

Soldiers guard captured arms, said to be the largest seizure of drug-cartel weapons in the country, Reynosa, Mexico, November 2008. © Gregory Bull/AP Photo

Captured and Counted

ILLICIT WEAPONS IN MEXICO AND THE PH

INTRODUCTION

The sprawling collection of weaponry seized in the border town of Reynosa, Mexico, could easily have been mistaken for the arsenal of a well-equipped infantry battalion: hundreds of assault rifles, sub-machine guns, pistols, grenades, and grenade launchers arranged in eight rows that ran the entire length of the Mexican Army's spacious press room (AP, 2008). The massive cache, discovered during the pursuit of a high-ranking drug cartel member in November 2008, is illustrative of Mexico's thriving black market in small arms and light weapons, which is dominated by the country's powerful and well-financed drug-trafficking organizations (DTOs). Fuelled by billions of dollars in drug revenue each year, the cartels are among the best-funded non-state armed groups in the world.

There is little disagreement that the arsenals built with these funds are vast, but their precise composition and the sources of their contents are subjects of much debate. Do the DTOs have the wealth and armies of nations, as some claim? Does their wealth afford them access to weapons that are unavailable to armed groups of lesser means? Are there notable differences between the weapons acquired by the profit-motivated Mexican DTOs and those obtained by groups that have ideological or political ambitions and operate in other countries? This chapter attempts to answer these and other questions through data-driven analysis of illicit small arms and light weapons in countries affected by low-intensity armed conflict and high-intensity organized criminal violence.

The chapter is the second instalment of the Small Arms Survey's multi-year study on illicit small arms and light weapons. The purpose of the study, launched in 2012, is to improve public understanding of illicit small arms and light weapons through the compilation and analysis of hitherto unused or under-utilized data from official (government) sources. During the first phase of the study, reported in the Small Arms Survey 2012, the Survey analysed data on illicit small arms, light weapons, and rounds of light weapons ammunition in three high-intensity armed conflict zones: Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia.

The focus of the current phase is on illicit weapons in countries affected by high-intensity organized criminal violence and low-intensity armed conflict. To this end, the Survey collected data on illicit weapons seized in Mexico, which

- € Despite their vast wealth, armed groups in Mexico do not possess the full array of light weapons available to governments and some state-sponsored armed groups.
- € The data suggests that some firearms identified as •weapons of choice• of drug traffickers in Mexico are not as widespread as commonly assumed. These include .50-calibre rifles and 5.7 mm x 28 mm pistols, which combined account for fewer than 1 per cent of all seized firearms studied.
- € The data provides little clarity on the proximate sources, age, condition, and intrastate and international movements of illicit weapons. More data on these aspects would significantly improve public understanding of black market weapons in Mexico and the Philippines.

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this chapter, •illicit small arms and light weapons• are defined as weapons that are produced, transferred, held, or used in violation of national or international law. The chapter uses the term •illicit• rather than •illegal• to include cases of unclear or contested legality. The term •small arms• (alternatively, •firearms•) refers to the following items:

- € revolvers and self-loading pistols;
- € rifles⁴ and carbines;
- € shotguns;
- € sub-machine guns;
- € light and heavy machine guns; and
- € accessories and ammunition for small arms.

The term •light weapons• refers to:

- € mortar systems of calibres of 120 mm or less;
- € hand-held, under-barrel, and automatic grenade launchers;
- € hand grenades;
- € recoilless guns;
- € portable rocket launchers, including rockets fired from single-shot, disposable launch tubes;
- € portable missiles and launchers, namely anti-tank guided weapons (ATGWs) and man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS);
- € landmines;
- € improvised explosive devices (IEDs); and
- € accessories and ammunition for light weapons.

These definitions are consistent with the Small Arms Survey's practices and with usage of these terms during the first phase of the illicit weapons project.⁵ Thus, unless otherwise specified, data compiled and analysed in this chapter includes illicit small arms, light weapons, and ammunition.⁵ The term •Kalashnikov-pattern rifles• is used to refer to the numerous models of automatic and semi-automatic rifles that are manufactured in different countries but that are

€ Data on weapons seized in the Philippines. This dataset was compiled from online summaries of seizures published by the Philippine Information Agency, the Armed Forces of the Philippines, and the Philippine Army, Air Force, and National Police. The summaries include data on approximately 1,000 small arms, light weapons, and rounds of light weapons ammunition, along with more than 100,000 rounds of small-calibre ammunition.

To supplement these datasets, the Survey obtained aggregate data from the Government of Mexico, along with similar data published by the US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). Additional sources of data and information include interviews with Mexican, Philippine, and US government officials, and reports by researchers from the United Nations, governments, and private institutions.

