Sudiste youths have mainly been attracted to groups based on the south Chadian border both due to proximity and the fact that they have little in common, religiously or culturally, with those based in the northern Tibesti region or in Libya.<sup>25</sup>

The CAR has hosted Chadian rebel groups for decades,<sup>26</sup> and while the leaders of a number of groups were killed during the Idriss Déby regime, four groups remain particularly active in northern CAR close to the southern Chadian border – Rassemblement Populaire pour la Justice et l'Égalité du Tchad (RP-JET); Mouvement pour la Révolution du Sud du Tchad (MRST); Mouvement pour la Paix, la Reconstruction et le Développement (MPRD), and the Armée Dynamique Révolutionnaire du Sud (ADRS). Of these, the first two are significantly more established.

Assessing the total number of fighters in these groups is complicated, given limited verifiable information, but estimates from sources familiar with the area suggest a cumulative total of between 2 000 and 3 000 members of RP-JET and MRST.<sup>27</sup> A number of sources based in southern Chad and northern CAR report



In October 2022, clashes erupted in the Chadian capital, N'Djamena, between police and demonstrators at a banned protest over the ruling junta's grip on power. © AFP via Getty Images

that these groups were particularly active between May and July 2023,<sup>28</sup> with activities waning thereafter.<sup>29</sup> This decline may be because the Chadian military has reinforced its presence in Goré.<sup>30</sup>

While Chadian rebel groups have mostly presented a security threat to the Chadian government, their impact has also been felt by civilians in the CAR and Cameroon. In the Touboro region of Cameroon, an increase in kidnappings, particularly of farmers, has been attributed in part to Chadian rebels who retreat back over the border into Chad or the CAR.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, the groups' killing of civilians,<sup>32</sup> as well as their reported engagement in robberies and cattle rustling, has ensured that they do not enjoy the support of the local population in either southern Chad or northern CAR.<sup>33</sup>

In response to growing activities by non-state armed groups, the Chadian government has bolstered its security presence at the border,<sup>34</sup> and French soldiers were reportedly seen in Logone-Oriental in April 2023.<sup>35</sup> General Déby visited the region in May 2023, highlighting the government's concern with developments in southern Chad where its legitimacy, already low, threatens to collapse.<sup>36</sup>

As in much of the region, the military response to non-state armed groups has multiplied the harm to civilians. Illustratively, the impact on Central African civilians in the Paoua region has in large part been worsened by the activities of the ANT in pursuit of militants.<sup>37</sup> According to the member of parliament (MP) for Paoua in May 2023, ANT soldiers were making frequent incursions into northern CAR in order to track and kill southern Chadian rebels from RP-JET.<sup>38</sup> CAR soldiers had reportedly demanded that rebels leave of their own accord, but their refusal prompted Chadian attempts to expel them by force, resulting in violence against civilians and extortion.<sup>39</sup> According to the deputy for the community of Mia-Pendé, ANT soldiers demanded that residents show their identity cards (a document that most residents of the area do not have, since obtaining one requires travel to Bangui), in order to prove they were not Chadian. If they could not produce the card, they were forced to either pay FCFA10 000 and flee, or, in some reported cases, were threatened with death.<sup>40</sup> At the time, he said, there were at least 80 000 Chadian refugees in northern CAR who had been displaced by rebel activity and counter-insurgency operations in Chad.<sup>41</sup>

## Cameroon

While Cameroon's portion of the tri-border area has been less affected by domestic rebel groups than other parts of the country,<sup>42</sup> Nord province has experienced the presence of a new rebel group, the predominantly Fulani Mouvement de Libération du Cameroun (MLC) since 2021, and seen increased activity from the Boko Haram splinter groups, Jama'atu Ahlis Sunnah lid-Da'awati wal-Jihad (JAS) and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), in 2023. The MLC has repeatedly clashed with Cameroon's counter-terrorism forces in areas close to the Bouba Ndjida National Park, located next to the border with Chad and the CAR, which has acted as a safe haven for rebels, bandits and poachers in the tri-border area.<sup>43</sup>

The MLC has participated in illegal elephant poaching within the Bouba Ndjida park, following in the footsteps of the Sudanese Janjaweed militia who have hunted elephants there to finance their activities for two decades.<sup>44</sup> While the MLC was behind a number of attacks between its establishment in 2020 and late 2022, the group has been far less active in 2023, with no known incidents of violence committed at the time of writing.<sup>45</sup> However, combatants in the tri-border region frequently engage in armed criminality as well as armed struggle, so it is possible that MLC combatants have continued in other destabilizing activities, such as kidnappings.



Illegal elephant poaching in Cameroon's Bouba Ndjida National Park finances the activities of armed groups. © Brent Stirton/ Getty Images Reportage

Alongside growing violence from ISWAP and JAS, unidentified armed actors have been very active in the Nord province, particularly around Touboro and Mayo-Rey, and in the vicinity of the Bouba Ndjida National Park, engaging in kidnap, robbery and cattle rustling.<sup>46</sup>

Public concern over the escalating insecurity in the Nord region is growing. In October 2022, demonstrations took place in front of the Touboro sub-prefecture building over the abductions of 435 people in a ten-month period.<sup>47</sup> Local authorities say that at least 70 people were kidnapped for ransom in a three-month period in Touboro department.<sup>48</sup> On 22 October 2023, there was another mass kidnapping with 30 hostages taken by presumed *coupeurs de route* (bandits), including Chadian students as well as Cameroonian nationals.<sup>49</sup> Buried caches of arms have also been frequently discovered by the armed forces in the area.<sup>50</sup>

