Ninja militia stand guard in downtown Brazzaville (©Associated Press/Adil Bradlow).

Making the Difference?

WEAPONS COLLECTION AND SMALL ARMS AVAILABILITY IN THE REPUBLIC OF CONGO

8

INTRODUCTION

In central Africa, the Republic of Congo (RoC) is wedged along the north-west border of its neighbour, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, formerly Zaire). The DRC overshadows the RoC in the world's eye, as it is far more populous, vast, and chronically war-torn. The RoC, with a population of only three million scattered across a territory of 342,000 square kilometres and few resources beyond a modest oil industry and forest reserves, is often overlooked by mainstream media. It has, however, been afflicted by violent political instability and intermittent civil war since 1993.

Under the auspices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), a programme was executed in 2000–01 to collect small arms left over from the fighting. It linked voluntary weapons collection with reintegration assistance for former combatants, providing them with employment in existing companies and micro-credit to create small businesses.

As with many such endeavours, its results were controversial. The total number of small arms collected by the IOM/UNDP and others—16,000 out of which 2,800 were collected by IOM/UNDP and the rest by the goverment and a government-appointed body, the CDS—was not large in absolute terms. At the time, it was impossible to evaluate the success of the project, since participating authorities lacked a sense of the total number of weapons in circulation. This case study—originally commissioned by the IOM and the UNDP in order to establish benchmarks for the programme—estimates that by the time the fighting ended, the total number of small arms and light weapons in the RoC lay between 67,000 and 80,000. In all, the collection programmes recovered about 28 per cent of the estimated total by 2003.

The estimate of the total number of small arms and light weapons in the RoC when fighting ended lies between 67,000 and 80,000. By 2003, collection programmes had recovered about 28 per cent of this.

The IOM/UNDP programme was hailed as a pioneering attempt to reintegrate former combatants and reduce their demand for guns. However, it failed to prevent fighting from flaring up again in March 2002. Some commentators blame the lack of funds, arguing that a better funded weapons collection programme would have made ex-combatants, disarmed and reintegrated, less likely to return to war. Others maintain that irrespective of funding, there was a lack of political commitment to peace.

This case study focuses on Phase I of the Project, which ended in 2001.[1] It gives an overview of small arms availability and trade prior to the renewed outbreak of hostilities, and examines the results of the weapons collection programme. It provides a global profile of the total number of small arms and light weapons outside government hands, generates geographic and demographic profiles of the distribution of weapons, and assesses current proliferation dynamics in the region. Results are tentative. The research team commissioned by the IOM/UNDP had eight weeks to undertake the research.

It is challenging to estimate small arms holdings of fluid militias which lack central organization, a problem typical of situations in which weapons are collected. This analysis of the RoC shows how useful estimates of total stockpiles can be made, even when accurate data is unavailable. Had donors appreciated the true scale of the RoC stockpile before the project began and increased their support accordingly, the outcome might have been different. The RoC experience illustrates how damaging inadequate information can be to the design of weapons collection and destruction programmes. It also shows how much can be accomplished with modest means. From this, one can derive either a warning against inflated expectations or a manifestation of the potential of weapons collection programmes.

A TURBULENT DECADE

Militias have been integral to the political and social life of the RoC since it became independent from France in 1960. Political crises and widespread violence throughout the 1960s led Congolese leaders to create armed militias in order to safeguard their power bases and achieve political objectives. During the crises of 1964–68, the para-statal armed formation known as the 'Defense civile'—created by Pascal Lissouba to replace the 'colonial' army with a genuine 'people's army'—served to institutionalize civilian militias as a partial substitute for, or alternative to, forces of law and order.

The end of one-party rule in 1991 and a series of elections in 1992 led to power struggles between Pascal Lissouba, former prime minister and head of the Union panafricaine pour la démocratie sociale (UPADS), and the opposition. The opposition was made up by Denis Sassou-Nguesso, head of the Parti congolais du travail (PCT), and Bernard Kolélas, head of a coalition known as the Union pour le renouveau démocratique (URD). Amidst charges of electoral fraud, Bernard Kolélas organized a campaign of civil disobedience in 1993 in the districts of Bacongo and Makélékélé in Brazzaville. The government response—massive use of force by the Forces armées du Congo (FAC) in November 1993—prompted the creation of the Ninja, a group of armed self-defence groups from the southern districts of Brazzaville that united around Kolélas (Bazenguissa-Ganga, 1996, pp. 10–12). Sassou, for his part, consolidated those diverse security forces and neighbourhood self-defence groups that were loyal to him into the Forces démocratiques et patriotiques (FDP), a militia better known as the Cobras. Faced with an army whose members maintained neutrality or allied with Sassou, Lissouba created a state militia, the Réserve ministérielle (Pourtier, 1998, p. 15).

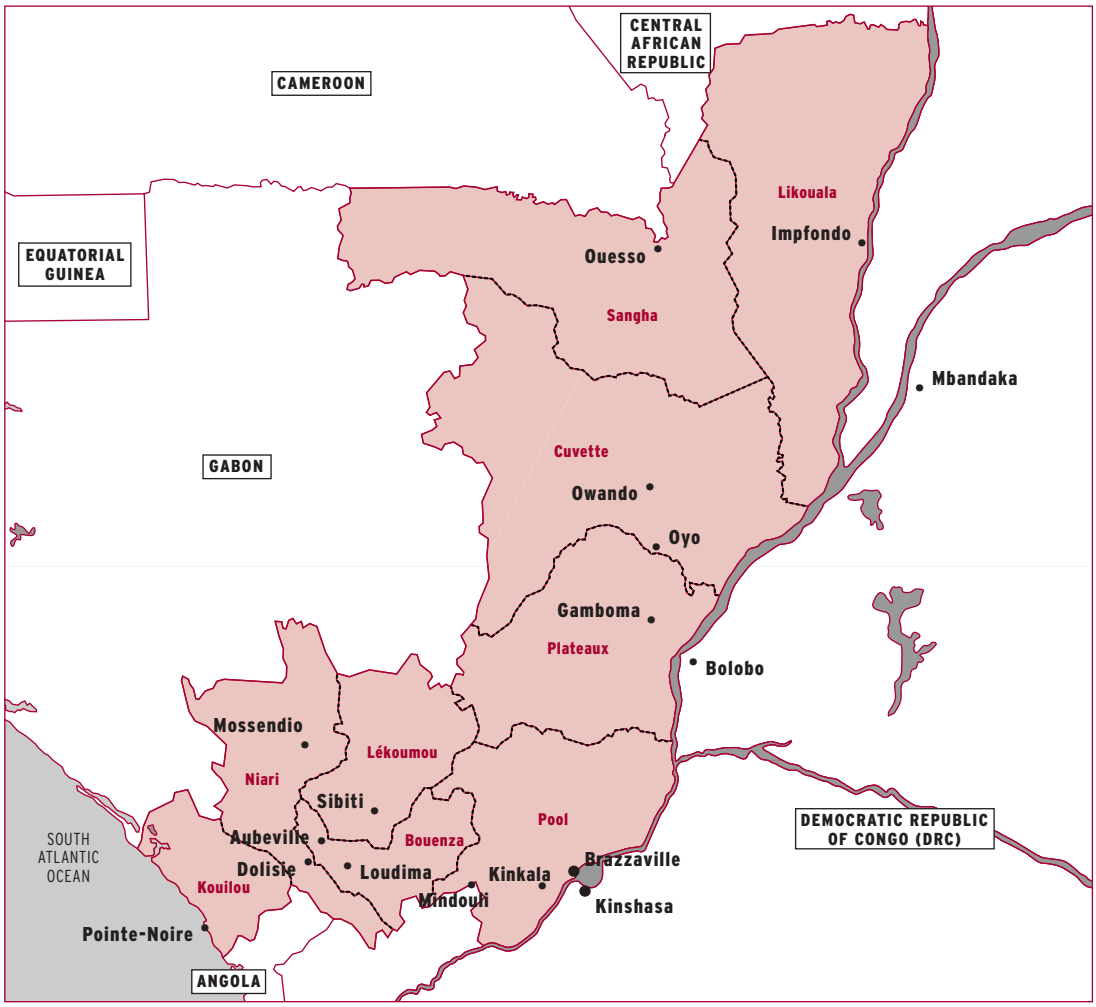
Table 8.1 Main political figures, parties, and militias

Political figure	Political party	Militia
Bernard Kolélas	Union pour le renouveau démocratique (URD)	Ninjas
Pascal Lissouba	Union panafricaine pour la démocratie sociale (UPADS)	Cocoyes
Denis Sassou-Nguesso	Parti congolais du travail (PCT)	Cobras

The alliances between factions were dynamic. Conflict quickly escalated into urban warfare between the FAC and pro-Lissouba militias on the one hand and the Ninja on the other. During this period the militias were not large, with up to 2,000 combatants. They received a modicum of training and were relatively well organized. The armed confrontations resulted in 2,000 deaths and 100,000 people displaced (Pourtier, 1998, p. 17). Despite the reconciliation between Lissouba and Kolélas in 1994—the latter was named mayor of Brazzaville—the main political figures, including Sassou, retained their forces. Lissouba, for example, continued to train members of the Réserve ministérielle in the training camps of Loudima and Aubeville in Bouenza.