ILLICIT SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS IN MEXICO

Drug trafficking has affected Mexico for decades, but the violence associated with this trade has metastasized into a large-scale national security crisis in recent years. Many of the organizations that control this trade have thousands of members and exercise influence over large swaths of territory. The Sinaloa •Federation• is among the largest drug-trafficking entities in the world. It controls the western half of Mexico's drug markets and routes. On the Caribbean coast resides its enemy-turned-ally, the Gulf Cartel, which competes for influence with the third major DTO, Los Zetas. Founded by former members of the military, Los Zetas is known for paramilitary tactics, bold engagements with government forces, and brutality.

The DTOs use illicit small arms and light weapons in pursuit of several organizational objectives. At the tactical level, illicit weapons are used to protect drug shipments, drug traffickers, and revenue generated through narcotics sales, which is often transported back to Mexico as large bundles of currency. At the strategic level, drug traffickers use small arms and light weapons to seize and maintain control over drug supply routes and to defend themselves, while also intimidating and weakening rival cartels and Mexican security forces. At the grand strategic level, cartels use illicit weapons to create a climate of fear and intimidation that is conducive to drug trafficking and greater accumulation of power (Bouchard, 2011, p. 3).

Data on the seizures studied reveals that the vast majority of the weapons seized in Mexico were firearms, which account for approximately 80 per cent of the weapons

Table 10 Illicit weapons recovered by the Mexican

Weapon category	Quantity	Percentage of total
Firearms*	4,200	80%
Grenades and grenade launchers**	985	19%
Rockets	16	<1%
Mortar systems and rounds	10	<1%
RPG launchers and rounds	7	<1%
Improvised explosive devices	2	<1%
Landmines	0	0%
Recoilless rifles and rounds	0	0%
Portable missiles (MANPADS and ATGWs)	0	0%
Total	5,220	100%

studied. Grenades and grenade launchers were the second most frequently seized items, accounting for approximately 19 per cent of recovered weapons. Rockets, mortars, and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) were also seized, but in much smaller quantities. Table 12.1 summarizes the items seized by category.

Small arms

Illicit small arms in Mexico range from bolt-action hunting rifles to heavy machine guns. The most visually striking are the ornate assault rifles and pistols seized from cartel leaders, which are often gold- or silver-plated and feature elaborate engravings of cartel insignias. Valued at up to USD 30,000 each (García, 2010), these weapons are symbols of the excess, in violence, cash, and power, associated with the illicit drug trade in the Americas.

The surreptitious and opaque nature of arms trafficking to and within Mexico precludes a definitive accounting of illicit firearms. However, data on seized and trafficked weapons provides a sense of the size and composition of Mexico's black market, including the weapons acquired and used by drug-trafficking organizations.

Data provided by the Government of Mexico indicates that authorities recovered more than 306,000 illicit firearms and 26 million rounds of ammunition in Mexico from late 1994 to mid-2012. These figures include seizures by the military and police forces, and weapons voluntarily surrendered as part of an amnesty programme sponsored by SEDENA. Seizures account for most of the recovered weapons (see Table 12.2).

While the percentage of illicit firearms and ammunition in Mexico reflected in this data is unclear, other metrics, including estimated trafficking from the United States, suggests that only a small fraction of illicit weapons are recovered



Gold-plated, diamond-encrusted weapons, confiscated by the army during counter-drug operations, Zapopan, Mexico, May 2010

Category		Quantity
Firearms	Seized by military	

each year. In 2009, William Hoover, then assistant director for field operations at ATF, estimated that the number of firearms illicitly transported into Mexico across the US border on a daily basis was “probably in the hundreds” (USDOJ, 2009). Based on this claim, which is significantly more conservative than other estimates,¹⁰ the illicit trade in firearms is likely to be at least 100...200 units per day, or 35,000...70,000 units each year. Given that the United States is not the only source of illicit weapons in Mexico, the total number of trafficked firearms is likely to be higher, although ambiguities in available data preclude a precise estimate. Regardless, the data suggests that the 20,000 to 30,000 weapons

seized annually in recent years represent only a fraction of illicit weapons in Mexico, and that firearms trafficked into Mexico from abroad equal or exceed the number of weapons seized by Mexican authorities each year.