It is not clear whether the individuals making up these unknown armed groups are Cameroonian or from neighbouring states, although it is likely that nationals from all three countries of the tri-border are involved. These individuals may be current or former rebel fighters, violent entrepreneurs or even soldiers from national armed forces. Indeed, in January 2022, after two separate kidnappings in the village of Mbilougui in which a total of five people were taken hostage, Cameroonian forces tracked down a band of armed men. After an exchange of fire, one of the kidnappers was killed. Having examined his weapon and documents, they found that he was a member of the Chadian armed forces.<sup>51</sup>



# SNAPSHOT OF ARMS TRAFFICKING IN THE TRI-BORDER AREA

## Rising demand, rising prices

These summaries of conflict and instability on the three sides of the border show the many ways in which civilians can be caught up in these violent events, whether as casualties of political violence or armed profiteering. Equally, competition between herders and farmers over pasture, water and land access is becoming increasingly militarized spurring the perceived need for self-defence.<sup>52</sup>

Interviews conducted for this report describe how demand for SALW rose in the period between 2021 and 2023, mostly for self-protection.<sup>53</sup> The endurance of conflict both within the tri-border region but also in the Lake Chad Basin and Sudan regions from which SALW flow out, has led to the build-up of a large stock of recent and legacy weapons in the tri-border area. SALW – like fighters – are often recycled from one conflict to another, following the demand. Small arms function as a tradable commodity, like gold, capable of appreciating or depreciating in value. They can be sold when there is an immediate need for cash, making them a valuable investment for civilians and armed groups alike. Armed groups often bury weapons and ammunition caches and note the coordinates for later retrieval.<sup>54</sup> This allows them the flexibility to buy additional SALW or ammunition when prices are low and increases their mobility in case of attack on their positions.

What people are prepared to pay for a firearm is a strong indicator of demand. The average monthly salary in the tri-border region ranges between FCFA35 000 and FCFA80 000.<sup>55</sup> Assuming an individual saved half of their maximum monthly salary, it would take well over a year to accumulate the funds necessary for a Kalashnikov-type weapon.<sup>56</sup>



**Demand for small arms and light weapons increases during the rainy season, as cattle herders are drawn into conflicts over pastureland.**  
© Patrick Meinhardt/AFP via Getty Images

SALW were also described by interviewees as being critical to peoples' livelihoods, and their ability to safeguard their property. Many civilians resort to borrowing money to purchase weapons, some from informal sources such as friends, family or unregulated lenders, while others buy them on credit.<sup>57</sup>

One Chadian army officer highlighted this perceived necessity of firearms for civilians in border communities. According to him, owning a weapon is a 'dream' among farmers, herders and traders alike. They will purchase them at any price 'to protect [their] property, because in this border region there is no trust, because the armed men who transit here sometimes outnumber inhabitants. And they are ready to use their weapons.'<sup>58</sup> After all, as another respondent put it, 'There is no price tag on security.'<sup>59</sup>

SALW prices appear to fluctuate in line with conflict intensity – as demand for weapons increases, prices increase. Arms prices broadly increased in the tri-border region between 2021 and 2023, due to a combination of rising violence and limited injections of new weapons into the market.<sup>60</sup> The February 2023 UN Panel of Experts report on the CAR noted that, in 2022, the growing instability in Chad and Sudan had created greater demand and competition for SALW, thereby reducing availability in the CAR and ultimately increasing prices.<sup>61</sup> SALW prices also follow seasonal patterns, with spikes in demand occurring during the rainy season, as cattle herders are drawn into conflicts over pastureland.<sup>62</sup>

In other regions, such as Darfur in Sudan, significant price fluctuations have encouraged residents and armed groups alike to stockpile arms and ammunition when prices are low to prepare for future conflicts.<sup>63</sup> Such stockpiling results in a dangerous tinderbox situation, where minor provocations can result in the rapid arming and mobilization of individuals seeking to retaliate.<sup>64</sup> While it is unclear

if this phenomenon is happening in the same way in the tri-border region, similar price fluctuations have been observed making this trend critical to monitor.

Most participants highlighted the ease of access to SALW. One Arab herder who operates across the tri-border region told the GI-TOC that SALW are the most consumed product the area, and that a firearm of any quality could be purchased over the phone in less than five hours. ‘People buy them daily and quickly,’ he said, ‘Weapons sales have increased because everyone wants a weapon, some sell them again to other people in other countries.’ According to him the principal impulse is self-defence: ‘The different conflicts [...] between herders and farmers are multiplying, everyone intends to protect themselves. The conflict between farmers and herders is the major problem that pushes everyone to prepare.’<sup>65</sup>

Many community members – often purchasers of SALW themselves – therefore see arms dealers very favourably and as contributing to their security, even though long-term arms proliferation tends to lead to more insecurity.<sup>66</sup> This trend has been observed in other areas, such as Nigeria, where demand for arms for self-protection is significant.<sup>67</sup>

The high degree of popular legitimacy enjoyed by the SALW market reduces the likelihood of petty arms dealers being reported or apprehended. Proactive efforts to regulate or control arms distribution are discouraged due to community pushback, creating a vicious cycle of increasing availability of weapons and consequent insecurity.

The cheapest firearms available on the market are Kalashnikov-style assault rifles, with prices varying according to demand, quality, make (Russian or Chinese) and age (see Figure 2).

