Briefing Paper

March 2025

small arms survey

OPEN MARKETS

Documenting Arms Availability in Afghanistan under the Taliban

Manon Blancafort, Emile LeBrun, and Andrea Edoardo Varisco

Credits and contributors

Production and communications coordinators:
Olivia Denonville and Katie Lazaro

Fact-checker:
François Fabry

Copy-editor:
Alessandra Allen

Proofreader:
Stephanie Huitson

Design and layout:
Rick Jones

Cartography:
Jillian Luff, MAPgrafix

The Small Arms Survey takes no position regarding the status, names, or borders of countries or territories mentioned in this publication.

Front cover photo

Taliban holds a military parade with equipment captured from the US army in Kandahar on 8 November 2021.
Source: Murteza Khaliqi/Anadolu Agency via AFP

About the authors

Manon Blancafort is a project assistant at the Small Arms Survey, conducting research on the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Afghanistan, the Arms Trade Treaty in the Indo-Pacific region, and improvised explosive devices in West Africa. She holds a master's degree in Peace, Security and Conflicts from the Université Libre de Bruxelles and a post-graduate degree in International Humanitarian Law from the Université Côte d'Azur and the San Remo International Institute of Humanitarian Law.

Emile LeBrun is a senior consultant with the Small Arms Survey. He led the Survey's Afghanistan arms proliferation project (2022–24). He holds a master's degree in Philosophy from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland.

Andrea Edoardo Varisco is an arms export control expert at the Small Arms Survey. He holds a PhD in Post-war Recovery Studies from the Post-war Reconstruction and Development Unit, University of York; a master's degree in International Affairs, Peace and Conflict specialization from the Australian National University, in collaboration with the Peace Research Institute Oslo; and a master's degree in Politics and Comparative Institutions from the University of Milan.

Acknowledgements

The authors extend their gratitude to the Survey's implementation partners on this project, including Afghan Peace Watch, the Centre on Armed Groups, and the Sustainable Peace and Development Organization, whose local investigators made this paper's findings possible. They also thank participants in this project's closed informal consultation process, including representatives of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Interpol, the World Customs Organization, and UN sanctions monitoring panels, among others. The findings presented here do not necessarily reflect the positions or opinions of any of these organizations. Finally, the authors thank the peer reviewers, who provided excellent comments on early drafts of this paper.

german cooperation
DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT

Overview

More than three years after the Taliban's takeover and their seizure of the previous regime's weapons stockpiles, the de facto authorities have strengthened control over commanders and restricted civilians' and private businesses' access to arms. Meanwhile, arms trafficking has continued—likely with at least the tacit approval of low-level Taliban officials—and evidence suggests the continued arming of UN Security Council-designated terrorist groups, including the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and al-Qaeda, alongside efforts to acquire conventional weapons systems on international markets.

This Briefing Paper reviews field investigations conducted from 2022 to 2024 into the availability and prices of small arms, light weapons, accessories, and ammunition at informal markets in the Afghanistan–Pakistan border areas, alongside qualitative research into arms proliferation dynamics. It finds that cross-border trafficking is more of a 'slow drip' than a flood, with both newer NATO- and older Soviet-pattern weapons still accessible in Afghanistan's eastern provinces and Pakistan's tribal districts. Diversion to illicit markets and the deliberate provision of weapons to various non-state armed groups remain significant concerns.

Key findings

- The range of weapons available in informal markets under the Taliban is generally linked to longstanding local ethnic and power dynamics.
- The Taliban's efforts to tighten civilian arms possession do not appear to have made an impact on arms availability in informal markets in the areas studied.
- Of the NATO-pattern weapons prices monitored, M4s were consistently more expensive in all provinces and districts compared to M16s. The price of Soviet-pattern materiel was significantly lower than most NATO weapons.
- While Soviet-pattern weapons prices remained stable across the locations monitored, there were slight increases in price for M4s (+13%) and significant increases for M16s (+38%) in Nangarhar and Kunar provinces over the research period.
- The relationships between Taliban control efforts, informal market factors, and trafficking activities require further investigation.

Introduction

The sudden fall of the Afghan government in August 2021, and the Taliban's takeover of Kabul, created a number of immediate strategic and geopolitical concerns. One major concern was the Taliban's capture of the military equipment that had been delivered to the former Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF), which included not only 'major' conventional arms (Kaufman, 2022; Kuimova and Wezeman, 2021), but also, and predominantly, small arms and light weapons and related ammunition. Would the Afghan arsenal suffer the same fate as Libya's, where state stocks were looted, fuelling civil war and regional proliferation?

The fear seemed warranted at the time. Not only were the Taliban's weapons management capabilities unknown, but their relationships with other armed groups in the region such as the TTP and al-Qaeda were also of grave concern for proliferation dynamics. In addition, it was unclear whether internal Taliban command lines would hold, or whether factionalism and internal discord would increase, with consequences for the distribution and use of the captured weapons. A potential economic collapse would further exacerbate the situation and increase concerns about trafficking of weapons to Central Asia, Africa, and Europe.

Despite these fears, more than three years have passed since the collapse of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and there has been no evidence of massive weapons losses from Taliban control. Instead, a more complex and nuanced story has emerged that has seen both the increased consolidation of control over de facto national weapons stocks and the continued, semi-authorized trafficking and donations to designated terrorist groups. And while the status quo is relatively stable, recent developments both within and outside the Taliban's control could signal the eventual disruption of this relative equilibrium, and lead to a more chaotic set of market dynamics for illicit arms in the region.

This Briefing Paper builds on previous studies and new research that the Small Arms Survey and its regional partners conducted in Afghanistan and Pakistan between 2022 and 2024. It reviews almost two years of field investigations into the availability and prices of benchmark small arms, light weapons, accessories, and ammunition at informal markets in different provinces of Afghanistan and in the Afghanistan–Pakistan border areas, as well as qualitative research into proliferation dynamics into, within, and out of Afghanistan.

The evolution of a diverse arsenal

Prior to the Taliban's resurgence and eventual takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, a vast arsenal of weapons had accumulated in the country, dating back to the Soviet–Afghan War (1979–89) and the subsequent civil wars. After the 1979 Soviet invasion, various Afghan factions received military support from competing international powers, which continued in ensuing civil wars throughout the 1990s. This influx of arms, compounded by the lack of effective regulation, made weapons widely accessible to both civilians and insurgent groups (Schroeder and King, 2012, pp. 330–36). The Survey estimated that by 2018 the number of firearms present in the country had exceeded four million (Karp, 2018).

During the early days of the first Taliban insurgency, it and other groups had access to a significant number of AK-pattern rifles, predominantly of Soviet or Chinese design, and little in the way of modern weaponry. A 2012 Small Arms Survey study on illicit arms in Afghanistan found that the majority of seized light weapons, for example, were outdated and relatively unsophisticated (Schroeder and King, 2012, pp. 313–14). In fact, alongside Soviet-era arms, the Taliban and other non-state actors also had access to artisanal weapons—locally made firearms often crafted in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. Conflict Armament Research (CAR) found that, even as late as 2019, half of the illicit weapons documented by CAR in the country were of artisanal origin (CAR, 2021, p. 11).

