



Declassified Under Authority of the Interagency Security Classification Appeals Panel, E.O. 13526, sec. 5.3(b)(3) ISCAP Appeal No. 2017-189, document 22 Declassification Date: May 2, 2022

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Policy Support Memorandum

Office of Transnational Issues

19 October 1999

Arms Dealers Fueling African Conflicts (U)

Arms deliveries to sub-Saharan Africa have nearly tripled in the last five years, boosted by exports from more than 35 countries. The technology level of the weapons delivered to the continent has risen as African states and insurgent groups have taken advantage of a global arms market characterized by excess supply and a shortage of customers. (U)

African governments have absorbed nearly \$3 billion of military equipment during this time frame. Russia, China, and Bulgaria have been the key suppliers, with Ukraine and other former Soviet bloc countries following closely behind:

- Since 1995, Russia has provided over \$550 million in weapons—including fighter and ground attack aircraft, attack and transport helicopters, artillery, tanks, antitank missiles, and munitions as well as training. Some of the sales were first-time exports of advanced systems—including Su-27 and MiG-29 fighters—to Africa.
- China, one of Africa's traditional arms suppliers, supplied an estimated \$500 million since 1995 in mostly small arms and ammunition but also has exported radar, armored personnel carriers, and transport aircraft to the continent.
- Bulgaria, during the same time period, delivered more than \$315 million of military weapons to Africa consisting primarily of munitions, but also including tanks, artillery, and antitank as well as surface-to-air missiles. (U)

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Arms sales to UN-embargoed countries and factions—such as Liberia, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone, and various Somali factions—also continue apace, 1.4(c) 1.4(c) 4(c) 1.4(c) 1.4(c) 1.4(c) In many cases, it is unclear whether foreign weapon suppliers are aware of the final destination of their arms shipments, as gray market arms dealers falsify paperwork to obscure the true recipients. For example:

- In March 1999, a Ukrainian AN-124 aircraft delivered a shipment of infantry weapons and ammunition from Kiev's state-owned arms trade firm Ukrspetsexport to Burkina Faso. The commander of the West African peacekeeping force in Sierra Leone (ECOMOG) has alleged that the arms were transported to Liberia for provision to RUF rebels in Sierra Leone—in contravention of two UN embargoes. In response to diplomatic protests, the Ukrainian Government produced an end-user certificate from the Ministry of Defense of Burkina Faso, suggesting the complicity of Burkina Faso Government officials in facilitating arms shipments to its embargoed neighbors. CIA Statut

The financing of arms sales in the region also requires outside support. Both national governments and sub-national groups use international contacts to raise funds for arms purchases. Africa's rich natural resources—particularly diamonds, which are easy to transport and difficult to trace—are one key to attracting foreign interest.

- Both the government of Sierra Leone and the RUF rebels—using Belgian, Israeli, South African, and Thai contacts—exploited diamond resources to finance military support.
- UNITA has used its access to Angola's diamond reserves as its main source of funding for arms purchases during its conflict with government forces. The diamond industry estimates UNITA revenues dropped sharply after the loss of its mines in northern and north-eastern Angola in late 1997. CIA Statut

Foreign nationals increasingly have facilitated the transport of arms to and within Africa. For example, UNITA has contracted with Victor Butt—the head of the UAE-based AirCess family of airlines—to transport weapons and other goods to their military forces since at least early 1998. CIA Statut

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Several efforts are underway to limit weapons deliveries to the region, including the regionally initiated Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) conventional arms moratorium. The moratorium, signed by 16 countries in October 1998, calls for a three-year (renewable) ban on the manufacture, import, and export of light weapons. A ban on arms transfers to conflict areas and efforts to control diamond smuggling are unlikely to succeed unless African governments develop the political will, legislation, and regulatory infrastructure required to address the problem.

- The government of Togo—while serving as host to the UN's regional disarmament center—has provided false end-user certificates to facilitate arms shipments to UNITA, according to press reporting.
- In March 1999, government officials in Burkina Faso—an ECOWAS member and moratorium signatory—appear to have facilitated the Ukrainian arms shipment of light weapons to UN embargoed-Liberia through provision of an end user certificate and allowing transshipment of the weapons. CIA Statute

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