TYPE OF SALW	PRICE (FCFA)
Kalashnikov-type (assault rifle)	50 000–100 000
IWI Galil ACE (assault rifle)	80 000–130 000
Browning Hi-Power (semi-automatic pistol). Referred to locally as ‘Le Belgicain’ (mix of ‘Belgian’ and ‘American’ in French) <sup>68</sup>	1 million–1.5 million
<i>Gourloun</i> (artisanal/crafted weapon)	20 000–35 000

**FIGURE 2** Types and price ranges of SALW in the tri-border area, May 2023.

NOTE: Pricing data is based on interviews with 12 stakeholders held between April and June 2023<sup>69</sup>

While most of the conventional (i.e. non-artisanal) SALW available in the tri-border zone are second hand (ranging from five to 30 years old),<sup>70</sup> weapons sourced from army officers tend to be almost new. Likewise *gourlouns* (crafted weapons) also tend to be sold new. One feature of the SALW market in the tri-border area is the eclectic mix of firearms available, although they are generally older. The following analysis of firearms in the CAR is illustrative.

## Purchasing firearms in the Central African Republic

During field research, GI-TOC researchers obtained photographs of a sample of SALW available for sale in two clandestine shops operating out of private houses – one in Bemal, north of Paoua in Ouham-Pendé prefecture and another in Baoro, east of Bouar in Nana-Mambéré prefecture. Customers looking to buy weaponry would be connected, through contacts, to the seller. They then either visit the shop in person, or choose a firearm in advance from a catalogue of photos and meet the seller or a courier elsewhere.



Type 82-2 hand grenades manufactured in China (left) and Type 56 assault rifles (right) discovered for sale at clandestine shops in the Central African Republic.

*Photo: GI-TOC*



Three AK-type magazines (left) and an MAT-49 submachine gun (right) found in clandestine arms shops in the Central African Republic.

*Photo: GI-TOC*

The GI-TOC collaborated with Conflict Armament Research to analyze the SALW in the photographs. Conflict Armament Research is an organization that specializes in the identification and tracing of SALW and their supply chains. The organization maintains a database of SALW identified and documented around the world, allowing them to compare new SALW findings against previous data from a particular area.

Conflict Armament Research's analysis, through comparison with their dataset, is that the majority of the SALW documented in these photographs are typical of those available in illicit markets in the



### BAORO SHOP

One MAT-49 submachine gun, French-manufactured. Year of manufacture believed to be 1970–1975.

Two Type 82-2 hand grenades manufactured in China. Potentially manufactured in 2006, and likely to have been diverted from FACA stocks.

Two RG-4 offensive grenades. Manufactured in the Czech Republic in 1981.

One F1-type fragmentation grenade, without fuse. Date and manufacturer are unknown.

Four unidentified hand grenades, with fly-off levers and safety pins taped in place. Date and manufacturer are unknown.

One heavy machine gun (HMG) ammunition round, likely compatible with a mounted HMG system, e.g. on a pick-up truck. Date and manufacturer are unknown.

77 rounds of 7.62 x 39 mm ammunition. 23 rounds of small calibre ammunition, including 7.62 x 39 mm and potentially other types. Between 3 and 7 Ak-type magazines. Date and manufacturer are unknown.

### BEMAL SHOP

One Type 56 assault rifle manufactured in China by Qinghua Machine Tool. Date of manufacture is unknown.

One Type 56-2 assault rifle manufactured in China by Jianshe Machine Tool. Date of manufacture is unknown.

One unidentified bolt-action rifle, which is likely to have been manufactured for hunting and recreational shooting, not defence. Date and manufacturer are unknown.

Three types of Kalashnikov-type magazines with 7.62 x 39 mm ammunition cartridges, suitable for both Type 56 and Type 56-2 rifles. Date and manufacturer are unknown.

**FIGURE 3** Sample of SALW available at clandestine arms shops in the Central African Republic, 2023.

tri-border area and in central and western Africa more broadly. While some of the SALW had not previously been documented in the CAR – for instance, the MAT-49 submachine gun and the F1 fragmentation grenade – they had been identified elsewhere in the wider region. Legacy weapons such as the MAT-49 seem to have circulated through different battlefields over the years.

The eclectic assortment of SALW and ammunition on display is characteristic of the illicit market, particularly that serving civilians. Its variety is a reflection of ad hoc availability, with stocks combining legacy and more current weapons sourced through trafficking, seizures or clandestine sales from official SALW stocks. At least 80 Type 56 rifles, a model commonly used by security forces in Central and western Africa, have been documented in the CAR by Conflict Armament Research, suggesting that this rifle was likely diverted from official stocks.

The varied mix of sources for SALW used by traffickers and dealers in the tri-border area may help to explain some of the more unusual contents of the shops, and the circumstances of their acquisition. For instance, the single round of heavy machine gun ammunition would not typically be of use to criminal groups or civilians indicating an ad hoc seizure from a military source. The F1 grenade identified in the photographs cannot be used without a fuse. This may indicate that it was seized from an armoury, while fuses – which are typically stored separately for safety reasons – were not taken. Indeed the stocks documented here also demonstrate the safety risks involved in storing weapons in this way, with grenades particularly running the risk of uncontrolled explosions. ■

## Sources and modes of supply

There are two key sources of commercial SALW supply in the tri-border region: SALW imported from outside the region and SALW already in circulation in the region.