Table 1 Reported transfers of arms and ammunition to Afghanistan (2005–21) and estimates of items remaining in Afghanistan as of August 2021

Category	Items	Quantity exported (2005–21)	Value of exports (2005–21)	Quantity remaining in August 2021
Weapons	M4/M16 and AK-variant rifles	258,300	USD 150.7 million	**316,260 weapons[a]/ USD 511.8 million**
	Various pistols	64,300	USD 31.6 million	
	Various sniper rifles	6,300	USD 33 million	
	Individual and crew-serviced light (such as M249), medium (such as M240B/PKM), and heavy machine guns (such as M2/DShk)	56,155	USD 233.7 million	
	Rocket-propelled and various mobile and hand-held grenade launchers	31,000	USD 51.4 million	
	12-gauge shotguns of various models	9,115	USD 4 million	
	60–82 mm mortar systems	1,845	USD 41.6 million	
	Total	**427,015[b]**	**USD 546 million**	
Weapons accessories	Associated machine gun mounts	5,500	USD 5.7 million	**Unspecified**
	M150 weapon optics and PEQ-2/15/18 laser aiming devices	41,350	USD 41.8 million	
	Total	**46,850**	**USD 47.5 million**	
Other ground munitions	120 mm and 122 mm mortar rounds	188,000	USD 121.7 million	**Unspecified**
	81 mm and 82 mm mortar rounds	769,000	USD 84.8 million	
	60 mm mortar rounds	249,000	USD 89.6 million	
	40 mm and 73 mm rocket-propelled or cartridge grenade rounds	3,768,000	USD 269.5 million	
	Total	**4,974,000**	**USD 565.6 million**	
Small arms ammunition and specialty munitions	Rounds of specialty 23 × 115 mm and .50 calibre ammunition	6,895,000	USD 38.3 million	**1,537,000 rounds total (~1,167,000 rounds of small arms ammunition)**
	Rounds of common small arms ammunition (such as 9 mm, 5.56 mm, 7.62 mm)	Millions	USD 3.19 billion	
	Total	–	**USD 41.49 million**	

Notes:

a This figure is roughly consistent with the Taliban's estimate of the numbers of small arms and light weapons it seized from the ANDSF. In February 2022, the head of the Taliban's Ranks Clearance Commission told reporters that his group took possession of more than 300,000 'light arms' in August 2021 (Al Jazeera, 2022).

b These figures exclude 224 D-30 Howitzers listed in the original report because the Survey does not categorize Howitzers as small arms and light weapons, which are the focus of this paper.

c Data was compiled from the Core Inventory Management System (CoreIMS) and unspecified 'US DoD records' and only includes US DoD-funded materiel procured through the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) programme, Pseudo-FMS cases, and the Excess Defense Articles programme (US DoD, 2022, p. 5).

Source: Schroeder (2024)

Taliban fighters drive past ammunition along a road in Bazark district, Panjshir province, on 15 September 2021. Source: Wakil Kohsar/AFP

The prevalence of these weapons fostered a thriving illicit economy where arms smuggling became a significant enterprise intertwined with that of drugs. In 2008, reporting conducted near the Tajikistan border suggested that Russian arms dealers and Taliban drug lords frequently exchanged Russian-made weapons for Afghan opium (Starkey, 2008). This underground market not only empowered the Taliban, but also equipped warlords, militias, and criminal organizations with weapons.

The complexion of the weapons stockpile in Afghanistan—both under government control and among the population—began to change from 2002, when the United States and its allies began transferring hundreds of thousands of small arms and light weapons to the fledgling ANDSF. The US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) estimated that foreign governments transferred some 600,000 small arms and light weapons alone over two decades, among other materiel (SIGAR, 2023, pp. 65–78).[1] In the two years before the fall of the Republic in 2021, government and journalist reporting estimated that Afghanistan received more than 18 million rounds of 7.62 mm and .50 calibre ammunition, as well as, between April and July 2021 alone, more than 1,000 rockets, '61,000 explosive 40 mm rounds, 900,000 rounds of .50 ammunition, and over 2 million 7.62 mm rounds' (Mehra, Demuynck, and Wentworth, 2022).

As SIGAR documented, however, oversight of the so-called 'train and equip' operations was less than thorough; supply chains were not secure, and corruption and poor accountability were rife among both contractors and recipients, leading to significant uncertainty about the type and quantity of weapons that had reached their intended holders.

To assess the accuracy of publicly reported figures, the Survey requested previously unreleased US procurement and export data, which was combined with publicly available transfers data (Schroeder, 2024). The Survey found a wider diversity of exporters than previously assumed, with more than 30 NATO and non-NATO countries supplying Afghan forces with at least 300,000 weapons between 2002 and 2021. At least 12 countries shipped 10,000 or more weapons—including Egypt, India, and several European countries—while Hungary, Romania, and Serbia exported at least 30,000 each. Given the inconsistencies and gaps in public data, these figures are likely under-estimates, and the actual volume of arms transfers is probably even higher. A US Department of Defense (DoD) report obtained by the Survey found that some 75 per cent of the 427,015 small arms and light weapons it identified as having procured and transferred to Afghanistan from 2005 to 2021 remained in the country as of August 2021, amounting to approximately 316,260 weapons. The amount of small arms ammunition remaining in Afghanistan likely exceeded 1.1 million rounds (see Table 1; US DoD, 2022). These figures are only estimates, however. The US DoD acknowledged that it did not have a complete accounting of arms and ammunition remaining in Afghan arsenals at the time of the government's collapse.

Many of the weapons procured and transferred were Warsaw Pact designs, including assault rifles, RPG-pattern launchers, and machine guns. These non-NATO-standard arms were critical in the initial stages of the US-led programme. Over time, NATO-standard weapons such as M4 and M16 rifles began to replace the Soviet models. By 2021, the Afghan military's weaponry was much more diverse,

> Internal divisions within the Taliban provide informal pathways to acquire weapons."

reflecting a mix of US-, European-, and Soviet-designed equipment.

Thus, when the Taliban seized power, they took control of a larger, more diverse weapons stockpile that included US-made rifles, machine guns, and military vehicles, as well as older Soviet-made arms still used by the Afghan National Police and local forces (Schroeder, 2024). The fact that the materiel included significant quantities of non-NATO weapons was not widely publicized, but has important implications for monitoring efforts, because it means that detecting leakage or proliferation of this materiel is not simply a matter of documenting NATO-pattern weapons and ammunition.

Bringing proliferation risks into focus

Given concerns about the proliferation of the Taliban's newly acquired arms and ammunition, the German Federal Foreign Office requested the Small Arms Survey to convene a closed international expert group consultation process to assess the risks of proliferation and to present recommendations for mitigating them (LeBrun, 2022). This process, which lasted from November 2021 to January 2022, informed a subsequent two-year project, beginning in October 2022, to generate new, independent data and qualitative research on proliferation challenges and dynamics in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. The project focused on two tasks: (1) generating a baseline of weapons at risk of proliferation based on an analysis of transferred materiel, with particular emphasis on the NATO-pattern weapons acquired by the Taliban in 2021; and (2) collecting data on arms availability in Afghanistan and border areas of Pakistan to inform understanding of changing dynamics of supply and demand.

During the same time frame, the UN Security Council expanded the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in April 2022 to include 'support [to] regional and international efforts to prevent and address the illicit trade in and destabilizing accumulation of small arms and light weapons and their diversion in Afghanistan and the region' (UNSC, 2022, para. 5(j)). UNAMA acted on the new mandate by launching a consultative study, liaising with the de facto authorities and governments of surrounding states, collecting open-source seizure data, and—along with CAR and partners—developing a framework to consider the risks of illicit accumulation and diversion of small arms and light weapons in Afghanistan and the region. UNAMA liaised with the Survey to ensure that its independent research project could provide additional relevant information for not only the Mission, but also other key international stakeholders, such as UN sanctions monitors.