A failed attempt to disarm Sassou militants led to renewed fighting in June 1997. During this conflict, the Cobra militia fought against the militias of Lissouba—now consolidated and known as the Cocoyes—in Brazzaville. The army, which had been disintegrating following political polarization from 1994 onwards, ceased to be an effective political or military force. In contrast to the 1993–94 conflict, which can be characterized as a low-level insurgency against government authority, the 1997 conflict was over the leadership of the RoC. These higher stakes drove

Map 8.1 The Republic of Congo



each side—with the exception of Kolélas's Ninja militia, which remained neutral until July, when it joined Lissouba's forces—to mobilize massive numbers of combatants, who were enticed with weapons and the promise of spoils. Due to the ineptitude of the vast majority of combatants, the conflict turned into a military stalemate until external reinforcements permitted Sassou forces to gain advantage. Together with foreign mercenaries and other forces from Rwanda, the DRC, Chad, and Angola, the Cobras managed to retake Brazzaville and most of the northern and central regions of the country. By the end of the conflict in October 1997, an estimated 10,000 people had been killed and hundreds of thousands displaced.

Starting in 1998, the Congolese government launched two operations—Colombe I and Colombe II—to pacify the southern regions of the country and disarm the Cocoye and Ninja militias. An excessive use of force sparked rebellions in the regions of Bouenza and Pool in late 1998 and culminated in full-scale fighting throughout the south and Brazzaville until November 1999, when a general cease-fire was signed. During this conflict, the Ninja was torn by factional strife and divided into two groups: the Nsiloulou, headed by the so-called Pasteur Ntoumi, and a group loyal to Kolélas. As in

1997, both militias took advantage of fear and anger to recruit and arm thousands of local inhabitants to resist the imposition of central authority. After a year of armed violence, the intervention of foreign forces (Angolans and Rwandans) on the side of the government, widespread looting and execution of civilians, and massive displacement, conflict fatigue and desperation drove many of the key actors to the negotiating table. There, in November 1999, a general cease-fire was signed in Pointe Noire and an inclusive body—the Comité de suivi (CDS)—was established to oversee its terms.

The cease-fire, signed in November and December 1999 by the main belligerents, comprised a number of provisions. These included the disarmament and demobilization of militias, their reintegration into the armed forces, Police nationale, and Gendarmerie, and the convocation of a so-called National Dialogue on the constitutional and political future of the country. The CDS was charged with overseeing the implementation of the immediate provisions, notably disarmament and demobilization, and completed its work in late 2000. The National Dialogue, which was held in April 2001, established a timetable for elections.

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After handing in weapons, ex-combatants used small loans to create innovative small businesses, such as this cosmetics shop in Brazzaville.

In January 2002, the Congolese approved a draft constitution, and in March 2002, Sassou obtained almost 90 per cent of the vote in the presidential elections. Lissouba and Koléas, forced into exile, would have faced life imprisonment or the death sentence had they returned to the RoC. The legislative elections were to be held on 12 May 2002, but fighting broke out between the central government and the Ninja under Pasteur Ntoumi in the Pool region in late March 2002. In the end, the two rounds of elections which Sassou's party won were held in June 2002, amidst continuous violence also in Brazzaville. The eight seats in Pool remained vacant due to the fighting.[2]

ESTIMATING MILITIA HOLDINGS IN THE REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Massive quantities of weapons were distributed to militias without registering their ownership. Ex-combatants still own the majority of the weapons.

Every conflict generates its own dynamic of weapons acquisition. In the RoC, most fighting took place between militia groups supported by dominant political figures and made up largely of untrained civilians. In this context, militia leaders were dependent on a steady stream of financial and military resources to maintain cohesion and loyalty. The methods with which militias obtained weapons reflect this organization or lack of it: widespread looting of military and government weapons depots and buying weapons on international markets. As a result, militias got massive quantities of weapons without registering their ownership or ascertaining that they were properly distributed amongst combatants. At present, in spite of the quantities lost, destroyed, or collected, the majority of these weapons are still in the hands of ex-combatants.

In this section, estimates of militia holdings are assessed in two different ways: the 'acquisition approach' and the 'possession approach' (see Box 8.1).

Box 8.1 Note on methodology (I)

In order to establish the total quantity of SALW[3] currently possessed by ex-combatants, the research team utilized a dual methodological strategy that consisted of an **'acquisition approach'** (projecting a global estimate on the basis of identified weapons looted or bought) and a '**possession approach'** (projecting a global estimate on the basis of data on militia size and weapons possession patterns). Both approaches rely on predictive modelling which is often imprecise. Due to the incomplete nature of the data obtained, estimates can produce likely orders of magnitude instead of precise quantities.

The acquisition approach assesses and verifies SALW acquisitions by the militias over the duration of the conflicts. The data was drawn from primary sources (e.g. government documentation, airway bills, invoices, and end-user certificates) and secondary sources (e.g. international and local media). Vital data was also generated from interviews with ex-combatants, former militia unit commanders, and military officers. The possession approach assesses patterns in SALW possession and distribution in order to predict gross militia holdings. Data came from controlled and standardized surveys administered for each militia group and sampled throughout the country (see Box 8.2 for a detailed description of the survey). Projections were then made from this data on the basis of estimated militia force levels and distribution patterns adjusted for selection bias.[4] The data was supplemented with qualitative information generated from semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions—including participatory exercises—and on-site inspections.

The central challenge was to measure a number of key variables in a tense and unpredictable environment. Even with official authorization, for example, information on the size of the Congolese military and police forces (between 1963 and 1993) and the ratio of weapons to men (including reserves) remained unavailable to the research team, necessitating the development of proxy variables. Essential variables for the possession approach, such as the actual size of the militias, the average size of weapons holdings (individual and collective caches), and the physical distribution of holdings, also depended on proxy variables—in this case demographic data and projections from survey data.

Adjusting for weapons loss and destruction: Throughout the conflict period, considerable quantities of weapons were lost, discarded, or destroyed. Large numbers of Ninja combatants threw their weapons into the Djoué River as they fled Brazzaville at the end of the 1997 conflict, while a major cache of Cocoye weapons in Pointe Noire was destroyed before Sassou forces occupied the city. In addition, and although militias looted the vast majority of weapons originally in government holdings, remaining FAC, police, and gendarmerie forces retained a token quantity of weapons. Time and material resources precluded an in-depth investigation of these rates of loss; instead, overall estimated quantities of weapons in militia possession have been adjusted on the assumption that the above constitute approximately 20 per cent of overall holdings.

Adjusting for ex-combatants without weapons: Not all ex-combatants currently possess weapons. Estimates of weapons availability need therefore to be adjusted for the percentage of ex-combatants who never possessed weapons or lost them in both conflict and post-conflict periods. Although an in-depth assessment of this phenomenon was not possible, the research team obtained indicators that provided an approximate order of magnitude. These indicators include: (1) approximately 20 per cent of Ninja combatants who never received military weapons; (2) the large proportion of Cocoye fleeing Brazzaville in 1997 who were disarmed by Ninja combatants in the Pool region; (3) weapons collected or seized by the government between 1997 and 1999; and (4) weapons lost in the course of the conflicts. On the basis of these indicators, it can be inferred that approximately 20 per cent of all ex-combatants did not possess weapons in 2001.

Estimating acquisition of small arms and light weapons, 1993–99

During the conflicts of the 1990s, militia combatants acquired their weapons from two principal sources: by looting military and police depots and buying from outside the country. In order to determine a global estimate of SALW outside of government control, this subsection estimates government holdings (pre-1993) and external purchases (1993–97) on the basis of verified information. These projections are then matched with evidence from the field.[5]

Weapons acquired from pre-1993 government holdings

The majority of the country's weapons depots were, and continue to be, located in Brazzaville, followed by Pointe Noire and Dolisie. All military, police, and gendarmerie units also retained small reserves in their barracks or headquarters.[6] Although the weapons distribution system suffered from poor storage and maintenance,[7] one can safely assume that there were sufficient weapons for each soldier and police officer, and that reserves were well stocked.