Conventional SALW can come into circulation in a variety of ways.<sup>71</sup> A significant proportion is the result of diversions from official stockpiles. This can occur through thefts from military sites, seizures in clashes with armed forces and even the direct sale of weapons to civilians by military personnel; when discussing the CAR military, one Cameroonian official commented: 'The FACA always come to Cameroon when they're hungry. And they will sell their arms to whoever, it doesn't matter who. And this leads to arms proliferation and crime being done with those weapons.'<sup>72</sup>

Libya and Sudan are common points of origin for SALW trafficked into the tri-border area from outside the region.<sup>73</sup> These arms flows are not limited to SALW and also include conventional mines from Libya.<sup>74</sup> Sudan has consistently been a bulk supplier of weapons for the tri-border region. According to the February 2023 report of the UN Panel of Experts on Sudan, the volume and variety of SALW and ammunition available in Darfur increased drastically compared to previous missions in 2021 and 2022.<sup>75</sup> This was reportedly due to a combination of the activities of Chadian, Libyan and South Sudanese cross-border arms smugglers, continued siphoning from Sudanese government stockpiles and sales from armed groups returning from fighting in Libya.<sup>76</sup>

These spikes in supply have typically found their way into the markets of the tri-border region. In 2018, Sudanese arms smugglers reportedly took advantage of the Sudanese government's arms-collection campaigns in Darfur to amass SALW and ammunition from Sudanese fighters and sold them to armed groups in northern CAR.<sup>77</sup> Musa Hilal, a major Darfurian Arab militia leader whose influence stretches to Libya, has reportedly been a key conduit for arms trafficking from Sudan into the CAR.<sup>78</sup>



The 3R rebel group in the Central African Republic is believed to be using weapons diverted from Libyan government stocks during the 2011 revolution. © Reuters/Baz Ratner

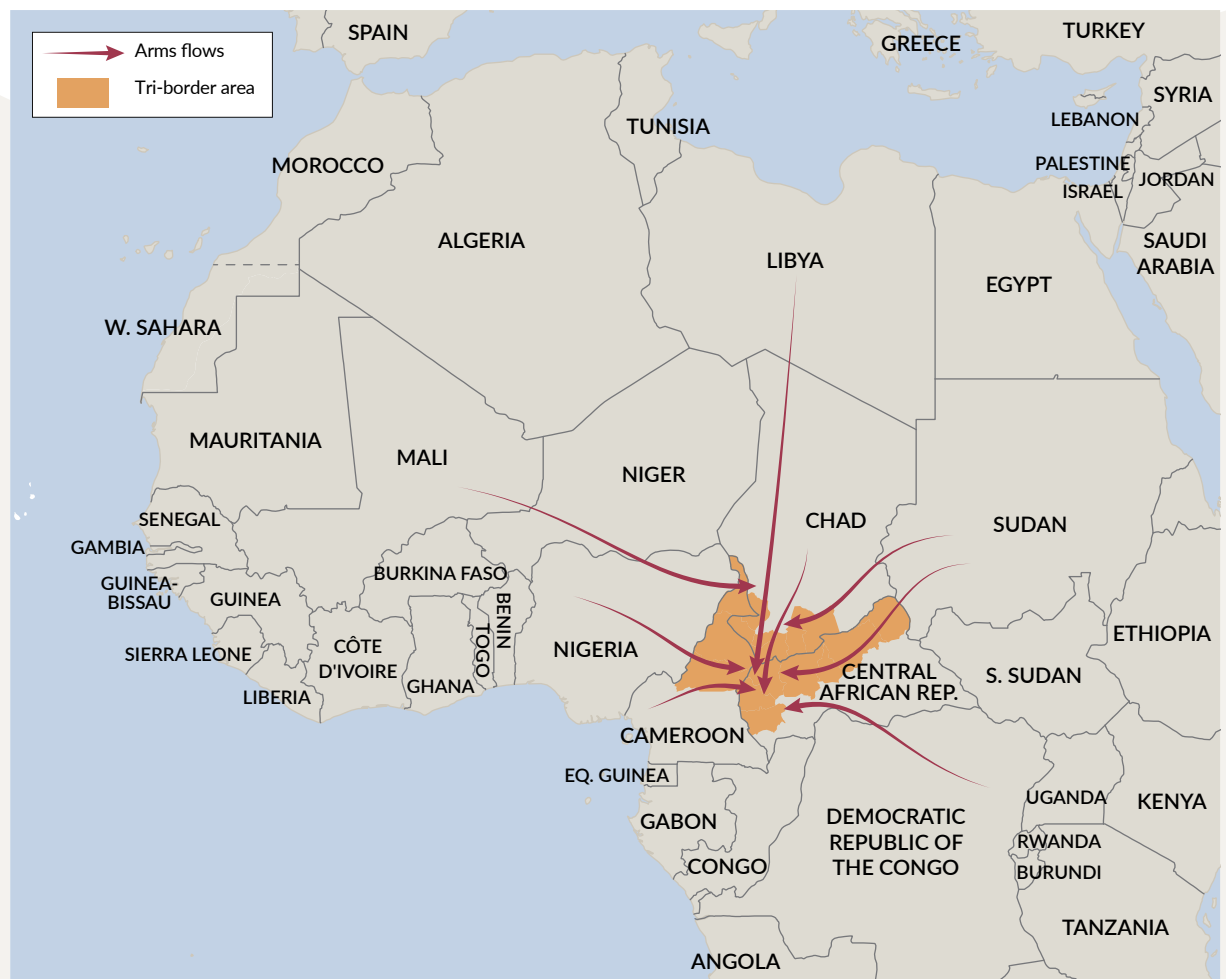
There is also a steady inflow of trafficked SALW coming from north-west of the tri-border area. Arms used in intercommunal violence in Nigeria, insurgencies in the Lake Chad Basin and the Ambazonian separatist conflict in north-west and south-west Cameroon are also thought to circulate in the tri-border area. SALW from the latter are largely trafficked into Cameroon from Nigeria, from where they may be sold on.<sup>79</sup> Though the region mainly serves as a destination market for weapons sourced from Sudan and Libya, some sources indicate that it also functions as a transit hub, connecting the Libyan and Sudanese markets to destinations as far away as southern Nigeria.<sup>80</sup>