Types and models of illicit small arms

According to US and Mexican officials, Mexican DTOs have sought various types of firearms over the past ten years. Whereas .38-calibre handguns were the “weapon of choice” for the cartels in the late 1990s, “they now have developed a preference for higher quality, more powerful weapons, such as .223 and 7.62 × 39 mm caliber rifles, 5.7 × 28 caliber rifles and pistols, and .50 caliber rifles” (USDOJ, 2009, p. 11). The increased demand for rifles is evident in aggregate data on seized weapons provided by the Mexican government. Prior to 2007, Mexican authorities seized roughly 50 per cent more handguns than long guns annually. Since then, seizures of long guns, and the ratio of seized long guns to handguns, have increased dramatically. By 2010, long guns accounted for more than 63 per cent of seized firearms (see Figure 12.1).

These figures are consistent with data on individual seizures compiled for this study. Of the firearms studied that were seized in Mexico from 2009 to 2012, approximately 72 per cent were long guns, rifles, shotguns, sub-machine guns, machine guns, and unspecified “long guns”, the vast majority of which were rifles. Pistols were the next most commonly recovered items, accounting for more than 19 per cent of seized firearms. Shotguns and revolvers made up 6 per cent and 4 per cent of seized weapons, respectively. Machine guns and sub-machine guns were also recovered in Mexico, but in much smaller quantities.

Interestingly, the ratio of long guns to handguns seized at the US border is roughly similar to that of long guns to handguns seized in Mexico. Of the 139 firearms reportedly bound for Mexico and seized at the US border from January 2009 to July 2011, approximately 75 per cent were rifles, shotguns, and machine guns. The ratio of handguns to other firearms seized at the border is also similar to the ratio of handguns seized in Mexico, accounting for 24 per cent of seized firearms (vs. 28 per cent for firearms seized in Mexico). Table 12.3 summarizes this data.

The data also provides some insight into the models of illicit firearms in Mexico, corroborating some commonly held assumptions and calling others into question. Several of the firearms frequently referred to by government officials and journalists as “weapons of choice” for DTOs and other unauthorized end users in Mexico were indeed recovered in comparatively large quantities in the seizures studied. These include Kalashnikov-pattern and AR-15 variant assault rifles, .38 Super pistols,¹ and 9 mm pistols. Kalashnikov-pattern rifles alone accounted for at least 19 per cent of all seized firearms identified by model or calibre, and more than 30 per cent of seized rifles. Models identified in the

Figure 12.1

Table 12.4 Illicit firearms destined for and seized in Mexico, by type

Seized weapons*	Seizures in Mexico (January 2009...July 2012)		Seizures at US ports (January 2009...July 2011)	
	Quantity	Percentage	Quantity	Percentage
Pistols	817	19%	31	2%
Revolvers	183	4%	3	0%
•Short arms•	194	5%	n/a	n/a
Rifles	1,967	47%	97	7%
Shotguns	269	6%	7	0%
Sub-machine guns	60	1%	0	0%
Machine guns	9	<1%	1	0%
•Long arms•	700	17%	n/a	n/a
Unspecified	1	<1%	0	0%
Total	4,200	100%	139	100%

data include Norinco's MAK-90 and the WASR series (WASR 10) of semi-automatic rifles, the latter of which are frequently included in lists of •weapons of choice• of the DTOs (Dudley, Schmitt, and Young, n.d.; Freedman, 2011). AR-15 variants accounted for most of the remaining rifles identified by model. Of the 251 seized AR-15s, at least 14 were identified as models produced by the US company Bushmaster; these weapons are also included in lists of firearms seized in Mexico (Dodge, 2009; Freedman, 2011; HCFA, 2008, p. 91).

The prevalence of .38 Super and 9 mm pistols is also consistent with previous reports on illicit weapons in Mexico. In fact, 9 mm and .38-caliber pistols, including at least 121 .38 Super pistols, were the most commonly seized handguns. Together, pistols identified as •9 mm•, •.38 caliber•, and •.38 Super• account for approximately 45 per cent of seized handguns studied that were identified by model or calibre. Nine-millimetre firearms were also the most frequently seized handguns along the US border and were seized at almost the same rate as in Mexico. Together, pistols that were identified as 9 mm or .38 calibre account for 35 per cent of the pistols and revolvers seized at the border.

Far fewer sub-machine guns and machine guns were seized. Most sub-machine guns identified by model were Uzi or Uzi-pattern guns. Other models and brands identified in the data include MP-5 and Intratec. No sub-machine guns are listed in the data on weapons seized at the US border. Data on the few machine guns seized in Mexico is vague. Only two are identified by model, one of which is a Minimi-pattern light machine gun recovered in San Luis Potosí. The one •machine gun• seized at the US border during this time period was a Browning .30 calibre, a World War-II era gun that is produced in several countries and in various configurations, including a semi-automatic version made for the civilian market. Whether the Mexico-bound gun seized at the border was a civilian variant is not clear. Table 12.4 contains a list of firearms recovered during the seizures studied.