For the Survey's research project, the main question was how to document the circulation of NATO-pattern and other weapons in a rapidly changing security environment, and how to do so safely. In consultation with partners, it was determined that the availability and prices of NATO- and Warsaw Pact-pattern weapons at informal arms markets in Afghanistan (and, eventually, Pakistan) would provide a reasonable proxy for the baseline of these weapons' availability, including for armed groups allied to the Taliban. Fluctuations in prices, together with key informant interviews, would also provide some insights into supply and demand dynamics. On this basis, between 2022 and 2024, the Survey supported field investigations in nine Afghan provinces, as well as in five locations in the Pakistani Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (see Map 1), working in partnership with local expert researcher networks.[2]

Weapons proliferation under the Taliban

Taliban arms management practices

Upon taking control in August 2021, the Taliban inherited vast caches of weapons, ammunition, and other military equipment from the former ANDSF. An unknown proportion of this materiel was quickly sold or redistributed through informal networks (Fleischner, 2023). Initially, the Taliban lacked formal systems for managing these stockpiles, but they have since taken steps to regulate and secure them, relying on both pre-existing structures and the introduction of permits for weapons ownership. Efforts to centralize arms management are driven by the Taliban's broader goal of transforming their insurgent forces into a coherent state security apparatus (Jackson, Maiwand, and Weigand, 2023). While weapons management practices have improved over the past three years, their application remains inconsistent across provinces and communities (Fleischner, 2023; Fleischner and Khan, 2024).

Institutional weaknesses, including limited technical capacity and reliance on paper-based systems, have also undermined Taliban control efforts. Initially, Republic-era staff were retained to maintain weapons management systems, but many departed due to the absence of salaries, resulting in a loss of expertise. Another challenge for the Taliban was, and remains, balancing central authority with local power dynamics. Many local commanders view weapons obtained during the insurgency as personal property, or property of their respective fighting group (*delgai*), and therefore resist efforts to register and manage these arms centrally. Additionally, internal divisions within the Taliban, along with the personal networks of commanders, provide informal pathways to acquire weapons, bypassing formal approval processes. These challenges led to significant variations in control practices from province to province based on the influence of local commanders and their relationship with central authorities (Jackson, Maiwand, and Weigand, 2023).

In April 2023, the Taliban's Ministry of Interior Affairs (MoIA) announced that all mujahideen and civil service workers must secure weapons permits through the appropriate MoIA authorities. The directive set a one-month deadline to comply. Subsequent research undertaken in late 2023 and early 2024 in Balkh province indicated that the Taliban were issuing three kinds of licences there: (a) official weapons permits to Taliban members, including the army and police; (b) official weapons permits issued under the Chamber of Commerce and MoIA to business people; and (c) unofficial weapons permits issued to those with direct ties to the Taliban. Unofficial permits are typically restricted to the province where they are issued and are granted exclusively to individuals with direct or

Map 1 Research locations, Afghanistan and Pakistan, 2022–24

indirect ties to the Taliban (Fleischner and Khan, 2024).

Complicating matters are internal tensions over which part of the Taliban hierarchy has ultimate authority over weapons in the possession of individual commanders and their fighters. In general, a power struggle between the Kandahar-based Taliban supreme leader, Mullah Hibatullah, and the minister of interior affairs, Sirajuddin Haqqani, has played out and intensified across many different dimensions since 2022. First, Hibatullah created the so-called Commission for the Collection of Arms and Military Equipment (also known as the Weapons Registration Commission) in 2023 as 'a tool of authority and control' (UNSC, 2024b, p. 7). Then, in November 2024, Hibatullah issued a decree that prohibits anyone but him from authorizing the distribution of weapons, ammunition, night vision devices, and radios (Hibatullah, 2024). The decree directs all Taliban ministries and offices, including the General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI), the MoIA, and the Ministry of Defence, to report their weapon inventories to a new office established by Hibatullah in Kandahar. While the move may serve to curb illegal weapon smuggling and misuse within the group, it is also another attempt by the Kandahari Taliban to further sideline the Haqqanis.

The Taliban and arms trafficking

The Taliban have gradually tried to formalize the control and regulation of weapons, issuing permits and cracking down on small-scale dealers operating without their authorization. The Taliban's nationwide policy is that weapons smuggling and selling is punishable by a three-year prison sentence (CAG, 2023). The GDI has conducted door-to-door searches to seize weapons and consolidate control over former military stockpiles. From August 2021 to November 2022, for instance, Nangarhar and Kandahar provinces have registered the highest number of GDI seizures (APW, 2023a). While these seizures are reportedly significant in scale, the accuracy and completeness of publicly available summaries of these seizures is difficult to independently verify.

Despite these efforts, field investigations conducted in late 2022 in Helmand, Kandahar, and Nangarhar found that weapons markets and smuggling networks continued to operate, in some cases with the knowledge or involvement of Taliban officials. As the Centre on Armed Groups reported in 2023, 'the number of top commanders involved in the smuggling suggests that the economic and political links are entrenched, with Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) commanders routinely engaging in off-book weapons trade' (CAG, 2023, p. 15). Furthermore, it is widely believed that the Taliban commanders tax or take commissions from weapons dealers in some markets (APW, 2023a).

Despite recent efforts by the Taliban to formalize the process of acquiring weapons permits through the MoIA, official procedures for obtaining permits remain limited at the provincial level. Individual Taliban commanders continue to either issue unofficial weapons permits—previously handwritten but now increasingly letter-based—signed by local Taliban officials and often granted based on personal affiliations (Fleischner and Khan, 2024), or enforce the regulations inconsistently.[3] Earlier findings from the project documented the ongoing presence of weapons markets in the eastern Afghanistan–Pakistan border areas, pointing to ongoing cross-border weapons smuggling, including involving local Taliban (Fleischner, 2023). Smuggling, along with a well-established network of smugglers, has long existed along this border, with the Taliban frequently purchasing weapons from traffickers during the insurgency (CAG, 2023).

In southern Afghanistan, the collapse of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban's takeover initially disrupted smuggling networks. Smugglers anticipated a lenient approach from the Taliban but were surprised when they imposed a ban on smuggling activities and demanded the surrender of all remaining weapons. Most smugglers initially resisted these demands, and the Taliban, reluctant to provoke a confrontation due to previous alliances and financial exchanges with these networks, sometimes refrained from strict enforcement. Since early 2022, however, smugglers have taken the Taliban's restrictions more seriously. In Helmand, smugglers even attempted, although unsuccessfully, to negotiate with the Taliban for permission to sell off their remaining weapons (CAG, 2023).

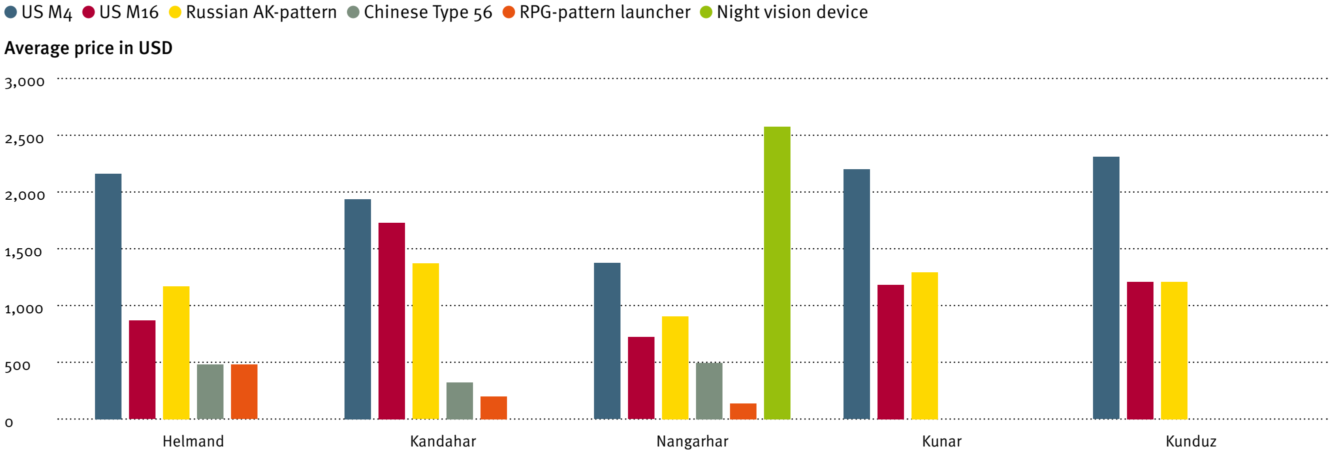
The Taliban's relations with regional terrorist networks, including the TTP and al-Qaeda, further complicate efforts to stop cross-border trafficking. These groups have longstanding ties with the Taliban, including personal relations between fighters and commanders who fought side by side for decades, intermarriages and family connections, as well as a shared ideology. These ties raise notable proliferation concerns as Afghanistan-sourced materiel has been documented in the hands of non-state groups in other regions, notably in the Sinai and in Kashmir (Abi-Habib and Frenkel, 2024; PTI, 2024).