Arms dealers interviewed by the GI-TOC said that army officers were among the primary suppliers of SALW in the tri-border region.<sup>81</sup> Weapons issued to the ANT and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) security forces, for instance, have been identified as being in circulation in the CAR.<sup>82</sup>

The ANT's arms trading in the CAR has been documented for decades; in 1998, while transiting through the country after having fought in the DRC, around 2 000 Chadian troops sold an unknown quantity of weapons to the local population.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, some have attributed the growth in *zarginas* (bandits) in northern CAR to the ANT's arms trading in the country.<sup>84</sup>

According to a resident with contacts in the region's militaries, current ANT officers can be in possession of 30 to 50 unregistered weapons at any one time. Many officers have investments in cattle so are keen to supply weaponry to herders in order to safeguard their assets.<sup>85</sup> In other cases, they have been known to sell on firearms that were seized through arms control raids or those seized after an armed confrontation.<sup>86</sup> This is likely to be a major factor behind the high number of SALW that remain in circulation,<sup>87</sup> despite (and perhaps even because of) the ANT's disarmament operations in the region, such as those now taking place in Pala.<sup>88</sup>

In addition to army officers, arms dealers identified a web of administrative authorities, bandits, customs officials and rebel groups who help to bring weapons into the region. They described networks of at least two dozen people, often composed of multiple nationalities (Libyans, Sudanese, Chadians,



**FIGURE 4** Arms flows in the tri-border area between Chad, Cameroon and the Central African Republic.

Central Africans, Cameroonians, Nigerians and Nigeriens). Each link in the geographical chain, they say, focuses on one aspect: buying, selling or transporting.<sup>89</sup> These networks may help to explain how supplies from North Africa arrive in the tri-border region. For example, the 3R rebel group in the CAR is believed to be using Belgian PRB M3 mines, diverted from Libyan government stocks during the 2011 revolution, which are still widely used by armed groups across the Sahel.<sup>90</sup>

In the tri-border region, SALW can be smuggled in several ways, ranging from organized convoys of trucks transporting only weapons and ammunition to shipments in which smaller quantities of fire-arms (up to 15) are concealed among other cargo.<sup>91</sup> Smaller volumes of this kind are often concealed in bags of crops entering and exiting the agriculturally rich region, such as peanuts, corn and beans.

In Cameroon, motorbike taxi drivers working in border towns appear to be active in this kind of low volume arms smuggling. According to a researcher on the ground in the northern region, this kind of trafficking typically contains light weapons including 'AK-47s, automatic pistols on rare occasions, hunting rifles and homemade weapons', which are hidden in bags of maize, carried on pack animals or in personal luggage.<sup>92</sup> In other instances, smuggled SALW have been discovered within bundles of fire-wood.<sup>93</sup> Over time, these frequent smaller volumes can add up to a significant number of weapons.<sup>94</sup>

Weather also plays a role in the timing and method of some cross-border arms movements. The rainy season (running roughly from May to June) leaves many roads inaccessible to government vehicles, allowing armed groups a window in which to transport SALW by motorcycle, horse and donkey.<sup>95</sup>



Anti-balaka fighters in the Central African Republic were initially mainly equipped with craft weapons but are now increasingly seen carrying industrial small arms and light weapons. © Reuters/Baz Ratner

This research did not identify specific open markets in the region where illicit SALW are displayed for purchase,<sup>96</sup> and the processes documented by the GI-TOC instead involved customers meeting SALW sellers directly and discreetly. For example, on the CAR side of the tri-border, there is reportedly a clandestine SALW depot in a village a short distance from Baoro, in Nana-Mambéré.<sup>97</sup> Reportedly, youths visit this depot to buy firearms, not for use but in order to surrender them to the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration (DDR) programme run by the MINUSCA peacekeeping mission. Posing as a demobilized rebel fighter allows them to gain access to resources and training.<sup>98</sup>

Several interviewees mentioned that large cattle markets, strategically placed close to the borders, are used for the trade of illicit commodities including SALW and drugs. The most prominent include the markets of Mbaimboun in Cameroon; Betoko and Bocaranga in the CAR; and Bitoye and Roro in

Chad, although there are many others in operation.<sup>99</sup> Rebel groups and bandits are known to frequent these markets to purchase supplies.

