

# Executive Summary

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## Blowback: Kenya's Illicit Ammunition Problem in Turkana North District

James Bevan ■ james.bevan@smallarmssurvey.org

Small Arms Survey

Graduate Institute of International  
and Development Studies  
47 Avenue Blanc  
1202 Geneva, Switzerland

t +41 22 908 5779

f +41 22 732 2738

e sas@smallarmssurvey.org

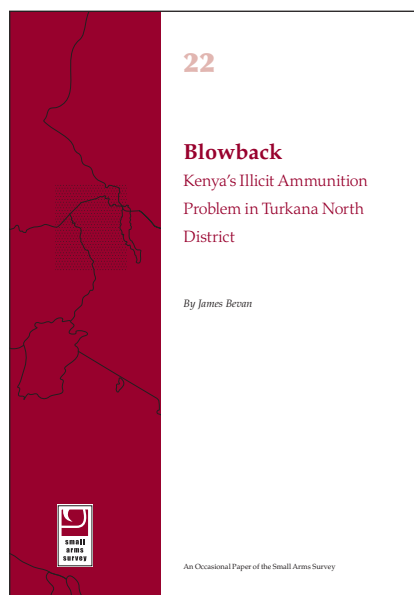
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Kenya has an ammunition problem. The Government of Kenya is fully aware of the symptoms, but it is not aware that it plays a large role in nurturing them. Turkana North District is afflicted by some of the most intense armed violence in the region. The wars that rage between the pastoralist communities in the district and neighbouring regions of Sudan and Uganda are fuelled by a steady supply of small arms ammunition.

The research presented in this paper provides strong evidence of a systematic unofficial initiative to supply the Turkana pastoralist groups with Kenyan government ammunition. It finds that the Kenya Police supplies almost 50 per cent of the ammunition that circulates illegally in Turkana North, ostensibly to provide the Turkana with some defence against rival groups in Sudan and Uganda.

The evidence presented here is fourfold. First, Kenyan local authorities recognize (and even welcome) additional firepower flowing to the Turkana, because the state is unable to provide effective security to pastoralist populations. Second, these ammunition transfers are observable

in the same types of ammunition used by the police and Turkana (but not by neighbouring groups). Third, the distribution of ammunition



among the Turkana and police-supplied Kenyan state security forces is strongly correlated. Fourth, and crucially, eyewitnesses (including the author) confirm that the practice is commonplace.

This practice has negative effects. The cartridges leave government control and become available for use in a variety of crimes, ranging from roadside banditry to targeted assassination.

The killing of Lokichoggio's World Food Programme head adds an international dimension to this 'blowback' effect. The same type of ammunition that is supplied to the Turkana by the Kenya Police was recovered from the scene of the crime. It probably came to the attackers indirectly; but the extensive proliferation of this type of ammunition in the region makes it statistically probable that government-

supplied ammunition is frequently used in many acts of violence each year, including this one.