The lower and upper thresholds highlighted in Table 8.2 are intended to capture variations in the size of weapons reserves. The dramatic collapse of law and order over the course of the three conflicts, together with widespread ransacking of government arsenals by all militia, indicates that the vast majority of weapons were at one point taken from official control.[8]

Table 8.2 Estimated government holdings, pre-1993

		Lower threshold		Upper threshold	
	Men	Weapons per person	SALW	Weapons per person	SALW
Army	8,000	1.1	8,800	2.0	16,000
Navy	800	1.1	880	1.5	1,200
Air force	1,200	1.1	1,320	1.5	1,800
Paramilitary	2,000	1.1	2,200	2.0	4,000
National police	1,500	1.0	1,500	2.0	3,000
Gendarmerie	2,000	1.0	2,000	1.5	3,000
People's militia	3,000	0.4	1,200	0.7	2,100
Total	**18,500**		**17,900**		**31,100**

Source: Data on force levels from SIPRI

During the conflict of 1993–94, weapons were primarily looted from police and military weapons depots and distributed freely from government arsenals.[9] The Aubeville and Zulu militias (pro-Lissouba groups that eventually united to form the Cocoye militia) allegedly received weapons from the government.[10] The Ninja, on the other hand, obtained weapons directly from fallen and ambushed FAC troops, and from the looting of Postes de securité publique (PSPs) in the Makélékélé and Bacongo districts of Brazzaville, as well as throughout the region of Pool. Some weapons were also taken from military camps in Pool. The Ninja militia were allied with Sassou's forces at the time, and received weapons from them via Kinshasa.[11] Although not directly involved in the fighting, Cobra forces raided the Military Academy in Gamboma in late 1994 and looted an estimated 800 weapons, half of which were given to the Ninja.[12]

At the start of the 1997 war, Cobra forces obtained some weapons from government holdings by FAC officers dismissed by Lissouba.[13] Following the failed attempt of government forces to capture Sassou, Cobra forces looted the military depots in the district of Talangai, securing between a half and a third of the pre-1993 FAC holdings; Cobra forces also looted the PSPs in northern Brazzaville.[14] When they entered the war in July 1997 on the side of the Cocoye, the Ninja obtained considerable amounts of weapons from military, police, and gendarmerie depots in Brazzaville, as well as direct distributions from the office of the presidency.[15] The only weapons acquired by the Cocoye outside the presidency were allegedly 'skimmed off' the stocks then safeguarded for UNITA.[16]

The return of conflict in the interior between 1998 and 1999 led to another wave of attacks on government weapons depots. The Ninja, during this period largely dispersed throughout the Pool region, once again looted PSPs and military detachments (notably in towns along the railway linking Brazzaville and Pointe Noire) and took weapons from defeated enemy.[17] Moreover, an indeterminate number of weapons were taken from Cocoye forces in late 1997 as they fled to their home villages from Brazzaville via Pool—up to 50 per cent of Cocoye forces were allegedly disarmed in this manner.[18] From 1998–99, Cocoye forces dispersed throughout the regions of Bouenza, Niari, and Lekoumou also obtained weapons from police and military depots and fallen Angolan and FAC soldiers.[19]

This widespread and prolonged looting was made possible by the decline of the regular armed forces and the loss of control over key installations. Although it cannot be conclusively established that all weapons were looted, the duration of the conflicts and the political and military supremacy of the militias suggests that a massive redistribution of government holdings did occur. Even where these weapons were not directly given to militia combatants, they were held in reserve for that eventuality.

Weapons procured from abroad, 1993–97

In contrast to the conflict of 1993–94, which was fought primarily with weapons pillaged from government depots, the conflict of 1997 entailed significant arms purchases from abroad—arms that were ultimately destined for the Cocoye and Cobra militias. There is little evidence of further purchases during the 1998–99 conflict, though the Sassou administration may have made additional acquisitions.

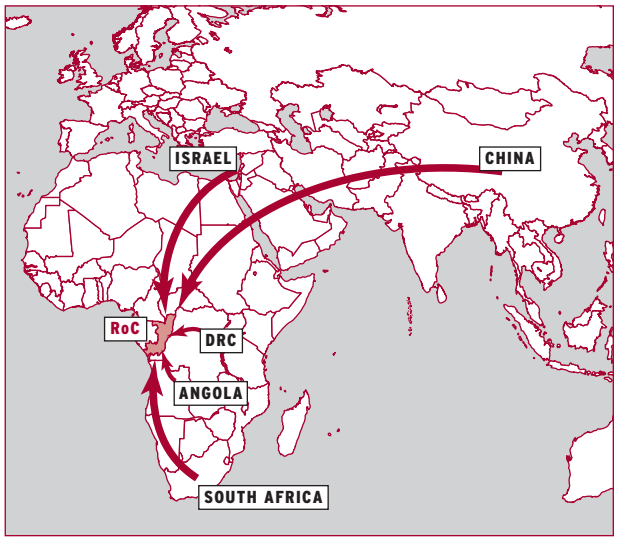
The murkiness and *ad hoc* nature of 'secret' arms purchases make it extremely difficult to develop a detailed assessment of the quantities or types of weapons transferred to the various militias. Nonetheless, information from a variety of sources suggests that the majority of weapons came from abroad. According to these findings, belligerents acquired an estimated 49,500 weapons between 1993 and 1997. These are incomplete estimates, and do not include values for suspected, but unconfirmed, shipments. Hence, the figures should be seen as a conservative estimate of overall quantities.

Between 1994 and 1997, Lissouba purchased large quantities of weapons, mainly from Israel, South Africa, and China (see Table 8.3). In 1994, as part of a larger package deal with the Israeli firm Levdan—which included military trainers—substantial quantities of weapons (Uzis and Galils) were reportedly purchased.[20] Subsequently, in instalments beginning in 1995, large amounts of weapons were reportedly acquired from Bulgaria and shipped via South Africa with the assistance of Rudolph Wollenhaupt and Jacques Monsieur, both well-known arms brokers in the central African region.[21] Between 1996 and 1997, the Congolese government also received several shipments of heavy and light weapons from the South African government.[22] Other weapons purchased during this period include a reported nine aircraft-loads of weapons from China that were brokered by the Zimbabwean Defence Industries (ZDI) and unverified transfers from Romania and central Asia.[23]

These purchases were not organized through the procurement division of the Ministry of Defence but through the Office of the Presidency, where control of distribution remained in Lissouba's hands.[24] According to several sources, a portion of these weapons was transported by train to Cocoye strongholds in the regions of Niari, Bouenza, and Lekoumou.[25] The rest were sent to Brazzaville, Owando, Ouesso, and Impfondo. Although the majority of these weapons were directly distributed to Cocoye and Ninja combatants (the latter due to the merging of their military commands late in the 1997 conflict), a certain amount was stocked in the weapons depots of Pointe Noire and Brazzaville.[26]

Crewmen of a Russian aircraft, accused of being mercenaries and transporting weapons, are jailed in Pointe Noire.

Map 8.2 Major sources of weapons to the Republic of Congo



Denis Sassou Nguesso purchased weapons in 1997 at two critical junctures in the conflict. At the outbreak of the conflict, Cobra combatants managed to intercept a shipment of Bulgarian-made AKS-47s in Kinshasa destined for the Congolese government or UNITA forces in Angola.[27] These weapons were purchased from the intermediaries organizing the shipment and transported by pirogue to the district of Mpila in Brazzaville. There they were stockpiled in the homes of pro-Sassou officers.[28] In addition, Cobra forces received at least two major shipments of heavy and light weapons, armoured vehicles, and ammunition from Angola and Gabon in September 1997. The former were allegedly air-dropped by the Angolan army north of Brazzaville, while the latter were flown into the town of Oyo and subsequently transported by road to Brazzaville.[29] These shipments, arriving when weapons supplies and ammunition were at a critical low point, facilitated a turn in the tide of conflict.

Among these latter shipments were significant quantities of the RPO-A 'Shmel', an extremely lethal weapon that uses fuel-air explosive techniques to create destruction equivalent to a 122mm artillery shell. Although produced and sold by both Russia—where it was first developed and used against Chechens in the mid-1990s—and China, this is the first time this weapon has been seen in the possession of a non-state actor. Although not formally banned under treaty law, the lethalness and indiscriminate nature of this weapon not only alters the force balance in a conflict largely dominated by the Kalashnikov, but also poses a formidable danger in the post-conflict context as it continues to circulate among ex-combatants.

The above projections, together with substantiated evidence, yield an estimated total of 67,500–80,500 weapons acquired by the militias, or an estimated average of 74,000 (see Table 8.4). When adjusted for the estimated quantity of weapons destroyed or lost (20 per cent of the total) and collected by the CDS, government, and IOM/UNDP Programme—a total of 16,000 weapons—the total quantity of weapons remaining can be estimated at between 38,000 and 48,500, or an average of 43,000. The empirical assessment of 87,000 weapons acquired—based on eyewitness accounts, anecdotal information, and structured interviews—yields an adjusted estimate of 53,500 weapons (see Table 8.7). Although exaggerated because informants tend to inflate perceived quantities, this empirical value largely corroborates the total calculated on the basis of documentary evidence and projections.