## Craft weapons market grows

The tri-border countries have a long history of craft weapons production, but a combination of rising prices for conventional SALW and an accelerating demand has driven unprecedented growth in the region's craft weapons industry.<sup>100 101</sup>

Craft (or artisanal) firearms include those produced from scratch and imitation firearms that have been converted. The production and sale of craft weapons, known locally as *gourloun*, has reportedly been driven mostly by farmers seeking to defend their land and communities from armed herders.<sup>102</sup> Farmers have often resorted to purchasing their weapons from local hunters, who have a history of producing cheap, craft firearms.<sup>103</sup>

In 2018, multiple craft manufacturing facilities were discovered in and around internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in the CAR.<sup>104</sup> The December 2018 UN Panel of Experts report on the CAR highlighted that hunting ammunition, which is often used in craft firearms, has been imported from Congo and the DRC, but also from EU member states, in violation of a UN arms embargo.<sup>105</sup> The same ammunition type has also been found in the country's nature reserves, suggesting it is also being used by poachers.<sup>106</sup>

While craft firearms are not as effective or lethal as industrial weapons, their role as enablers of violence should not be underestimated. At first, anti-balaka fighters<sup>107</sup> in the CAR were mainly equipped with craft weapons and hunting ammunition, although they are now increasingly seen carrying industrial SALW.<sup>108</sup>



## THE RISK OF SMALL ARMS ABUNDANCE: OPPORTUNISTIC VIOLENCE IN THE TRI-BORDER REGION

One of the remarkable aspects of violence in the tri-border region is the fluid identities of some perpetrators. The story mentioned earlier in which a Chadian soldier was involved in a kidnapping incident is a telling example. Members of non-state armed groups also switch to using their firearms to engage in violent crime, particularly if they have been dispersed or are not actively engaged in political violence. Our researchers heard many reports of armed individuals, including both insurgents and former soldiers, exploiting the relative safety offered by IDP camps to hide themselves and their weapons, in order to engage in opportunistic violent crime. As one Cameroonian security official noted:

Ex-FACA [Central African armed forces] are involved, and others are rebels. Especially now they are being chased out by Wagner, who track them all along the border. They flee here, they retreat with their weapons, and then they use those weapons to commit crimes. In Gado Badzere camp, you can see if you go there that some of the people there are former FACA. They might have fled rebels and taken their arms with them. Now these camps are not controlled by us, and so when these ex-FACA arrive they can bury the weapons. They can then dig them up and use them for crime at night.<sup>109</sup>

While it is unsurprising that people seek to arm themselves in volatile circumstances, as the data from the tri-border region suggests, more owners of firearms make for more potential criminal opportunists. In parts of West Africa, conflict and certain forms of violent crime have risen alongside (and often as a result of) each other. A major reason for this is the increased availability of SALW that the onset of conflict facilitates.

Armed actors exploit the relative safety offered by IDP camps to hide themselves and their weapons. © Reinnier Kaze/AFP via Getty Images



In this section, examples of such opportunistic violence in the tri-border region will be examined, to consider how they may represent a broader risk to stability.

## Actor profile: 3R

One of the key constituent groups in the CPC rebel coalition, the Retour, Rehabilitation, Reclamation (3R) group has been highly active in the tri-border area in 2023. Formed in 2015, 3R gained effective control over portions of Ouham, Ouham-Pendé and northern portions of Nana-Mambéré in the CAR between 2016 and 2021 by launching attacks on the state armed forces and their allied Russian Wagner Group mercenaries. They also launched devastating attacks on civilian populations in this period, exemplified by the killing of 50 civilians in Ouham-Pendé on 21 May 2019. However, its capacity and legitimacy were severely dented after the death of group leader Bi Sidi Souleymane (better known as Sidiki Abbas) in March 2021.<sup>110</sup>

In its heyday, 3R garnered legitimacy and support among cattle herders by offering them protection from cattle rustling and abduction. Its name derived the promise of returning Fulani herdsman to the CAR In exchange for a tax known as *tchoffal* in Fulfulde (the language of the Fulani) in its areas of influence in north-western CAR, 3R provided a degree of stability for herders in pasture-rich areas along the Cameroon border, recovering stolen cattle and kidnapping victims alike

After the death of Sidiki Abbas, General Sembé Bobbo took over as 3R leader in March 2021, marking a change in 3R activities. A second faction emerged after Abbas' death, led by Siwo Tchirgou, splitting the group to a degree and adding to the unstable matrix of armed groups in the tri-border zone. Following substantial territorial losses at the hands security forces and a corresponding collapse of its income, the 3R group has been forced to expand its involvement in illicit activities. But resorting to higher taxation, violence and predation on the civilian population has come at the cost of local support.<sup>111</sup>

In addition to arbitrary hikes in the *tchoffal* demanded from the Fulani in the CAR, pastoralists from Cameroon and Chad have also reportedly been taxed for access to pastures in 3R territory. As tax revenues have dried up, the group has reportedly reverted to raiding local communities and has become more involved in kidnapping across the Cameroon border, where it does not exercise as much of a governance role.<sup>112</sup> In October 2022, six kidnapers thought to be 3R fighters were arrested by the Cameroon armed forces in the Adamawa region (within the tri-border region) after demanding ransoms for hostages. The armed forces also found a stash of Kalashnikov-style rifles in the course of the arrest.<sup>113</sup> ■

## Cattle as a focal point

Cattle have become a focus for violent crime across west and central Africa, including the tri-border area, for two key reasons. Cattle are a particularly valuable economic asset in the region and so are often seen as a logical investment for those with the means to do so, leading to herd expansion. Likewise, herding cattle has become a source of intense social tension. These tensions derive from a complex mix of factors, including land-use policies that tend to disadvantage herders; pressure on natural resources worsened by the climate crisis; geopolitical friction over cross-border transhumance; and damage caused to arable crops by large migrating herds.<sup>114</sup>