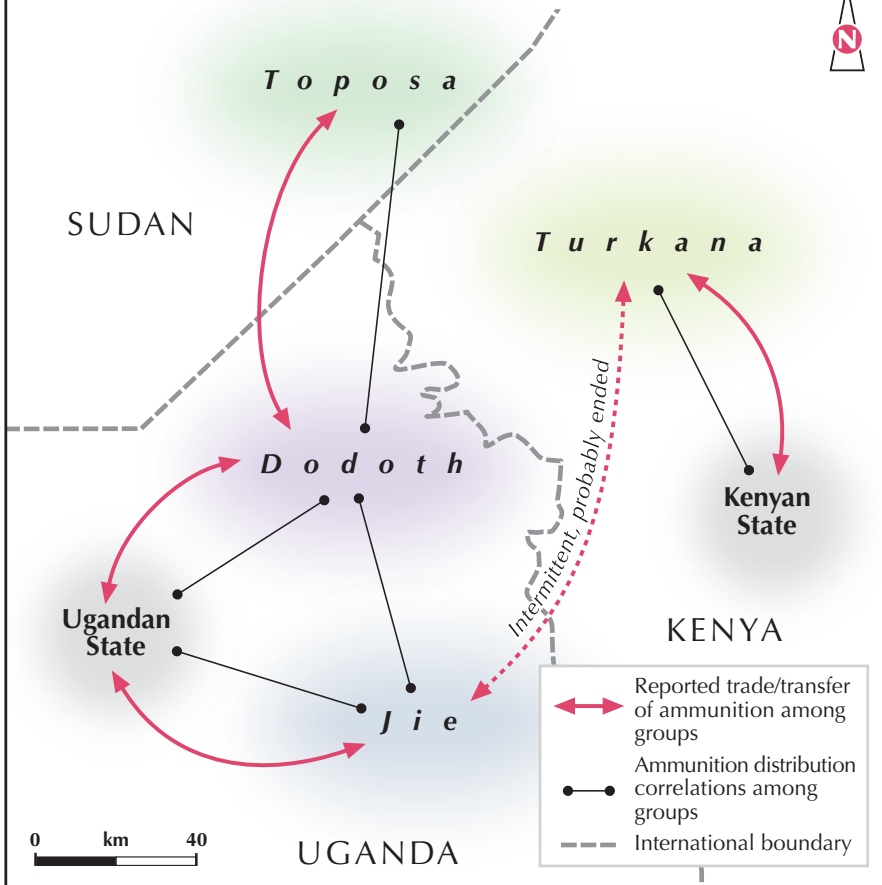
Such ammunition transfers from the police to the Turkana have for long remained discreet, due to the relative 'anonymity' of small arms cartridges, but Kenya can no longer claim that they are the result of isolated ammunition theft by members of the Kenya Police and Kenya Police Reserves (KPR).

The evidence presented in this paper has been compiled over a period of two years and includes more than 3,000 samples of ammunition recorded throughout Turkana North and in neighbouring regions of Sudan and Uganda. The study triangulates statistical analyses of ammunition with field research to develop a picture of the broad dynamics of illicit ammunition trade in the region. The paper finds, in particular, the following:

- Ammunition from at least 25 countries, and 51 different factories, circulates in the region, drawn to the area by the many conflicts that have raged there over the past decades.
- There are greater similarities between ammunition circulating within countries than there are between the countries, suggesting that, once in the region, the transfer of ammunition is relatively localized.
- Kenyan state forces' ammunition stocks are strongly correlated (in



Map 4.3 **Reported trade routes and correlations between groups, 2006–2008**



*Turkana North's ammunition problem cannot be solved by restricting the supply of ammunition alone*

ammunition, the parties to the conflict will retain access to numerous sources of ammunition because the region is already awash with armaments.

Turkana North's ammunition problem cannot be solved by restricting the supply of ammunition alone. This supply is an escalatory factor in the region's armed conflicts, not a causal one. Instituting effective controls on the management of arms and ammunition by Kenyan security forces could have a positive impact on curtailing the supply of ammunition to illicit users, but this would not address the underlying demand for ammunition in Turkana North.

Addressing this problem requires providing security to communities that, at present, have to protect themselves. It is clear that unless Kenya radically revises the strategies of its security forces in Turkana North and the resources placed at their disposal, the violence and insecurity that afflict the region will continue unabated. ■

types and numbers) with those of Turkana pastoralists in Kenya, which indicates ammunition transfer between the two groups.

- Ugandan state forces' stocks are, likewise, correlated with those of Dodoth and Jie pastoralist groups based in Uganda.
- Strong correlations among the ammunition stocks used by different groups in the region closely match the major ammunition trade and transfer patterns revealed by field research in the region; the two methods are therefore mutually supportive.
- Interviews, eyewitness reports, and personal observations made by the author confirm that state security forces in Kenya, Uganda, and Sudan are a major source of ammunition for warring pastoralist communities in each country.
- The problems associated with the proliferation of government-

supplied ammunition are not confined to the countries in question. At least 15 per cent of ammunition enters Turkana North District via Sudan and Uganda.

The paper concludes that with or without the supply of government



A blood-stained and bullet-holed World Food Programme Landcruiser at the scene of the killing, UN compound, Lokichoggio, Kenya, 14 May 2008. © James Bevan