Estimating possession of small arms and light weapons, 1993-1999

Another way to assess the global number of small arms in circulation is to generate projections from the total number of ex-combatants and rates and trends in weapons possession. This provides additional insight into, and verification of, overall weapons holdings.

Table 8.3 Identified weapons transfers into the RoC, 1994–1997

Date	Origin of shipment	Origin of weapons	Supplier/ Broker	Value (USD millions)	Estimated SALW acquired	Weapon types	Package contents	Sources
1994	Israel	Israel	LEVDAN	50	2,000	Galil assault rifles; uzi sub-machine guns	Military trainers, SALW, and ammunition	Media, corroborated testimonies
1996	South Africa	SA military industry	SA govt	14	10,600	Vector R4/R5 assault rifles	Heavy and light weaponry	National Conventional Arms Control Committee
1997	South Africa	SA military industry	SA govt	1.6	5,300	Vector R4/R5 assault rifles	SALW	National Conventional Arms Control Committee
1995-97	Unknown	Eastern Europe	Monsieur/ Wollenhaupt (Ebar Management)	62.43	13,550	AK-47 assault rifles, RPG-7s, pistols	Vehicles, aircraft, heavy and light weaponry, supplies	Media, Republic of Congo 1999
1997	China	China	Zimbabwean Defence Industries/ NORINCO	-	10,000	Type-56 assault rifles, SKS rifles	9 aircraft (Ilyushin 76), loads of SALW and ammunition	Investigative research
May 1997	DRC	Bulgaria	-	-	5,000	AKS-47 assault rifles	SALW (PM Noire)	Corroborated testimonies, investigative research
September 1997	Angola	FSU, eastern Europe	-	-	1,500	AK-47 assault rifles, RPOA 'Shmel', GPMGs, HMGs	SALW, ammunition	Corroborated testimonies
September 1997	Gabon	FSU, eastern Europe	-	-	1,500	AK-47 assault rifles, RPOA 'Shmel', GPMGs, HMGs	Aircraft, vehicles, heavy and light weaponry, ammunition	Corroborated testimonies

Estimating militia size

The reliance of militia leaders on irregulars who spontaneously joined or left the fighting—not to mention the fighting itself, which oscillated between guerrilla warfare and a mass civil resistance movement—resulted in constantly changing force levels. During the conflict of 1993–94, total militia force levels were small (not more than 2,000). During the 1997 and 1998–99 conflicts, and with the extension of fighting into the interior, military exigencies called for mass recruitment, including thousands of disaffected and opportunistic youth with little or no formal training. The combination of 'spontaneous recruitment' with the lack of control over and registration of combatants makes it impossible to estimate militia size precisely. The CDS claimed to have validated 22,450 ex-combatants by 2000, but these figures are widely disputed (RoC, 2000).

Table 8.4 The acquisition approach: Total weapons acquired by militia forces, and quantity available in 2001

Source	Lower threshold	Upper threshold	Average
Government holdings	18,000	31,000	24,500
Transfers	49,500	49,500	49,500
Total acquired (1993-1997)	**67,500**	**80,500**	**74,000**
Adjustment for loss/destruction (20 per cent)	54,000	64,500	59,000
Adjustment for weapons collected (16,000)	38,000	48,500	43,000
Total available (2001)	**38,000**	**48,500**	**43,000**

The combination of 'spontaneous recruitment' with the lack of control over combatants makes it impossible to estimate militia size precisely.

© IOM/UNDP

The Shmel, using fuel-air explosives, poses a significant danger in the RoC, as it continues to circulate after fighting has stopped.

The research team developed estimates of militia force levels on the basis of IOM/UNDP figures. This allowed the team to develop a lower and upper threshold of 26,000–36,400 combatants, and to calculate a probable average total size of 31,200 combatants (see Table 8.5). The lower threshold for militia force levels is based on IOM/UNDP figures. In order to identify its target beneficiaries, the IOM/UNDP Programme developed estimates of militia force levels based on registration lists compiled by former unit commanders, and on extensive discussions and direct observations during field missions. These estimations reflect for the most part 'true' combatants, or those who received minimal training and were involved in a militia on a long-term basis, but do not necessarily reflect armed irregulars who remain outside formal militia structures.

Because irregular fighters were also provided with weapons, they fall within the scope of this study. An upper threshold for militia force levels has thus been calculated on the assumption that, in addition to 'true' combatants, an additional 40 per cent (on average) were irregulars. Although crude, this measure makes it possible to estimate the numbers of armed ex-combatants in the RoC more realistically.

Table 8.5 Estimates of militia size

Militia group	Lower threshold	Upper threshold	Average
Cobra	11,000	15,400	13,200
Ninja	6,000	8,400	7,200
Cocoye	9,000	12,600	10,800
Total	**26,000**	**36,400**	**31,200**

Estimating average militia holdings

Patterns in the distribution of weapons within militias are a function both of their lack of internal cohesion and of the ways they obtain weapons. Information on militia weapons stocks was not recorded due to the disorganized nature of weapons distribution.

However, the research team's survey of 240 ex-combatants in Brazzaville goes some way to overcoming this lack of data. The survey yields a distribution of weapons holdings broken down by militia and the size of individual holdings. (Not all militias were equally well-armed and weapons distribution within militias was not identical for all three armed groupings, as is discussed below.) To calculate overall possession, researchers first adjusted the average estimated size of each militia for the percentage assumed not to possess weapons (20 per cent). The number of weapons possessed by militia groups was then calculated by multiplying the number of armed combatants by the average ratio of cache size (i.e. 1, 2–5, 6–10, and 11+ weapons) This yields a total estimated figure of 69,000 weapons possessed by ex-combatants at the end of hostilities in 1999.

Adjusting this figure for the percentage lost or destroyed—20 per cent—and the total number collected by the government, CDS, and IOM/UNDP Programme, yields an estimated total of 39,000 weapons in the possession of ex-combatants before the renewed outbreak of hostilities (see Table 8.6).[30]

Table 8.6 The possession approach: Estimated number of weapons possessed by ex-combatants

Militia	Total militia size	Armed combatants	Weapons (1999)	Adjusted with weapons destroyed*	Adjusted with weapons collected*
Cobra	13,200	10,600	26,000	20,500	14,500
Ninja	7,200	5,800	13,000	10,500	8,300
Cocoye	10,800	8,600	30,000	24,000	21,700
Totals	**31,200**	**25,000**	**69,000**	**55,000**	**39,000****

* Figures adjusted.
** Including 5,500 weapons collected by the government that cannot be identified with specific militias.

The results of the estimates of both the possession and the aquisition approach, as well as a figure based on eye-witness accounts, anecdotal information, and structured interviews, are presented in the summary table below (Table 8.7). It shows that, although not identical, all estimates yield comparable figures.

Table 8.7 Total weapons available in RoC, 1999 and 2001

Source	Aquisition average	Possession average	Global average	Anecdotal
Gross total (1999)	74,000	69,000	71,500	87,000
Adjusted with loss/destruction (20%)	59,000	55,000	57,000	69,500
Adjusted with weapons collection (16,000)	43,000	39,000	41,000	53,500
Total available (2001)	**43,000**	**39,000**	**41,000**	**53,500**

DISTRIBUTION OF MILITIA HOLDINGS POST-1999

Weapons available in the RoC are not evenly distributed, but concentrated in particular locales and groups. Geographically, weapons tend to be amassed in or near areas where they were originally looted or distributed—weapons depots, for instance—or where they were last used. Predictably, ex-combatants often left heavier weapons at the 'front', but took lighter weapons home with them. Demographically, an unequal distribution prevails. Some ex-combatants possess few or no weapons, while others possess significant individual caches ranging from two to ten weapons or more.

Weapons are stored in three main types of caches. The first type includes small individual holdings of between one and five weapons, usually wrapped in sacks or cloths and buried in the homes of ex-combatants. The second includes medium-sized individual holdings of between five and ten weapons, usually controlled by former militia unit commanders and established either following the end of the 1999 conflict or in anticipation of a weapons collection operation. Finally, the third type (found exclusively in the Pool region) consists of large collective holdings ranging between 100 and 400 weapons, owned by several militia units or groups and controlled by their commanders. These, in contrast to the others, are typically well-maintained.

In the RoC, weapons are often stored simply wrapped in sacks and buried. Weapons rust rapidly and become unusable.