Not all of these tensions are new, and small-scale conflicts between herders and farmers has been a feature of life in the region for decades. However, pastoralists sense – with good reason – that they are at greater risk due to the recent nexus of pressures, (political, climatic etc.). Heightened tension has spurred many to arm themselves on their migration routes.<sup>115</sup>

Contributing to the growing militarization of transhumance has been the entry of major new economic players in the livestock sector since around 2014. *Néo-éleveurs* or new herders are influential individuals including army officers, politicians, civil servants and traders who have made substantial investments in the cattle industry, delegating the responsibility of managing the herds to salaried shepherds, typically of Muslim, Fulani or Arab origin.<sup>116</sup> These new entrants, mainly urban elites, often approach cattle rearing primarily as an economic enterprise, instead of a cultural practice. Their herds tend to be much larger than those of traditional pastoralists, and given their high monetary value, the herders employed to take them on these migration routes are far more likely to be armed.<sup>117</sup>

A Central African civil-society activist described how armed herders had become emboldened and were more likely to ignore the impact they had on farmers as well as dismiss traditional means of dispute resolution. 'For the last five years, I think, there's been this phenomenon of pastoralists with arms, who come all over the territory. They impose themselves, they stampede their oxen, without paying anything for all the damage the oxen do. They don't pay anything; they don't regularize anything.'<sup>118</sup>

Rising tensions and the rising value of increasingly large herds, has led to a new phenomenon of cattle rustling in the tri-border region. While petty cattle theft is a long-standing practice, some of the cattle rustling incidents taking place are now large-scale, and highly weaponized. For example, in Djohong, Cameroon, in 2022, six herds were seized by cattle rustlers, who reportedly began taking the cattle northwards towards Nigeria.<sup>119</sup>



Heightened tension has spurred many cattle herders to arm themselves on their migration routes. © Reuters/  
Goran Tomasevic



This type of large-scale cattle rustling is concerning. Elsewhere in West Africa, such as central Mali and Nigeria, given the organization and experience needed, large seizures of several herds tend to be associated with armed group activity.<sup>120</sup> While the theft of a small number of cattle presents a challenge to herders, the theft of an entire herd can be a devastating blow to livelihoods, triggering forced displacement or violent reprisals.

Further, such devastating thefts opens the space for armed groups to style themselves as would-be defenders of herders, as was the case in the CAR with the 3R group, contributing to the legitimacy of the armed group in the eyes of the community. Such local legitimacy makes armed groups harder to displace from a territory, and ultimately to defeat.

## Organized kidnappers

While north-eastern Cameroon (Adamawa and Nord provinces) have been less affected by armed group activity than the Extrême Nord, alarm is growing among residents of the area over the increasingly professional and large-scale kidnappings taking place. The town of Touboro in particular has seen mass kidnappings, with tens of people abducted at a time. Over 30 people were taken in a single incident in Touboro in October 2023. This was one year after protests took place in Touboro after locals had recorded 435 people kidnapped in the space of ten months.<sup>121</sup>

Kidnap for ransom is not necessarily distinct from cattle rustling on the tri-border. The same practitioners are often involved, and the two crimes may be undertaken in a single incident. In Ngang'ha, Cameroon, in 2022, five families were kidnapped along with their cattle before being released by authorities after a tip-off from civilian vigilance committees.<sup>122</sup>

As well as the sheer scale of the kidnappings, two other factors are cause for concern. The first is the apparent professionalization of the practice, to the extent that individuals are known locally as kidnappers. As described by a resident researcher, the population living in the larger towns of Ngaoundéré, Touboro and Meinganga are now afraid to denounce known kidnappers in the area because of their wealth and the fear of reprisals: 'When they are denounced, they are arrested, they go to prison, and as soon as they get out, those who denounced them are now in danger.'<sup>123</sup>

The second is their apparent access to more sophisticated weapons. '[They] obtained the weapons of war from Chad. These are mainly Kalashnikovs. These abductors operate by appointment and bury the weapons in the bush afterwards.'<sup>124</sup> Indeed, four Kalshnikov-type assault rifles were recovered by Cameroonian authorities in Ngoura in 2022, which were eventually linked to a group of local bandits known to engage in kidnapping.<sup>125</sup>

In southern Chad, it is a similar story. Two children who were victims of a highly publicized kidnapping in Pala in April 2023 reported that their captors had new and sophisticated weapons suspected of having come from the Chadian armed forces. The victims were believed to have been held in Sena Oura National Park, which together with the Bouba Njida park, connects Chad to Cameroon. This zone, spanning around 2 700 square kilometres (an area the size of Luxembourg), has become a base for *zarginas*, kidnappers and rebels alike.<sup>126</sup>

GI-TOC research elsewhere in the broader region has underscored the devastating impact of kidnapping activities on local communities and the role that it can play both as a source of funding for armed groups and as a means of mafia-style governance, where it is used to coerce communities, gather intelligence or forcibly recruit new members.<sup>127</sup> Tracking kidnapping patterns therefore offers critical insights into the changing dynamics of the illicit economies of the region.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**B**y reviewing the evidence gathered about the current state of arms trafficking and the SALW market, this report has sought to explore the dynamics at play in the volatile tri-border region of Chad, Cameroon and the Central African Republic. The region's particular geography and sociopolitical context, combined with a rising demand for SALW, has facilitated a thriving market for imported, diverted and locally made SALW.