Seized weapon category	Type, model, and calibre*	Quantity	Percentage
	M1 Carbine	18	0.4%
	G3-pattern rifle	13	0.3%
	.50-calibre rifle**	10	0.2%
	M16 and M4	7	0.2%
	FAL-pattern rifle	4	0.1%
	Other/unspecified	195	4.6%
	Total/percentage of all seized firearms	1,967	46.6%
Shotgun	12-gauge, unspecified	172	4.1%
	16-gauge, unspecified	28	0.7%
	20-gauge, unspecified	26	0.6%
	.410, unspecified	24	0.6%
	Other/unspecified	19	0.5%
	Total/percentage of all seized firearms	269	6.3%
Sub-machine gun	9 mm, unspecified	28	0.7%
	Uzi and Uzi-pattern	17	0.4%
	Intratec, 9 mm	4	0.1%
	MP-5	3	0.1%
	Other	8	0.2%
	Total/percentage of all seized firearms	60	1.4%
Total seized firearms		4,200	100%

with Mexican military and police units, including a firefight in which two soldiers were killed and another incident in which DTO members fired at a military helicopter with the rifles (Cabrera Martínez, 2012; El Universal

automatic weapons. A US government official interviewed for this report confirmed the seizure of converted firearms, but did not indicate how frequently they are seized.²⁰

Data on the age of the illicit small arms in Mexico is also sparse. Few records of the seized weapons list the date of manufacture. However, there is some data on the •time-to-crime• of US weapons diverted to Mexico, which provides a sense of how long seized weapons were on the black market. •Time to crime• refers to the time between •the first retail sale of a firearm and a law enforcement recovery of that firearm during a use, or suspected use, in a crime• (USDOJ, 2011, p. 6). Data provided by the Mexican government of weapons traced from 2006 to 2012 indicates that •the time from the legal sale until their seizure can be anywhere from two weeks to a decade²¹.

In recent years, the US Justice Department has published data on the time-to-crime of weapons purchased by

the rifles. The markings on seized weapons often identify the importing country or at least the country of manufacture, as well as the serial number, but these markings are rarely included in publicly available data. Even when this information is available, using it to trace a particular weapon to its proximate source requires access to documentation that is rarely made available to the public.

This lack of data and documentation precludes a definitive assessment of the sources of illicit weapons in Mexico and elsewhere. It also helps to explain the intractability of the ongoing debate over the sources of illicit firearms in Mexico. On one end of the spectrum are estimates that 90 per cent or more of these weapons are acquired in the United States, primarily from retail gun stores and gun shows (CBS News, 2009; Levi, 2009). These estimates appear to be based on data on firearms trace requests submitted by the Mexican government to the US government, which are not necessarily representative of all seized firearms, let alone all illicit firearms in Mexico. Some analysts explicitly note these data gaps. In a 2009 report, the US Government Accountability Office (GAO) concludes that "over 90 percent of the firearms seized in Mexico and traced over the last 3 years have come from the United States" (USGAO, 2009, p. 15).²⁴ Yet GAO also concedes that the data is incomplete; only firearms submitted for tracing to the United States by the Mexican gover

never have entered the United States, ATF notes that even these weapons may have been “legally imported into the US” before making “their way to Mexico by legal or illegal means” (USDOJ, 2012, p. 6).