In the RoC, weapons are often stored simply wrapped in sacks and buried. Weapons rust rapidly and become unusable, particularly during the rainy season. Observation of the weapons collected by the IOM/UNDP Programme suggest that approximately 30–50 per cent do not function properly due to lack of maintenance.

Most weapons currently in the possession of ex-combatants are small arms, machine guns, grenade-launchers, and small mortars. This reflects both the nature of the fighting (close combat in urban settings) and the operational structure of militias.

Box 8.2 Note on methodology (II)

In order to assess the distribution of weapons among ex-combatants, the research team used two methods. First, a large-scale survey-questionnaire (in Brazzaville) and a smaller survey-questionnaire (in the Niari region, to a sample of 35 ex-combatants) were administered. The second technique consisted of a series of semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, and participatory research exercises conducted in both Brazzaville and the regions visited by the research team.

The survey. The large-scale survey on individual weapons holdings was administered to a sample of 240 ex-combatants drawn from all three militias. The questionnaire used in the survey was designed to obtain information on pre-1999 as well as early 2001 weapons holdings, broken down by weapons types and quantities. Respondents were also asked to account for differences between current and previous holdings (i.e. whether they were destroyed, sold, or surrendered) and to identify locations and contents of weapons caches.

Of the 240 ex-combatants surveyed in Brazzaville, 118 were from the Cobra militia, 63 from the Cocoye, and 59 from the Ninja. Ex-combatant facilitators were hired to administer the questionnaires throughout the city. Although the sample was not randomly selected or representative of the total population, the use of a large number of questionnaire administrators with instructions to cover the broadest demographic and geographic area possible ensured a certain degree of randomness and representativeness. Measures to minimize the effects of selection bias were implemented, including: the selection of questionnaire administrators—some of whom had no relation to the IOM/UNDP Programme; careful review of each completed questionnaire; and the administration of a portion of the questionnaire by the research team itself. Moreover, the research team verified the authenticity and reliability of the results by conducting a series of 15 random interviews per questionnaire administrator. A large number of interviews (approximately 60) were disqualified in the early stages of the survey, though the process improved considerably.

Interviews and participatory research. Semi-structured interviews (SSIs), focus group interviews, and participatory research exercises were conducted with a large number of individuals and groups at all research locations. The objective of these exercises was to obtain information on the history of weapons proliferation and acquisition, the organization of the militias, distribution of ex-combatants, current weapons holdings, types of weapons retained, and the current size of caches. Interviewees were also asked to discuss current security conditions.

Moreover, those heavy weapons that did exist, including artillery pieces, large mortars, and heavy cannons, were often destroyed or abandoned by retreating forces. The main types of weapons observed by the research team included a range of communist-bloc systems (predominantly AK-47 assault rifles and SKS rifles, but also RPD/RPK GPMGs, 12.7 and 14.5mm HMGs, and RPG 7 and 18), and a variety of foreign assault rifles, including the Israeli Galil and South African Vector R4/R5.

Militia-specific and geographic distribution patterns

Cobra militia holdings centred in northern Brazzaville

After the conflicts of 1997 and 1998–99, most Cocoye and Ninja ex-combatants fled Brazzaville for the interior. As a result, the vast majority of ex-combatants in Brazzaville are Cobras. Cobra ex-combatants are concentrated in the northern districts of Brazzaville, notably Talangai, Ouenze, and Moungali. Outside of Brazzaville, small numbers of Cobra ex-combatants are located in key urban centres of the northern regions.

In Brazzaville, the uncontrolled looting of weapons in 1997 has resulted in a high concentration of individual weapons possession near or around the military depots in the district of Talangai. Holdings reflect this method of acquisition, with the majority of ex-combatants possessing an average of three weapons each.

In contrast to the Ninja and Cocoye militias, who had a certain degree of organizational coherence and control over weapons stocks, there has been no control over Cobra weapons possession. As a result, there are few collective or medium-sized caches, and the majority of gun owners are youths with no military training or experience. Despite the integration of an estimated 6,500 Cobra ex-combatants into police and military structures, the numbers of weapons suspected of being cached in Brazzaville is extremely high as Cobras tend to maintain their personal caches. On-site inspections of several individual caches reveal that generally they are in very poor condition, buried in nylon sacks.

Finally, and in contrast to the other militias, Cobra ex-combatants experienced little fighting in 1998–99 due to the reliance of the government on the reconstituted FAC and foreign forces. Consequently, there was little weapons turnover or redistribution during this conflict. Most holdings, therefore, are presumed to date from the 1997 conflict. The vast majority (93 per cent) of Cobra caches are located in Brazzaville homes.

There is an uneven distribution of weapons among Cocoye ex-combatants: 14 per cent possess a single weapon, 46 per cent between two and five weapons, and a further 22 per cent own 11 or more weapons.

Cocoye militia and SALW in Bouenza, Lekoumou, and Niari

© IOM/UNDP

Weapons cache from Sibiti.

The ex-combatants that make up the Cocoye live primarily in the regions of Bouenza, Lekoumou, and Niari, and throughout the southern and western districts of Brazzaville. The distribution of weapons among Cocoye ex-combatants is more varied than that of the Cobras due to the relative cohesion of the militias in the 1997 and 1998–99 conflicts. In 1997, the Cocoye were organized as a paramilitary formation dependent on the presidency for weapons and orders, while in 1998–99 its transformation into a typical guerrilla movement imposed a classic cell structure on organization and operations. Survey results, key informant interviews, and inspections of caches reveal that in Bouenza, Lekoumou, and Niari, weapons distribution patterns consist of a variety of cache sizes ranging from small individual to large collective holdings. There is an uneven distribution of weapons among ex-combatants: 14 per cent possess a single weapon, 46 per cent between two and five weapons, and a further 22 per cent own 11 or more weapons. Assault rifles—AK47s, Galils, and Vector R4/R5s—are the most common weapon types, along with RPGs.

Most weapons are stored in poor conditions, in personal residences above ground or wrapped and concealed underground.[32] Based on group interviews and survey data, estimates of the proportion of weapons maintained in group caches range from ten per cent to 30 per cent. Most are located in urban areas that witnessed significant fighting. This corroborates the finding that most weapons remained close to where they were used.

Weapons used by, and collected from, the Cocoye include: Kalashnikov rifles, 12.7mm and 14.5mm HMGs, GPMGs, under-barrel grenade launchers (PM Castors), rocket-propelled grenade launchers, SKS rifles, mortars, portable mortars, grenades, and ammunition (from Mbouti, Dolisie, and the Centre de formation). Moreover, Bulgarian AKS-47s with effaced serial numbers—the typical weapon obtained by Cobra forces in 1997—were apparently taken from ambushed Angolan soldiers in Niari. The larger crew-served weapons, such as 12.7mm and 14.5mm HMGs, are heavy to carry and difficult to hide. Fleeing Cocoye militia would carry one or two individual weapons as a personal insurance policy. These would be subsequently hidden at, or close to, their final destination. Furthermore, according to virtually all Cocoye interviewed, most heavy weapons were 'collected' from the communities through repeated clandestine and frequently unannounced buy-back programmes administered through the CDS, with payments ranging from CFA 25,000 to CFA 500,000 (USD 35.75 and 715) depending on the weapon type. The IOM/UNDP Programme also collected a number of light weapons—though many Cocoye claim to still possess their own personal weapons.

The Ninja militia and its weapons in the region of Pool

Although the Ninja originated as a predominantly urban phenomenon in Brazzaville, their self-proclaimed identity as 'southerners' or 'Lari' drew rural youth of the same affiliation from throughout the region of Pool. The vast majority of Ninja ex-combatants are concentrated in Pool, in particular in villages around key urban centres along the railway line linking Brazzaville and Pointe Noire.

Many of the weapons in the region of Pool originated in Brazzaville and elsewhere. In addition to the weapons looted throughout the entire conflict period, Ninja combatants fleeing Brazzaville in 1997 brought many weapons into the region—although an estimated 20–30 per cent of them were dumped in the river outside Brazzaville. Other weapons were acquired by disarming Cocoye combatants as they too fled Brazzaville at the end of the 1997 conflict.[33] The distribution of these weapons largely follows the pattern of ex-combatant settlement in the region, that is, in locales near the railway lines and outside major towns.