This is a fraught situation. The presence of myriad rebel factions in the region, each with their own objectives and alliances, adds to the complexity and unpredictability of the situation. Even the comparatively stable parts of the tri-border, such as eastern Cameroon, are being exploited by armed groups, arms traffickers and criminal bands spilling over from neighbouring countries. This threatens the rapid destabilization of a region which provides an economic lifeline to Chad and the CAR.

The widespread availability of SALW appears to be fuelling categories of violent crime which exacerbate instability and violence – including increasingly professionalized forms of kidnap for ransom and cattle rustling. These activities are, in turn, fuelling demand for SALW for self-defence. However, increasing the number of firearm owners increases the risk that some will be tempted into opportunistic



Arms surrender programmes have been launched as part of the Central African Republic's national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration efforts. *Photo: MINUSCA*

violence, particularly if there are long-standing social or intercommunal tensions. Such violence can thus become self-perpetuating.

The findings underscore the need for a multifaceted approach, underpinned by enhanced coordination between Chad, Cameroon, and Central African Republic, in order to address violence in the tri-border region. The following recommendations should be considered by regional governments and donors:

- **Address the growing instability driving the purchase of SALW for self-defence.**
- **Strengthen national and regional coordination frameworks to curtail the unchecked flow of arms by:**
  - enhancing cross-border efforts, for instance by gendarmeries, to prosecute the unlicensed sale of SALWs;
  - enhancing arms and ammunition management systems, including more frequent stocktaking and inspections of operational weapons;
  - enhancing arms tracing capacity.
- **Recognize the role of kidnapping in fuelling instability and violence.** Cameroon must urgently address the rise in semi-professional mass kidnapping. Security forces must convince local residents that they will be protected from reprisals for reporting known kidnappers, and that durable security will follow.
- **Cooperate to find new approaches to regulate the regional livestock sector.** In order to mitigate rising violence and cattle rustling linked to the transformation of the livestock trade, it is key for all three countries to:
  - address the tensions between farmers and herders, particularly during transhumance periods;
  - consider regulating herd sizes (in coordination with ecologists, agronomists and environmental scientists, governments and regional organizations) to reduce the need for armed protection and to ensure that transhumance pathways do not degrade farmers' crops or local environments.
- **Reform and strengthen security institutions in the CAR and Chad.** This includes ensuring that soldiers are properly paid in order to reduce incentives to sell weapons or engage in violent crime such as kidnapping.



## NOTES

- 1 As a result of long-standing conflicts in Sudan, the Lake Chad Basin and Libya, as well as the 2023 coup in Niger, Chad is increasingly short of secure overland routes for imported goods, and is left with only one coastal neighbour that enjoys a degree of stability – Cameroon. The CAR likewise is enormously dependent on the trade corridor running between Garoua-Boulaï on the Cameroonian border and Bangui, where the majority of imports enter the country. See Antoine Rolland, Chad all but deprived of trade routes after Niger coup, Africa Intelligence, 25 August 2023, <https://www.africaintelligence.com/central-africa/2023/08/25/chad-all-but-deprived-of-trade-routes-after-niger-coup,110036029-art>.
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  - 29 Interview with a civil society leader in southern Chad, 9 September 2023, by phone; Interview with an armed group combatant in northern CAR, 8 September 2023, by phone; Interview with a Chadian researcher based in southern Chad, 6 September 2023, by phone.
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  - 39 A more ambiguous Central African position towards the Chadian rebel presence is demonstrated by Mahamat Abdoul Kader Oumar, better known as 'Baba Laddé', who is believed to have returned to the CAR in the third quarter of 2023. Baba Laddé's extensive career as an anti-Déby rebel leader in Chad was punctuated with long periods spent in northern CAR, where he commanded support among Fulani herders, for whom his armed activity served as a means of defence. He was briefly brought into the Chadian political fold by Mahamat Déby after his father's death in 2021, as director of National Intelligence. However, after a breakdown in relations, he has reportedly returned to Besson, in Nana-Grébizi, CAR. His current intentions in the area are not clear, although he may be looking to mobilize Fulani combatants, including from the 3R group. Some sources allege that he has held meetings with Wagner personnel to seek support for rebellion in Chad, although there is not yet firm evidence of this. See Matthieu Olivier, From Déby Itno to Wagner, Baba Laddé goes to war again, *Jeune Afrique*, 28 September 2023, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1487169/politique/de-deby-itno-a-wagner-baba-ladde-repart-en-guerre/>.
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  - 42 Such as the north-west and south-west, by the anglophone secessionist conflict, or the Extreme-Nord region, now affected by the Lake Chad Basin's armed groups, ISWAP and JAS.

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- 58 Interview with a Chadian Goran army officer in Goré, May 2023.
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- 60 Interviews with 12 stakeholders held between April and June 2023, including an ANT officer in Logone-Oriental; an ANT officer in Mayo-Kebbi; two Cameroonian army officers in Touboro; an arms dealer in Moundou; an arms dealer in Goré; an arms dealer in Bongor; a journalist in Moundou; a journalist in Touboro; a civil servant in Nya Pendé (Goré); a civil servant in Lac Wy, Moundou; two students in Moundou; and two other locals in Moundou.
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- Goré, an arms dealer in Bongor, a journalist in Moundou, a journalist in Touboro, a civil servant in Nya Pendé (Goré), a civil servant in Lac Wy (Moundou), two students in Moundou and two other locals in Moundou.
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