Weapons prices at informal arms markets

Previous work by the Survey has demonstrated that monitoring the prices of benchmark weapons and associated ammunition in illicit or informal markets can provide indicators for changes in arms flows, rising demand, and, in some cases, the onset of adjacent conflict dynamics (Florquin, 2013). In the context of Afghanistan post-August 2021, the Survey determined that methodologically consistent monitoring of informal markets would provide a means of assessing the level of proliferation of the weapons stocks captured by the Taliban—including distinctive, recognizable NATO-pattern materiel—taking local contextual demand factors into careful consideration. Without access to data on the weapons holdings of terrorist-designated armed groups such as the TTP and al-Qaeda, informal market monitoring would provide a reasonable proxy for the baseline of the availability of such weapons, and, possibly, for these groups' access to similar types and models.

Between late 2022 and mid-2024, the Survey worked together with its research implementing partners to collect data on the prevalence and prices of a set of benchmark weapons, ammunition, and equipment identified as widely available across each of the provinces studied—including US M4s and M16s, Russian AK-pattern assault rifles, Chinese Type 56s, RPG-pattern launchers, and 7.62 × 39 mm and 5.56 × 45 mm ammunition, as well as thermal or night vision devices.[4] The objective was to get a clearer sense of the materiel escaping from Taliban control, paying particular attention to the newer materiel seized by the group. The choice of research locations was driven by concerns about pre-existing cross-border trafficking between eastern Afghanistan and Pakistan, trafficking to Central Asia, and the need to obtain insights from a number of different regions and provinces. Research was conducted in three phases, as discussed below. In the last phase, it was possible to conduct simultaneous data collection over three months in markets on both sides of the Afghanistan–Pakistan border, in order to compare availability and price data.[5]

Figure 1 Comparison of benchmark weapons prices at informal markets in Helmand, Kandahar, Nangarhar, Kunar, and Kunduz provinces, November–December 2022



Source: Authors' data analysis based on APW (2023a) and CAG (2023)

Research phases

Eastern and southern Afghanistan, late 2022

The first research phase was conducted in Helmand, Kandahar, Nangarhar, Kunar, and Kunduz provinces from November to December 2022. Researchers collected price data on specific NATO- and Warsaw-Pact-pattern weapons believed to be in circulation after the US withdrawal, to facilitate price comparisons across provinces.[6] Certain types of weapons and equipment, such as RPG-pattern launchers and night vision devices, were available in some arms markets but not others—a discrepancy highlighted in Figure 1.

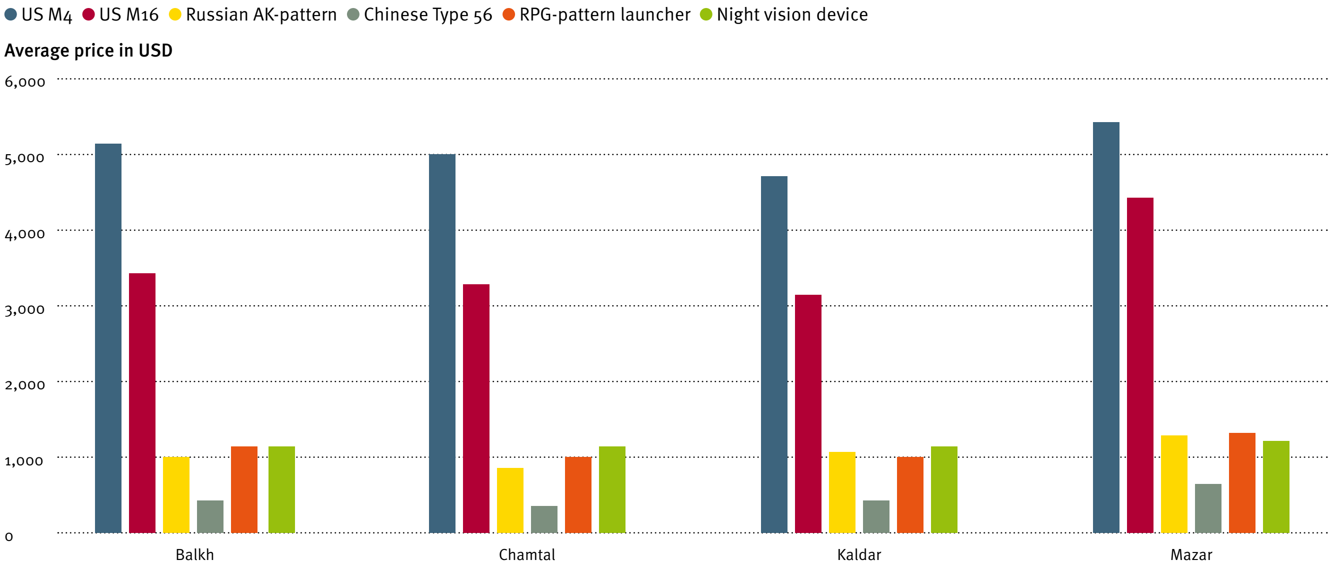
The weapons and ammunition price points obtained varied widely in some cases, depending on the quality of the weapon,[7] the individual dealer, and negotiations between the buyer and seller. Anecdotal reports also suggested that the Taliban has been particularly careful to control the flows of US-manufactured M4 and M16 assault rifles, night vision devices, thermal sights, and other high-value accessories. M4 and M16 rifles cost approximately two to three times the price of an AK-pattern assault rifle, with Kunduz being the most expensive location for US M4s (average of USD 2,310), compared to Nangarhar (average of USD 1,375). On the other hand, the prices of AK-pattern assault rifles[8] initially dropped from USD 745 to USD 220, marking their lowest level (average of USD 525) in two decades, according to local sources. Interestingly, the average cost of M16s seems very close to that of AK-pattern assault rifles in all provinces except Kandahar. The cost of Beretta pistols fell from USD 440–570 to as low as USD 130 (APW, 2023a). No discernible trend in the prices of ammunition was noted.

Balkh province, late 2023

The second research phase was conducted in Balkh province from October to December 2023. Arms prices were collected in Balkh, Chamtal, Kaldar, and Mazar districts (see Figure 2).