In contrast to the other militias, the Ninja maintained a cohesive organizational structure that survived the 1998 internal rift. This is reflected in the degree of centralized control exerted over weapons. Following the end of the 1998–99 conflict, unit commanders (chefs d'écurie) gathered weapons from their troops and placed them in large caches. According to several sources, the majority of Ninja weapons were cached in this manner, although an estimated 20 per cent of ex-combatants still retain individual holdings.[34] Moreover, an estimated 20 per cent of ex-combatants were issued machetes instead of military weapons because they were deemed unable to handle the latter.[35]

These assertions are based on information on collective caches obtained during a visit to the Pool region. Thirteen caches were identified in the vicinity of Kinkala and Mindouli, accounting for 2,308 weapons. The size of the caches ranged from 40 to 400 weapons, with an average of 178. Most caches identified consist primarily of assault rifles—Kalashnikovs and South African Vectors—grenades, RPGs, and heavy machine guns (12.7mm). The assertion that not all Ninja combatants deposited weapons in collective caches is based on key-informant interviews and the survey data from Brazzaville, which reveals that a number of ex-combatants either have been disarmed or possess at least a single weapon.[36]

Sixty-eight per cent of the Ninja combatants surveyed for this study possessed caches of one weapon only, and 29 per cent possessed individual caches of between two and five weapons. In addition, IOM/UNDP beneficiary data reveals that nearly 50 per cent of Ninjas who entered the project were reintegrated without surrendering their weapons.

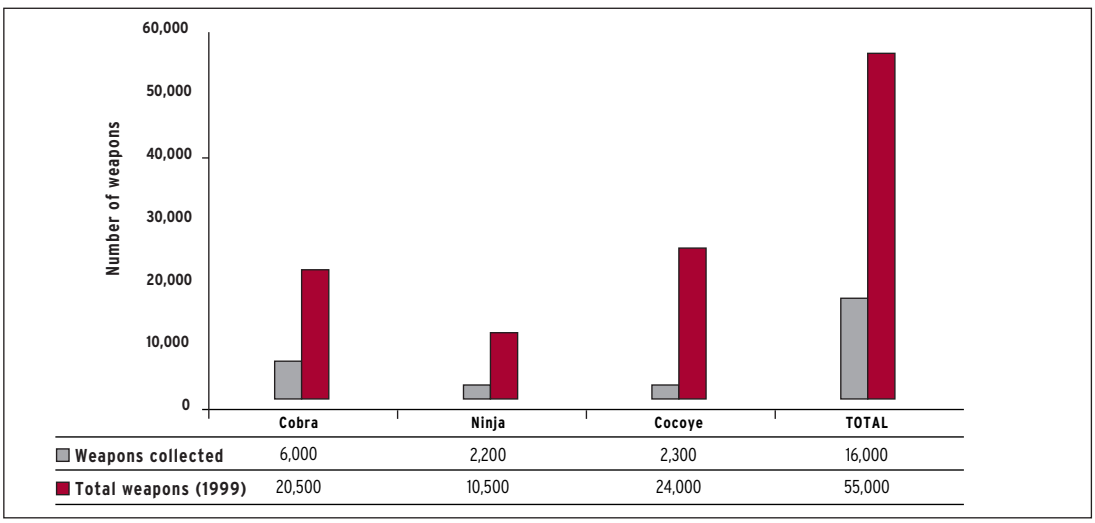
The research team was unable to ascertain whether the pattern of weapons distribution among the Ninja in Kinkala and Mindouli is similar or identical to that of the Ntoumi faction. However, one unit commander admitted that, although a certain amount of weapons were collected and given to Ntoumi—who subsequently surrendered a portion to the government—many ex-combatants retained individual weapons for self-defence.[37] Hence it is possible to infer that the Ntoumi faction in all likelihood possesses a small number of large collective caches and that individually held weapons are widely distributed.

RESULTS OF WEAPONS COLLECTION PROGRAMMES

Between 1999 and 2001, the CDS, the Ministries of Interior and Defence, and the IOM/UNDP Programme attempted to collect weapons throughout the country, mainly through cash buy-backs. Phase I of the IOM/UNDP Programme successfully reintegrated 7,300 ex-combatants (for a total of 2,300 micro-projects), and collected 2,800 small arms and light weapons and 8,000 grenades and other explosives (IOM/UNDP, 2001b). The collection is the equivalent of five per cent of the (pre-2000) total number of weapons circulating in society. The weapons collected were destroyed.

The government also collected approximately 6,500 weapons, and the CDS another 7,000 weapons. On the assumption that the weapons collected by the CDS in 1999–2000 have not been re-circulated, these, in contrast to the IOM/UNDP weapons collected, were not destroyed. The combined quantity of small arms taken out of ex-combatants' hands since 1999 amounts to 28 per cent of all weapons in circulation (i.e. 16,000 weapons). Figure 8.1 shows the weapons availability and collection results, broken down by militia. The survey with ex-combatants shows that, interestingly, those ex-combatants who did dispose of their weapons (by throwing them away, selling them, or giving them up) for the most part retained approximately half of their original stocks. This indicates that even those ex-combatants who disposed of weapons were not fully disarmed.

Figure 8.1 Weapons availability and collection by militia



	Cobra	Ninja	Cocoye	TOTAL
Weapons collected	6,000	2,200	2,300	16,000
Total weapons (1999)	20,500	10,500	24,000	55,000

Source: Demetriou (2002)

SMALL ARMS PROLIFERATION AND TRADE IN THE REPUBLIC OF CONGO

The situation of the RoC—glutted with weapons, surrounded by socially and politically unstable countries, where state structures and surveillance infrastructure are poor or non-existent, and corruption is endemic—would imply a thriving weapons market and large weapons movements in the region. The reality, however, is quite different.

Extensive interviews with ex-combatants, former unit commanders, local authorities, diplomatic sources, and arms dealers based in the United Kingdom reveal that only a very small-scale covert trade exists, between the RoC and the DRC in particular. The domestic market for weapons is driven by two sources of demand: an embryonic barter trade for arms between ex-combatants and civilians, and poaching among residents bordering wildlife reserves. Although an assessment of the magnitude or volume of weapons sold in these different ways requires further in-depth study, information received indicates that such trade is not significant in comparison with the total quantities of weapons believed to be in circulation.

The domestic market for weapons is driven by two sources of demand: an embryonic (bartering) market for weapons involving ex-combatants and civilians, and people needing small arms for poaching.

Box 8.3 What's in a price?

The absence of a weapons market prior to the conflicts of the 1990s raises the question of how current prices are determined in the RoC. In a normal market, a 'clearing price' occurs at the intersection of supply and demand. This, however, depends on the availability and easy transmission of market information, which does not exist in the RoC due to the secrecy and lack of organization surrounding the weapons trade. From this it can be inferred that current prices are a legacy of the weapons buy-back price of 2000—established by the Congolese government—that set a (very low) baseline for the market value of weapons. This stands in sharp contrast to other contexts, such as Mozambique or Afghanistan, where low prices are a function of a market clearing in a context of near-perfect information (such as an arms bazaar). The prices in the RoC generally indicate a distorted market that is not structured to ensure that supply and demand are satisfied. The only exceptions are Brazzaville, Cabinda, and possibly Impfondo, where higher prices indicate an increasing gradient due to the proximity of the sources of demand and supply.

Table 8.8 Estimated market values of weapons in the region, July–August 2001

Type	Price (USD)	Local price (CFA)
Weapons buy-back price (government)	20-30	15,000-25,000
Street price in Brazzaville (RoC)	40-67	30,000-50,000
Street price in Sibiti (RoC)	13-27	10,000-20,000
Street price in Dolisie (RoC)	27-33	20,000-25,000
Street price in Cabinda (Angola)	13-20	10,000-15,000
Street price in Kinshasa (DRC)	200	150,000

Cross-border trade in weapons

The Congo River forms a permeable boundary between the RoC and the DRC, facilitating the transport of goods and people and serving as a vital economic artery. In the DRC, fighting between rebel groups and the government in Kinshasa has been raging since 1997, generating a constant need for weaponry and ammunition. To service this demand, traders and dealers from the DRC cross the Congo River and buy weapons in the RoC. According to numerous recorded and eyewitness accounts, most weapons are purchased in Brazzaville, Impfondo, and at several key locations along the river, including Makotiboko and Bolobo, in the region of Plateaux. These weapons are generally destined for the rebel group led by Bemba in north-west Congo, and unknown elements in Brazzaville.

Information received indicates that, in Brazzaville at least, this trade is not conducted on a large and organized scale. Rather, individuals crossing over by pirogue purchase small numbers of weapons that are subsequently distributed within the interior or sold in Kinshasa for USD 200 each: four times the price in Brazzaville. These individuals are allegedly part of a larger network operating throughout the city and its environs. Relatively few weapons are sold in this manner because a joint patrol force is deployed along the Congo River and strict security measures are implemented in Kinshasa. These could be deterring a larger trade from developing.