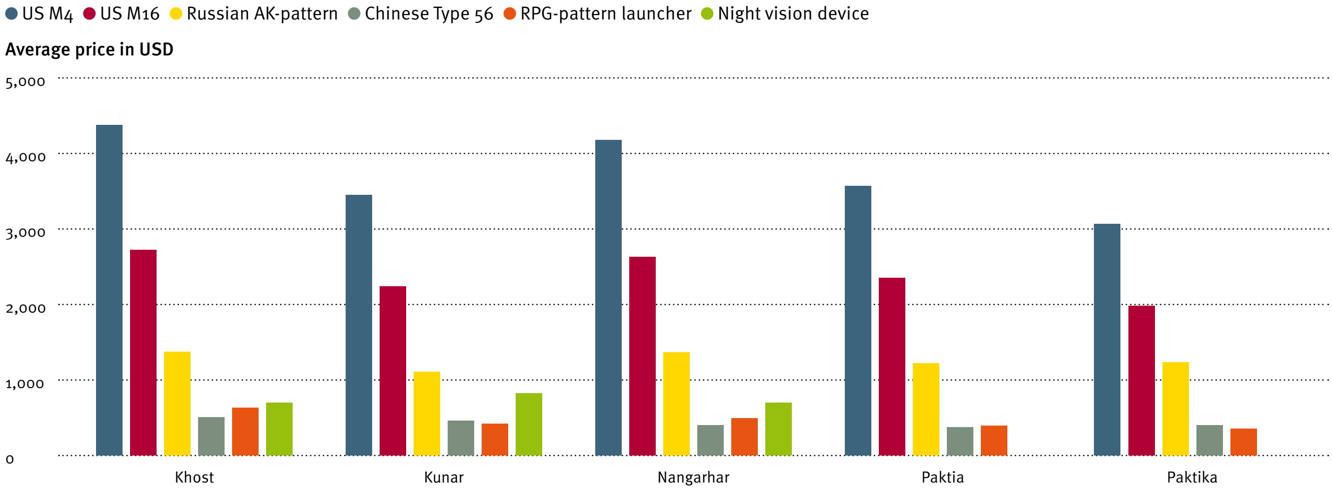
Weapons prices recorded in Balkh are notably higher than those documented in Helmand, Kandahar, Kunar, Kunduz, and Nangarhar provinces in late 2022. Prices for AK-pattern 7.62 × 39 mm ammunition remained relatively stable, while prices for NATO-calibre 5.56 × 45 mm ammunition were twice as high as those previously recorded in Nangarhar

Figure 2 Comparison of benchmark weapons prices at informal markets in Balkh province, October–December 2023



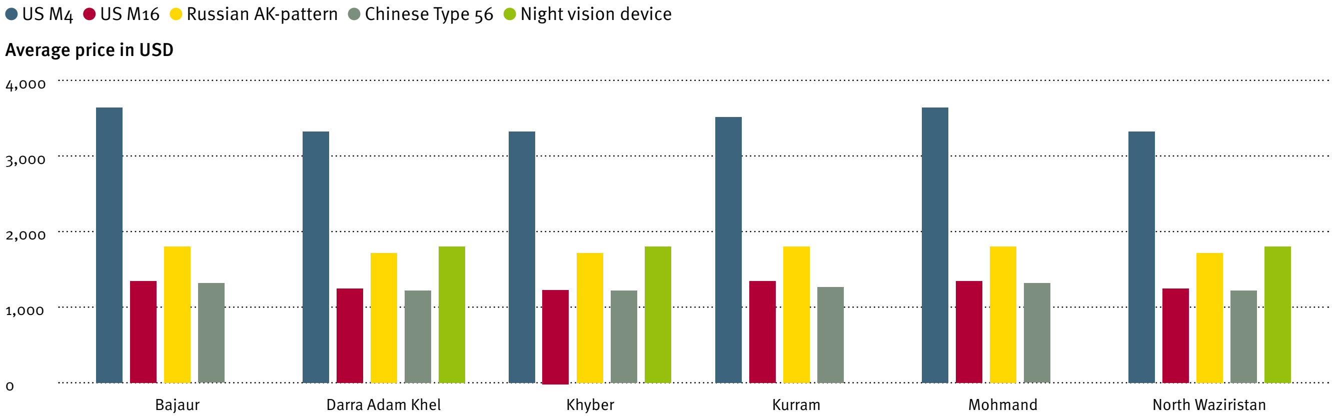
Source: Authors' data analysis of reporting in APW (2023b)

Figure 3 Comparison of benchmark weapons prices at informal markets in eastern Afghanistan border areas, June–September 2024



Source: Authors' data analysis based on APW (2024) and SPADO (2024)

Figure 4 Comparison of benchmark weapons prices at informal markets in Pakistan border areas, June–September 2024



Source: Authors' data analysis based on APW (2024) and SPADO (2024)

(November 2022). Additionally, RPG-pattern launchers were found to be two to three times more expensive than in Helmand in 2022, while night vision devices were half the price of those collected in Nangarhar in 2022.

Afghanistan–Pakistan borders, mid-2024

The third research phase was conducted from June to September 2024 in Afghanistan (Khost, Kunar, Nangarhar, Paktia, and Paktika) and Pakistan (Bajaur, Khyber, Kurram, Mohmand, North Waziristan, and Darra Adam Khel) border provinces and districts (see Figures 3 and 4).

While prices in Afghanistan provinces fluctuated over the period monitored, prices in Pakistan remained stable. In Afghanistan, the cost of a US M4 ranged from USD 2,219 in Urgun (Paktika) to USD 4,817 in Spira (Khost). Khost had the highest prices for US and NATO-pattern arms and ammunition, while Paktika had the lowest. Prices in Nangarhar were nevertheless similar to Khost, since US M4 rifles amounted to USD 4,379 at the lowest, while AK-pattern rifles amounted to USD 1,386 at the highest. In the Durbaba rural district in Nangarhar near the Pakistan border, however, US M4 rifles were on sale for as much as USD 3,722 and locally made AK-pattern rifles for as little as USD 218.

In Pakistan, researchers found that the prices of NATO- and Soviet-pattern arms and ammunition remained relatively stable throughout the period and across the different localities. Although the ongoing Pakistani military operation 'Azm-e-Istehkam'—aimed at countering rising insurgency and terrorism in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, particularly in tribal districts bordering Afghanistan—is said not to have directly affected weapons prices, local sources indicated that arms dealers were instead simply refraining from openly displaying NATO weapons in local markets due to concerns about arrests and the seizure of arms and ammunition (APW, 2024).

When comparing prices in Pakistan with those in Afghan border provinces, US M4 rifles cost between USD 3,325 and USD 3,700 in Pakistan, making them cheaper than in Khost and Nangarhar on the Afghan side but slightly more expensive than in Kunar, Paktia, and Paktika. In general, the wide variety in price is likely indicative of the condition of the weapons and their origin; sophisticated replicas may have also accounted for some of the lower-priced models. M16 rifles, however, are significantly less expensive in Pakistan, at an average price of between USD 1,245 and USD 1,400, compared to USD 1,824–3,065 in Afghanistan. This finding is difficult to interpret, but may relate to the presence of high-quality replicas. Conversely, Russian AK-pattern rifles are notably more expensive in Pakistan.

Assessing availability trends

The dynamics of arms availability and pricing in Afghanistan and neighbouring Pakistan have shifted significantly since late 2021. The last two years of research revealed some weapon-specific trends. Notably, of the NATO-pattern weapons prices monitored, M4s were consistently more expensive in all provinces and districts compared to M16s, followed by Soviet-pattern materiel at significantly lower prices. And prices for both models rose.

More specifically, M4 rifles increased by some 13 per cent from late 2022 to mid-2024 in Nangarhar and Kunar, with average prices rising from USD 1,787 (across both provinces) to USD 3,813. At the same time, M16 rifles rose by 38 per cent from an average of USD 1,020 to USD 2,434. These increases may reflect reduced supply, increased demand, or a combination of the two. Conversely, price increases for AK-pattern rifles and RPG-pattern launchers were relatively modest, while prices for Chinese Type 56 rifles decreased slightly, possibly due to increased market availability or reduced demand. The price for night vision devices, however, has dropped, falling from an average of USD 2,575 to USD 781—a decrease of roughly 70 per cent. This trend is consistent with that observed in Khost in 2024, though prices remain higher in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan in Pakistan, averaging USD 1,800.

When looking at price data collected in different locations and across time, a few observations emerge. First, US and NATO-pattern weapons cost more in Balkh province in late 2022 than in any other regions studied across the research period. This could possibly indicate either less availability of weapons in this province, or stricter control from the Taliban.

Second, data collected in June–September 2024 in Afghanistan suggests that prices are highest in Khost, frequently followed by Nangarhar, while prices are lowest in Paktika. Smuggling from Khost to Pakistan passes through the districts of Tani, Zazi Maidan, and Do Manda. The TTP is also highly active in the province, relying on entrenched smuggling networks to supply its fighters. In addition, Khost is a stronghold of the Haqqani Network and harbours other foreign fighters (APW, 2024). The demand for weapons in the area, including for M4s and M16s, may be responsible for the higher prices in Khost.

Relationship with narcotics trafficking and interdiction

Drug and arms trafficking in Afghanistan have been deeply intertwined, historically linked to the country's prolonged conflict and serving as significant income sources for armed groups such as the Taliban (Red Lantern Analytica, 2024). Smugglers often shift between these trades based on market conditions, with drug traffickers increasingly preferring weapons over cash due to the lower risk associated with transporting arms compared to large amounts of money (SPADO, 2024). Upon regaining power

Taliban security personnel display seized weapons in Mazar-i-Sharif district, Balkh province, on 29 August 2023. Source: Atef Aryan/AFP

> The issue of arms control has become absorbed into the power struggle between the Mullah's Kandahari faction and the Haqqani."

in August 2021, the Taliban faced the challenge of reconciling the lucrative drug trade with the Islamic prohibition of narcotics and aspirations for international legitimacy. In April 2022, they announced a ban on 'Poppy Cultivation and All Types of Narcotics' (Khoruk, 2024), which appears to have 'succeeded in massively reducing opium cultivation' (SIGAR, 2024, p. 26). By late 2024, when farmers were deciding what to plant for their winter crop for the third time after the introduction of the ban, it was unclear how the Taliban would continue to impose it and whether the decrease in cultivation would hold (Mansfield, 2024).

While the drug trade in Afghanistan has been extensively researched, the overlap with weapons trafficking and its role in financing armed groups and terrorist organizations remains underexplored, in terms of the actors involved in smuggling these goods as well as the modalities of their joint transport. Whether these goods are trafficked together, and in what quantities, is not even well documented, for example.

Nevertheless, research undertaken for this project has provided some perspectives on the trafficking of weapons and drugs in Afghanistan. In Helmand province, Bahramcha continues to be a transit point for drug and weapons smuggling, but the epicentre of the drug trade has moved to the urban area of Lashkar Gah (APW, 2023a). Some factions within the Taliban remained involved in the drug trade despite the official ban. These factions continued to collect revenue from drug activities in southern regions, and opium bazaars operated until mid-2022 with Taliban taxation. Influential drug traffickers have secured official positions within the Taliban government, and local commanders regularly participate in the drug trade, raising questions about central leadership control versus local profiteering (Azizi, 2024).[9] Furthermore, respondents in qualitative interviews in 2024 suggested that the Taliban were using proceeds from narcotics sales to finance their efforts to purchase weapons on the international market.[10]

In Pakistan, TTP armed factions, particularly in tribal border areas such as South Waziristan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, share financial networks with drug traffickers. Interviews conducted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa highlight that drug traffickers' shift to weapons smuggling is a result of the higher risks associated with large sums of drug money. As one senior Pakistani law enforcement official noted, 'People keep on changing over here. From drugs to customs articles, from customs articles to weapons. Wherever there is money.' Militant groups, including TTP factions, exert substantial influence over local arms markets in South Waziristan, where they extort money from government contractors and drug dealers, often taking a set percentage, such as PKR 5,000 (USD 17,899) per kilogram of hashish sold (SPADO, 2024).

Analysis

Research conducted under this 28-month project, as well as other contemporary sources, indicates that arms proliferation in and around Afghanistan since the Taliban took power has a dual, somewhat contradictory character. The de facto authorities have made improvements to national stockpile and civilian controls, but proliferation continues.

On the one hand, the Taliban has increasingly consolidated control over the stockpiles abandoned by the previous regime and its international partners. Although some NATO-pattern weapons thought to have originated from these stocks have been documented far from Afghanistan, there has been no sign of catastrophic large-scale losses, though supplies to the TTP, al-Qaeda, and other insurgent and jihadist groups are likely significant, and particularly worrisome.[11]

The Taliban has also issued increasingly stringent arms licensing and registration procedures for businesses and citizens, and strictly prohibits civilian ownership of some types of weapons. Some of these steps appear to respond to concerns from international actors.[12] The Taliban leadership's motivation is, however, driven less by public safety concerns than by the recognition that arms stocks represent sources of potential resistance to national authorities, and that it is in their best interest to try to exert tight controls over them—so much so that the issue of arms control has become absorbed into the power struggle between the Mullah's Kandahari faction and the Haqqani.

At the same time, the group's attempt to control arms in circulation is highly politicized and selectively enforced on segments of the population that differ from the Taliban's dominant Pashtun background and religious–ideological convictions. Nor has the Taliban leadership managed to force its own commanders in all areas to declare their own weapons stocks. A 2023 analysis published under this project hypothesized that the Taliban leadership had reached the limits of what it could force provincial commanders to report in terms of their weapons stocks without incurring resistance and opposition (Jackson, Maiwand, and Weigand, 2023). Furthermore, research presented here is consistent with the finding that the range of weapons available in informal markets under the Taliban is generally associated with longstanding local ethnic and power dynamics.

Furthermore, there are indications that informal weapons trafficking continues, and is at least partly enabled by local Taliban pressing longstanding smugglers and their networks into service (APW, 2023a). Given the strict control of the Taliban in most areas, it seems unlikely that smuggling would take place without the knowledge, consent, or even benefit of local officials; whether upper echelon leaders are aware of and condone such trafficking is difficult to confirm.

Even if such trafficking does not occur with the permission or under the direction of the group's leadership, the Taliban's strong strategic partnerships with the TTP and al-Qaeda are notable and worrisome. Though outside the scope of the Survey's local field research, there are anecdotal indications that both the TTP and al-Qaeda are accessing materiel from Afghanistan; if this is the case, it would not be out of character for the Taliban to continue providing weapons donations to maintain strong relations. Furthermore, as of mid-2023 the Taliban were reportedly welcoming al-Qaeda forces into eastern

Afghanistan, and training and equipping them (UNSC, 2024a).

Moreover, according to interviews conducted for this project, as well as other public sources, there are concerns that the Taliban are actively seeking to increase their weapons stocks by procuring arms on international markets, potentially with the assistance of brokers, in hopes of evading UN Security Council sanctions. Taliban leaders have attended international arms and defence industry expositions (MEMRI, 2024), and in late 2024 the Ministry of Defence's head of logistics was fired for saying publicly that the Taliban sought Russian air defence systems (Zarin Television, 2024).

The market data collected under this project has provided a partial window into the types of weapons available in informal markets under the Taliban and their relative prices. While the fact that prices and availability have remained generally stable since early 2022 must be carefully interpreted, it appears that the Taliban's efforts to tighten civilian arms possession have not made an impact on arms availability in informal markets in the areas studied. It is harder to draw broader general conclusions.