Along the river and in Impfondo, the situation is apparently quite different. Most of the road between Brazzaville and Owando is tarred, providing a pipeline for domestically traded weapons. Weapons from Brazzaville and its environs—for example, Mossaka, where large quantities were stocked as a rear base for Sassou in Oyo—are also sold at key riverbank locations to DRC dealers. Sources claim that Impfondo is a major trade hub for weapons, given how close it is to Bemba's forces and the nature and wildlife reserve of Lac Télé. Many weapons have reportedly been stocked throughout the region of Likouala, and a considerable number of DRC combatants allegedly cross over to purchase weapons, as individuals or in groups.[38]

The assessment of cross-border trade in weapons reveals a pattern of small-time weapons dealers whose activities are not organized, nor are they parts of larger networks.

In addition to the DRC, weapons are also being sold across the border in Gabon, Chad, and the Cabinda enclave of Angola. The Gabon trade has a history, as ex-combatants were reportedly selling weapons there between 1997 and 1999. This trade was, and reportedly still is, conducted from locations in the regions of Niari and Lekoumou, although the principal purchasers are poachers on both sides of the border.[39] This led to soured relations and eventual intervention from the Gabonese authorities.

Another key transit point is the border between the RoC and the Cabinda enclave of Angola. This is an open border with free-flowing trade and traffic in both directions. On-site visits revealed a thriving market in light weapons in the area. According to dealers encountered, the price for a Kalashnikov assault rifle throughout the region lies in the range of USD 13–20 (CFA 10,000–15,000), depending on the quantity purchased.

A close inspection of this cross-border trade in weapons reveals a pattern of small-time weapons dealers whose activities are neither organized, nor part of a larger network. This is partly due to the dynamics of weapons procurement in the region. In the DRC, rebel movements are probably similar to the militias in the RoC, in that weapons procurement depends on the initiative and resources of individual units or group commanders. In Angola, the long history of warfare has resulted in semi-professional standing armies with established large-scale procurement strategies and little need to engage in petty trade. Finally, the dispersed distribution of weapons throughout the RoC, combined with the prevalence of individual ownership and small caches, renders bulk trading impracticable and logistically tricky.

Internal weapons trade

One of the unintended consequences of the IOM/UNDP reintegration and weapons collection project—as indeed of all voluntary weapons exchange programmes—is the generation of demand for weapons. Although the IOM/UNDP Programme is not a weapons buy-back scheme, by linking reintegration assistance with weapons collection, the programme provides an incentive for individuals to acquire weapons in order to qualify for the project. Interviews with ex-combatants in Brazzaville and other regions revealed that a considerable redistribution of weapons takes place among ex-combatants.[40] Although this redistribution is normally non-monetary, as former unit commanders loan or requisition weapons, evidence indicates that weapons are also sold, usually at the street price.[41] A related phenomenon is the sale of weapons by foreign forces deployed in the RoC for the same purpose.[43] The net result of this activity is not only the redistribution of weapons among ex-combatants,[44] including the consolidation of large caches, but also a steady migration of ex-combatants to project sites.[45]

Although the IOM/UNDP Programme is not a weapons buy-back scheme, it provides an incentive for individuals to acquire weapons in order to qualify for the project.

In both rural and urban areas, ex-combatants are selling weapons to alleviate financial burdens and support their families. There is a strong market for military weapons destined for poaching in the wildlife reserves throughout Congo. Evidence collected in Brazzaville, Lekoumou, and Likouala regions reveals that poaching is widespread and profitable, as weapons are cheap—particularly outside Brazzaville—and poachers operate with relative impunity.[46] Cobra ex-combatants reportedly trade weapons mainly in Impfondo and Brazzaville, where they are transported by either pirogues or overland to the reserves.[47] The inhabitants of the villages surrounding the reserve of Lac Télé, for instance, stock considerable amounts of weapons purchased in Impfondo. During a household sweep in one of these villages of 2,000 inhabitants, police confiscated 30 assault rifles in one night alone.[48] The trade in weapons for poaching is therefore not inconsequential, and might even surpass the trade connected with the IOM/UNDP Programme.

The trade in military weapons for poaching activities represents two threats to security and stability in the RoC. Firstly, trade encourages the development of an illegal market for big game or 'bush' meat. Secondly, trade in poaching weapons indicates that weapons owned by ex-combatants are being (re)sold to civilians. This leakage is symptomatic of a trend toward criminality.

The small-scale and individually-organized nature of the internal weapons trade, like the cross-border trade, suggests that a relatively small quantity of weapons is being transferred or redistributed within the country. The poor condition of roads in the interior, together with a relatively strict control on movement, makes the transportation of significant quantities of weapons—50 or more—extremely difficult. This would imply that both the internal and the cross-border trade in weapons in Congo may amount to no more than several hundred weapons a year. It is clear that weapons circulation is more an internal than external phenomenon.

Box 8.4 The commodity value of weapons

To what extent are ex-combatants' military weapons a commodity like any other in Congo? The existence of a demand for weapons both internally and externally, and the ready supply to match it, has created a market for weapons, albeit one that is organized and structured at the individual level. In this sense, military weapons are a commodity. However, there is also a psychological aspect—the degree to which weapons are viewed as objects that can be bought or sold on a market—which affects supply.

One possible reason why the trade in weapons is not as large as one might expect is that many ex-combatants do not believe their weapons have an intrinsic economic value. In Congo, weapons were distributed freely, bearing no economic label or price. A weapon transformed its owner into a warrior. Weapons thus possessed a social value, not a financial one.

After the war ended, weapons had social value, as instruments of self-defence or as private badges of resistance. Although the government's buy-back resulted in commodifying weapons partly, a low level of economic activity then and now indicates that no widespread psychological shift has occurred among most ex-combatants. This could explain the low level of the weapons trade, and, more importantly, make it possible to collect weapons without further commodifying them.

CONCLUSION

By international standards, the estimated 41,000 weapons in the hands of ex-combatants in the RoC represent a relatively small stockpile. In Albania more than 650,000 weapons were released into society in the mid-1990s. Estimates suggest that 500,000–1 million weapons are in circulation in Mozambique (Small Arms Survey, 2001, p. 64) and a similar quantity in Cambodia. However, as the renewed fighting underway since March 2002 shows, weapons in circulation are still used to wreak havoc.

Despite the combined efforts of the RoC government and the IOM/UNDP Programme to collect weapons, this case study shows that approximately 72 per cent of the 1999 militia weapons holdings remained in circulation when the fighting restarted in 2002. The case of the Republic of Congo highlights one of the central conundrums of weapons collection programmes: Would more far-reaching weapons collection programmes have led to peace? Could programmes have increased confidence in the peace process by removing weapons from society and creating trust between participants as they took part? This case alone does not provide clear answers, but it does point towards better future policy-making in this important area.

The case of the RoC highlights the question: Would more far-reaching weapons collection programmes have led to peace?

8. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CDS	Comité de suivi (Follow-up Committee)
CFA	Central African Franc
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FAC	Forces armées du Congo
FAZ	Forces armées du Zaïre
FDP	Forces démocratiques et patriotiques
GPMG	General purpose machine gun
HMG	Heavy machine gun
IOM	International Organization for Migration
PCT	Parti congolais du travail
PMAK	Pistolet-miltrailleuse Kalashnikov (used to designate all AK models)
PSP	Poste de securité publique
RoC	Republic of Congo
RPG	Rocket-propelled grenade launcher
SSI	Semi-structured interview
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNITA	Uniâo Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola
UPADS	Union panafricaine pour la démocratie sociale
URD	Union pour le renouveau démocratique
ZDI	Zimbabwean Defence Industries

8. ENDNOTES

1. Phase II of the project had difficulties in getting funding and ended abruptly in December 2002.
2. See *Africa Research Bulletin*, Vol. 39, No. 6 2002, pp. 14891–14892; Vol. 39, No.8, 2002, p. 14960; *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 43, No. 17, pp. 5–6.
3. Unless otherwise stated, all figures for SALW include firearms ranging from pistols to heavy machine guns (14.5 calibre).
4. Selection bias took the form of a tendency by survey administrators—ex-combatants themselves—to select respondents who were known to possess weapons. Weights were applied in the form of a redistribution oriented towards smaller individual stockpiles in order to obtain a more accurate picture of weapons distribution.
5. In order to verify the accuracy of the projections of weapons in government holdings and those procured from abroad, further information was gathered from ex-combatants, unit commanders, current and former military officers, and on-site inspections. This information (included in Demetriou, Muggah, and Biddle 2002, Annex 4) yields a 'soft' figure of 87,000 weapons obtained by all militias, adjusted for weapons 'recycled' between conflicts.
6. For a selective list of weapons depots identified by the research team, see Demetriou, Muggah, and Biddle (2002, Annex 3).
7. On-site inspection of military depot and conversations with officers in Pointe Noire, August 2001.
8. This inference was corroborated by a high-ranking FAC officer (interview in Brazzaville, 11 September 2001). According to him, almost all weapons depots were looted, and the vast majority of weapons 'disappeared into the forests'.
9. For a detailed list of all identified weapons looted from government depots, see Demetriou, Muggah, and Biddle (2002, Annex 4).
10. Interview with Cocoye former unit commander, Brazzaville, 17 July 2001.
11. Information on arms procurement by the Ninjas obtained by a former head of logistics for the Ninja militia.

[12] Interview with a FAC Officer and former Cobra unit commander, Brazzaville, 26 July 2001, and a high-ranking FAC colonel and former Information Officer for the Cobras, Brazzaville, 25 August 2001.

[13] According to one officer, approximately 150 weapons were stocked in officers' houses for their eventual distribution. Approximately half the weapons in these caches were army weapons, while the rest were acquired externally. Interview with FAC officer, Brazzaville, 26 July 2001.

[14] Interviews with former Cobra unit commanders, as well as Cobra ex-combatants who were directly involved in the capture of the Talangai military depots, Brazzaville, July 2001.

[15] Interviews with Ninja and Cocoye unit commanders and ex-combatants, August 2001.

[16] Lissouba agreed to 'host' or 'retain' UNITA weapons from Angola following the signing of the Lusaka Accords in 1994, and progressively 'feed' them back. According to several informants, Lissouba retained a portion of these weapons as a price for their storage. Information received from a former high-ranking Ninja unit commander. See also Small Arms Survey (2001, p. 119).

[17] Interview with a Ninja unit commander and former Ninja Regional Commissaire for the Pool region, 18 July 2001.

[18] Interview with former Ninja commander in charge of forces between Kinkala and Brazzaville, and the series of roadblocks at which Cocoye forces were disarmed, Brazzaville, 24 July 2001.

[19] Interviews with Cocoye unit commanders and ex-combatants, Brazzaville, Dolisie, and Nkayi, July–August 2001.

[20] Information from former Cocoye commander in charge of weapons procurement and logistics, received 23 August 2001; interview with former Cocoye commander and deputy officer in charge of the Loudima training camp, Brazzaville, 26 July 2001. See also *The Jerusalem Post*, 10 October 1994, and *The Saudi Gazette*, 24 February 1994. These weapons were purchased to equip Lissouba's 'Reserve Ministeriélle' recruits in Aubeville and Loudima (approximately 1,500 men).

[21] Documents seized in Lissouba's residence in 1997 reveal that Rudolph Wollenhaupt, formerly with Pretoria-based 'Ebar Management and Trading', with the assistance of Jacques Monsieur, brokered 12 shipments between June and September 1997 totalling USD 61.43 million. According to end-user certificates (reproduced in the Republic of Congo, 1999, pp. 763–8), these shipments included a minimum of 12,000 AK-47s (10,000 with under-barrel grenade launchers), 550 RPG-7s, and 1,000 FM pistols. See also *The Observer*, 28 November 1999, and *Liberation*, 11 June 2001.

[22] Official records of the Republic of South Africa indicate that a USD 1.7 million transaction took place between South Africa and the Congolese government in 1997. Assuming an average unit price of USD 300 per Vector R4/R5—an assault rifle based on the Israeli Galil sighted by the research team—an estimated 5,300 (R4/R5) weapons could have been in the shipment. Due to the absence of any indication of the contents of the shipment, these quantities are an approximate order of magnitude. By using similar methods, the total quantity of weapons transferred in the 1997 deal—small arms constituted approximately USD 3.2 million out of a deal valued at USD 14 million—is estimated to be 10,600 R4/R5s. See *Mail and Guardian*, 15 August 1997, and Agence France Presse, 15 August 1997.

[23] Information and evidence provided by a field researcher for the Small Arms Survey. These include interview transcripts with the pilot of the aircraft transporting weapons from China to Harare, Zimbabwe, where they were subsequently transferred to Pointe Noire. Although the precise quantities of weapons received from China are not known, estimates can be derived from the cargo capacity of the aircraft used—Ilyushin 76, with a maximum payload of 46 metric tonnes—and the 2:1 ratio of arms to ammunition flights commonly used in weapons shipments. Adjusting for other items in the cargo, such as uniforms and supporting equipment, yields an approximate total of 10,000 weapons. Other unverified reports indicate that weapons were also flown in to Pointe Noire from Slovakia and Turkmenistan.

[24] Interview with the commander of the Point Noire General staff, Pointe Noire, 4 August 2001.

[25] Interview with a former Cocoye commander, Brazzaville, 25 July 2001; information received from the former Cocoye commander of the Dolisie military sector, 10 August 2001.

[26] Interview with the commander of the Point Noire General staff, Pointe Noire, 4 August 2001, and the former Ninja commander and commanding officer of the Makala military camp, Brazzaville, 24 July 2001.

[27] During this period, the RoC was a major sanctions-busting hub for an estimated 450 metric tonnes of UNITA weapons, which were transported from Bulgaria to UNITA-held territories via then Zaire and Pointe Noire in the RoC. See Human Rights Watch (1999), Vines (1999), and United Nations Security Council (2000).

[28] Information provided by a former Cobra commander, Brazzaville, 24 August 2001, and a former FAC officer and Cobra unit commander, Brazzaville, 26 July 2001, corroborated by interviews with Cobra ex-combatants, Brazzaville, July 2001. These weapons, Bulgarian-manufactured AKS-47s, are easily distinguishable by their black plastic pistol and barrel grips, and the fact that serial numbers have been effaced from most weapons.

[29] Information provided by a former Cobra commander, Brazzaville, 24 August 2001, and a former Cobra unit commander, Brazzaville, 4 July 2001, corroborated by interviews with Cobra ex-combatants, Brazzaville, July 2001. Although no precise figures are available for the number of small arms delivered to pro-Sassou forces, anecdotal estimates of 3,000–6,000 weapons make it clear that large numbers were involved, allowing a conservative estimate of probable quantities to be made.

[30] A full description of the calculations for these and lower and upper threshold figures can be found in Demetriou, Muggah, and Biddle (2002, Annex 6).

[31] See Demetriou, Muggah, and Biddle (2002, Annex 2) for details of the questionnaire.

[32] For example, photographic evidence of a 'factional cache' in Sibiti, revealed under the condition of anonymity, yielded two G-3s (Iranian or German made), a Chinese SGM (7.62mm), an Israeli Galil (5.56mm), 1 PM noire, 1 PMAK (7.62mm), two RPG-7s, three rockets, two 'green boxes' (ammunition), flares, and grenades (see photo insert in Demetriou, Muggah, and Biddle (2002)).

[33] One Ninja unit commander claimed to have disarmed 20–30 per cent of retreating Cocoye combatants at the Djoué Bridge outside Brazzaville. Interview with former Ninja unit commander, Brazzaville, 24 July 2001.

[34] Interview with the commander of the Kinkala military zone, Kinkala, 31 July 2001.

[35] Interviews with Ninja ex-combatants, Kinkala, 2 August 2001.

[36] Interviews with Ninja ex-combatants, Brazzaville, 11 September 2001.

[37] Interview with Ninja unit commander, Mayama, 14 and 15 August 2001.

[38] Interview with former mediator in the 1999 peace negotiations; interviews with Cobra ex-combatants, Brazzaville, August 2001.

[39] Interview with the Sub-Prefect of Sibiti, Lekoumou Region, 8 August 2001; interviews with Cocoye ex-combatants in the Niari region, 26–27 July 2001.

[40] Interview with former Cobra unit commanders, Brazzaville, 14 and 26 July 2001.

[41] Numerous examples of such trade were cited in discussions with ex-combatants in Brazzaville. These discussions also revealed that this trade transcends divisions between militias; several of the cases heard were of Ninja ex-combatants purchasing weapons from Cobra ex-combatants in the northern districts of Brazzaville.

[42] One former FAZ soldier interviewed for this study showed the research team two AK-74s he intended to either sell or present to the IOM/UNDP Programme for reintegration benefits (interview with ex-FAZ soldiers, Brazzaville, 12 and 14 July, 2001).

[43] Such redistribution is at its most intense in the northern districts of Brazzaville—notably Talangai and Ouenze—where the majority of Cobra ex-combatant weapons are located.

[44] This was particularly evident in sites outside Brazzaville. Interviews with local authorities in Sibiti, Lekoumou region, Pointe Noire, and Nkayi, Bouenza region, August 2001.

[45] Interview with the Sub-Prefect of Sibiti, Lekoumou region, 7 August 2001.
[46] Interviews with ex-combatants and former unit commanders, Brazzaville, July–August 2001.
[47] Conversation with John Poulsen, Projet de la Réserve du Lac Télé, Wildlife Conservation Society, Brazzaville, 16 August 2001.

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