In fact, relatively flat price data alone can only tell us that some kind of temporary equilibrium has been reached between the availability of weapons in the informal markets and the demand for them. That NATO-pattern weapons are significantly more expensive than Warsaw Pact-weapons in those markets is likely the result of a combination of factors, including the greater symbolic value placed on them and their relative rarity compared to Warsaw Pact models. Where there are increases in certain weapon types in some areas, researchers have found some correlation with increased trafficking, the concentration of foreign armed groups, or both (APW, 2024), but this association is not conclusive.

Beyond price data, interviews with arms dealers, purchasers, local Taliban, and community leaders have proven deeply informative in this context, pointing to divisions within the Taliban over control of weapons and the use of arms control and arms seizures as ways of consolidating power bases. While the leadership has maintained a certain degree of control over weapons, increasing divisions between the religious and secular sides of the movement could lead to further instability.

External factors could also quickly change the security situation, power dynamics, and, potentially, the landscape of arms supply and demand in the region. One flashpoint could be a further deterioration of Pakistani–Afghan relations over the Taliban's support for the TTP. As this paper was being finalized, Pakistan had responded to escalating TTP cross-border attacks on Pakistani military personnel with major airstrikes on TTP hideouts in Afghan territory (Hussain, 2024). Already in 2023, Pakistan had expelled some 800,000 ethnic Afghans following repeated TTP attacks (Ur-Rehman, 2025). Meanwhile, sectarian clashes in the Kurram tribal district of Pakistan, bordering Khost and Paktia in Afghanistan, have intensified recently, killing hundreds. The situation in Kurram remains tense, and markets and roads are still closed (Ur-Rehman, 2024).

Taliban fighters stand guard in Asadabad, Kunar province, next to weapons seized from various locations, on 25 September 2022. Source: AFP

Conclusion

This research project used quantitative and qualitative field investigations in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Freedom of Information Act requests, and a review of existing literature to assess aspects of arms proliferation in the Afghanistan–Pakistan region since late 2022. Careful project design, putting the safety and security of researchers first, generated unique and extremely valuable data and insights that complement official seizures data inside and outside the country. The project confirmed the widespread availability of many types of arms and tactical materiel, with NATO-pattern equipment present but in rather limited quantities and at more expensive price points. A wider geographic scope and more frequent data collection may have provided even richer insights at the local level.

One of the paper's main findings is that arms proliferation dynamics in Afghanistan are highly dependent on local conflict, relationships, power bases, and ethno-political fissures that predate the Taliban's takeover in August 2021. The relationships between local commanders and their religious and secular political leaders will undoubtedly continue to be an important defining factor in arms trafficking and proliferation into the future.

Some important aspects of the proliferation challenge were beyond the reach of the research methods employed, including relationships between Taliban control efforts, informal market factors, and trafficking actors and activities. In addition, the assumption that the types of weapons available and their prices at informal arms markets can act as a proxy for their general distribution within the informal economy has limits. It does not, in particular, reflect the deliberate arming by Taliban leaders of non-state UN-designated terrorist groups. This dimension is perhaps the most concerning for the fuelling of terrorist violence, onward diversion, and regional instability. The relationship between widespread general arms proliferation and the large influxes of al-Qaeda and TTP cadres into eastern Afghanistan, where they are reportedly armed and trained (SIGAR, 2024; UNSC, 2024c), could not be illuminated by researchers using methods that would ensure their safety and security. Yet independent research continues to be vital for enhancing the international community's understanding of the full range of arms proliferation dynamics in the region, including deliberate donations and supplies by the Taliban to allied non-state armed groups.

Unfortunately, there are signs that the international community's focus on this challenge is fading, driven in part by anger over the Taliban's persistent and deepening 'gender apartheid' (Kelly, 2024). The imminent closure in 2025 of the flagship US independent monitor (Sopko, 2025) will only increase the burden on competent regional and international authorities, UN sanctions monitors, and independent research teams guided by sound social science and ethical principles. In light of research provided here and in previous high-level monitoring reports, however, the challenge is too important to ignore. In the years ahead, triangulating between official and independent, donor-supported research initiatives such as this one will be essential for obtaining a clear picture of the risks and signs of wider arms diffusion in the region and beyond. ●

Abbreviations and acronyms

ANDSF Afghan National Defence and Security Forces

CAR Conflict Armament Research

DoD Department of Defense (United States)

GDI General Directorate of Intelligence

MoIA Ministry of Interior Affairs

PKR Pakistani rupee

SIGAR Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

TTP Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan

UNAMA United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

USD United States dollar

Notes

1 See also Mehra, Demuynck, and Wentworth (2022) and Cohen and Liebermann (2021) for analyses of the volume transferred published prior to Schroeder (2024).

2 Further information on the research methodologies employed for this project is available on request.

3 Communications with a knowledgeable source, November 2024.

4 The full list of the Survey's target benchmark small arms, light weapons, and associated ammunition included US M4 rifles; US M16 rifles; Russian AK-pattern rifles, including AKM, AK-74, and AK-74M; Chinese AK-pattern rifles, including the Type 56; Beretta 92 FS pistols; genuine Glock 19 pistols; genuine Glock 17 pistols; genuine Makarov pistols; Pakistani Derrai AK-47s; Pakistani Zigana pistols; 7.62 × 39 mm, 5.56 × 45 mm, 9 × 19 mm, 9 × 18 mm, and 30-bore ammunition; AMD-65 rifles; M240 and/or M249 machine guns; M24 sniper rifles; M9 pistols; and M203 under-barrel grenade launchers.

5 Photographs of weapons for sale in Pakistani markets obtained from field researchers allowed the Survey to contact knowledgeable experts and, in one case, a manufacturer to assess whether the items were authentic or locally made replicas. In all but one case, the US materiel was assessed to be authentic. The selection of items reviewed was not representative enough to make broad generalizations about the relative presence of replica firearms in the informal markets in Afghanistan or Pakistan.

6 Price data was collected in both USD and local currency. For the sake of comparison across areas and years, USD data is presented.

7 It was only possible to get price data points for single weapons, rather than bulk purchases.

8 Local researchers were trained to identify and collect price data on a range of AK-pattern assault rifles, encompassing various submodels and potential origins, predominantly Russian, which were categorized together as one type. See also footnote 4.

9 The Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, also known as the Turkistan Islamic Party (ETIM/TIP), now stationed in Baghlan province, is an example of a group that is known to secure funding from drug trafficking (UNSC, 2024a).

10 Communications with a research team leader, October 2024.

11 The Small Arms Survey did not have access to disaggregated official seizure data from Afghanistan or Pakistan that would have allowed for a more refined analysis of supplies to armed groups. For this analysis, the Survey relied on reporting by UN sanctions monitors as well as assessments by the Survey's local research partners.

12 Following the release of the Survey's first report on arms proliferation in Afghanistan under the Taliban, in July 2023 the Ministry of Interior Affairs issued a statement reiterating that trafficking was not taking place, and that arms were to be strictly regulated according to licensing procedures (Official X Account of the Spokesman of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2023).

References

Abi-Habib, Maria and Sheera Frenkel. 2024. 'Where Is Hamas Getting Its Weapons? Increasingly, From Israel.' *New York Times*. 28 January.

Al Jazeera. 2022. 'Taliban to Create Afghanistan "Grand Army" With Old Regime Troops.' 22 February.

APW (Afghan Peace Watch). 2023a. *Regional Weapon Proliferation in Afghanistan: Risks and Internal Weapon Dynamics under Taliban Rule*. Unpublished background paper for the Small Arms Survey.

—. 2023b. *Weapon Dynamics in Balkh Province under Taliban Rule*. Unpublished background paper for the Small Arms Survey.

—. 2024. *Weapon Dynamics Eastern Afghanistan under Taliban Rule*. Unpublished background paper for the Small Arms Survey.

Azizi, Hamid. 2024. 'The Nature and Extent of the Taliban's Involvement in the Drug Trade Before and After the Regime Change (1994–2022): Insights from Experts.' *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 35, No. 8. July.

CAG (Centre on Armed Groups). 2023. 'Counting Kalashnikovs and Managing M4s: Arms under the Emirate in Afghanistan.' Unpublished background paper commissioned by the Small Arms Survey. Geneva: Centre on Armed Groups.

CAR (Conflict Armament Research). 2021. 'Illicit Weapons in Afghanistan: Taliban Seizures of US Equipment Are Only a Fraction of the Story.' Frontline Perspective. Issue 1. September.

Cohen, Zachary and Oren Liebermann. 2021. 'Rifles, Humvees and Millions of Rounds of Ammo: Taliban Celebrate Their New American Arsenal.' CNN. 21 August.

Fleischner, Justine. 2023. *Arms Smuggling Dynamics under Taliban Rule*. Situation Update. Geneva: Small Arms Survey. July.

— and Habib Khan. 2024. *Selective Approval: Taliban Weapons Controls in Afghanistan's Balkh Province*. Situation Update. Geneva: Small Arms Survey. May.

Florquin, Nicolas. 2013. 'Price Watch: Arms and Ammunition at Illicit Markets.' In Small Arms Survey. *Small Arms Survey 2013: Everyday Dangers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 250–81.

Hibatullah, Mullah. 2024. Decree 1226/2/16 AH. ('The Protection and Distribution of the Registered Military Equipment Is in the Hands of the Amir al-Mu'minin'). November.

Hussain, Abid. 2024. 'Pakistan Air Strikes in Afghanistan Spark Taliban Warning of Retaliation.' Al Jazeera. 25 December.

Jackson, Ashley, Maiwand, and Florian Weigand. 2023. *Taliban Arms Management Practices*. Situation Update. Geneva: Small Arms Survey. June.

Karp, Aaron. 2018. *Estimating Global Civilian-held Firearms Numbers*. Briefing Paper. Geneva: Small Arms Survey. June.

Kaufman, Ellie. 2022. 'First on CNN: US Left Behind $7 Billion of Military Equipment in Afghanistan After 2021 Withdrawal, Pentagon Report Says.' CNN. 28 April.

Kelly, Annie. 2024. 'Afghan women Fight to Hold Taliban to Account over Gender Apartheid.' *Guardian*. 9 October.

Khoruk, Maria. 2024. 'Illicit Economies in Afghanistan under the Taliban.' Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime. March.

Kuimova, Alexandra and Siemon T. Wezeman. 2021. 'Transfers of Major Arms to Afghanistan between 2001 and 2020.' SIPRI Backgrounder. 3 September. Stockholm: SIPRI.

LeBrun, Emile. 2022. *Containing the Afghan Arsenal: Lessons, Priorities and Strategies*. Confidential background paper. Geneva: Small Arms Survey. May.

Mansfield, David. 2024. 'Between the Lion and the Man with the Stick.' Alcis. 1 October.

Mehra, Tanya, Méryl Demuynck, and Matthew Wentworth. 2022. *Weapons in Afghanistan: The Taliban's Spoils of War*. Policy Brief. The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism. February.

MEMRI (Middle East Media Research Institute). 2024. 'In Doha to Buy Weapons, Afghan Taliban Defense Minister Mullah Yaqoob Mujahid and Taliban Army Chief of Staff Meet with Qatari Emir, Inspect Weapons at DEMDEX Defense Exhibition.' Special Dispatch No. 11184. 8 March.

Official X Account of the Spokesman of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Zabihullah Mujahid. 2023. @Zabehulah_M33. X. 10 July.

PTI. 2024. 'Use of M4 Carbine Assault Rifles in Terror Attacks in J-K Alarming: Experts.' *Economic Times*. 10 July.

Red Lantern Analytica. 2024. 'Narco-Arms Trafficking from Afghanistan.' 10 April.

Schroeder, Matt. 2024. *Calculable Losses? Arms Transfers to Afghanistan 2002–21*. Briefing Paper. Geneva: Small Arms Survey. January.

— and Benjamin King. 2012. 'Surveying the Battlefield: Illicit Arms in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia.' In Small Arms Survey. *Small Arms Survey 2012: Moving Targets*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 312–55.

SIGAR (Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction). 2023. *Why the Afghan Security Forces Collapsed*. 23-16-IP Evaluation Report. Arlington: SIGAR. February.

—. 2024. *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*. Arlington: SIGAR. 30 July.

Sopko, John F. 2025. 'America, Afghanistan and the Price of Self-delusion.' *New York Times*. 2 January.

SPADO (Sustainable Peace and Development Organization). 2024. *Cross-border Illicit Arms Trade: Analyzing the Arms Trade and Market Dynamics between Pakistan and Afghanistan*. Unpublished background paper.

Starkey, Jerome. 2008. 'Drugs for Guns: How the Afghan Heroin Trade Is Fuelling the Taliban Insurgency.' *Independent*. 29 April.

UNSC (United Nations Security Council). 2022. Resolution 2626 (2022). Adopted by the Security Council at Its 8997th Meeting. S/RES/2626 of 17 March.

—. 2024a. *Letter Dated 23 January 2024 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) Concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals, Groups, Undertakings and Entities Addressed to the President of the Security Council*. S/2024/92 of 29 January.

—.2024b. *Letter Dated 3 July 2024 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Established Pursuant to Resolution 1988 (2011) Addressed to the President of the Security Council*. S/2024/499 of 8 July.

—. 2024c. *Letter Dated 19 July 2024 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) Concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals, Groups, Undertakings and Entities Addressed to the President of the Security Council*. S/2024/556 of 22 July.

Ur-Rehman, Zia. 2024. 'Sectarian Violence Kills at Least 25 in Northwest Pakistan.' *New York Times*. 23 November.

—. 2025. 'Tensions Escalate After Pakistan Pounds Afghanistan With Airstrikes.' *New York Times*. 1 January.

US DoD (United States Department of Defense). 2022. 'Disposition of Department of Defense (DoD) Property, Equipment, and Supplies of DoD-Funded Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) Materiel in Connection with the Withdrawal from Afghanistan.' Report to Congress in Accordance with Section 2205, Division C of Public Law 117-43. March.

Zarin Television. 2024. 'Taliban Defense Minister Fires Logistics Chief over Russian Arms Deal Comments.' 12 September.

About the **Small Arms Survey**

The Small Arms Survey is a centre for applied knowledge dedicated to preventing and reducing illicit small arms proliferation and armed violence. The Survey informs policy and practice through a combination of data, evidence-based knowledge, authoritative resources and tools, and tailored expert advice and training, and by bringing together practitioners and policymakers.

The Survey is an associated programme of the Geneva Graduate Institute, located in Switzerland, and has an international staff with expertise in security studies, political science, law, economics, development studies, sociology, criminology, and database and programme management. It collaborates with a network of researchers, practitioners, partner institutions, non-governmental organizations, and governments in more than 50 countries.

The Survey's activities and outputs are made possible through core support as well as project funding. A full list of current donors and projects can be accessed via the Small Arms Survey website. For more information, please visit:

www.smallarmssurvey.org.

Contact details

Small Arms Survey
Maison de la Paix
Chemin Eugène-Rigot 2E
1202 Geneva
Switzerland

t +41 22 908 5777
e info@smallarmssurvey.org

A publication of the Small Arms Survey, with support from the German Federal Foreign Office.

Follow the
Small Arms Survey

@SmallArmsSurvey