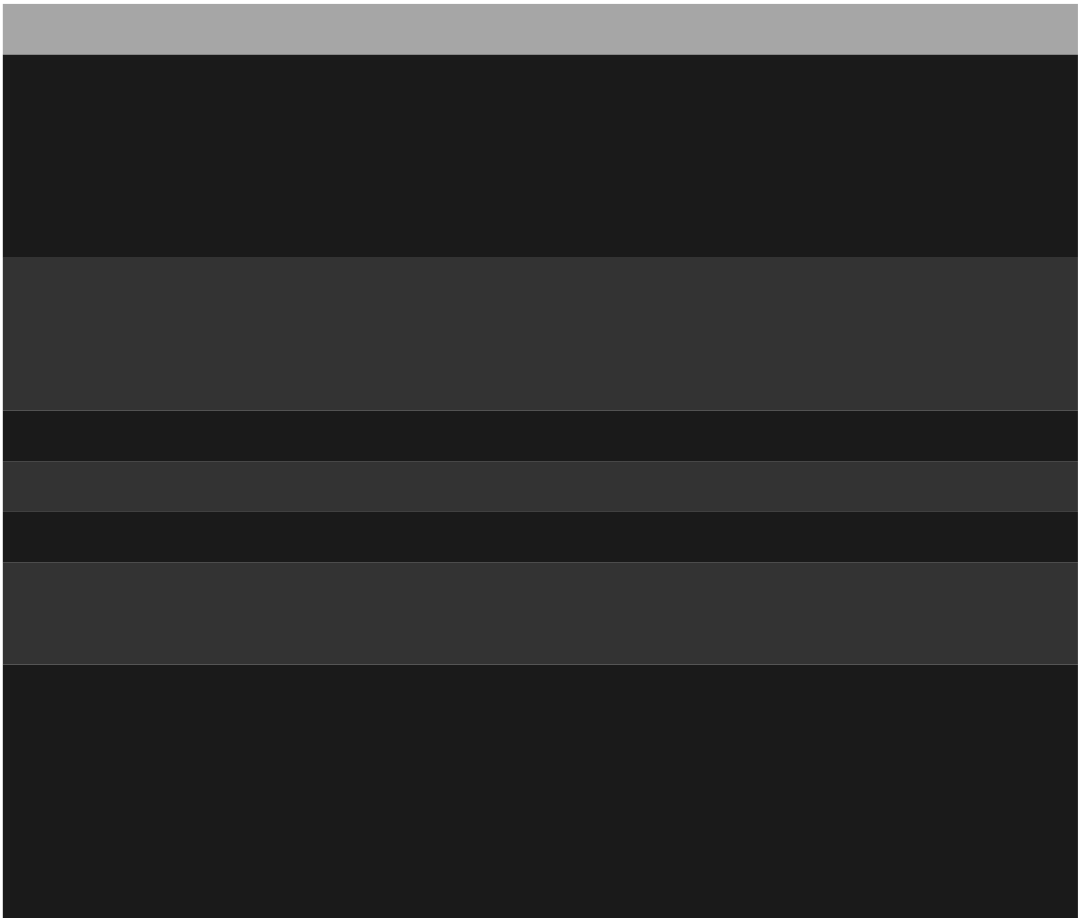
Despite its limitations, the data is useful in assessing the high- and low-end claims about the flow of illicit firearms from the United States to Mexico. Many of the high-end estimates (90 per cent) appear to be misinterpretations or misrepresentations of data on successful traces conducted by ATF, which, as noted above, reflects only a small percentage of all seized weapons:²⁸ For this estimate to be accurate, at least 90 per cent of the 31,530 firearms identified by ATF as being from “undetermined countr[ies] of origin” and 90 per cent of the 38,875 US-sourced weapons for which ATF was “unable to determine a purchaser”, along with 85 per cent of the roughly 55,000 firearms not submitted for tracing to ATF, “would have to be sourced from the United States. While not inconceivable, there is insufficient publicly available, empirical evidence to support these claims.

An example of a low-end estimate is Fox News’ claim that 17 per cent of crime guns in Mexico come from the United States (La Jeunesse and Lott, 2009). The claim is based on ATF trace data for 29,000 firearms recovered at crime scenes in Mexico in 2007 and 2008²⁹: According to Fox News, 11,000 of those firearms were submitted for tracing. ATF successfully traced 6,000 of them, 90 per cent of which (5,114 firearms) came from the United States. The other 23,886 weapons, according to Fox News, “could not be traced to the US” (La Jeunesse and Lott, 2009, emphasis added).

This claim is problematic for two reasons. First, all that is known about the firearms not submitted for tracing is that they were not traced back to the United States, not that they could not have been traced to a US source if they had been submitted to ATF. Second, the authors fail to note that simply because a trace request is unsuccessful does not necessarily mean that the weapon in question was not trafficked from the United States. As explained by ATF in its 2012 report, traces fail for a variety of reasons, including incomplete trace request forms, obliterated serial numbers, incomplete record-keeping by retail sellers, and the age of the seized firearm (USDOJ, 2012, p. 7). Thus, the fact that the trace request was unsuccessful reveals very little about the seized weapon. Without more detailed information about the untraced and untraceable weapons, little can be said definitively about these weapons, including their origins. Given these ambiguities, the low-end estimates do not appear to be supported by existing data either.

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As noted above, the US government traced 27,825 firearms seized in Mexico from 2007 to 2011 to retail purchasers in the United States. An additional 38,875 •US-sourced• firearms were also seized but were untraceable due to one or



- € Russian-made RPG-7s;
- € US-made light anti-tank weapon rockets;
- € 60 mm mortars;
- € •Claymore• mines;
- € C-4 plastic explosives;
- € K200, M406, and M433 projected grenades manufactured in South Korea and the United States; and
- € other fragmentation, smoke, tear gas, and craft-produced grenades³⁸.

According to the Mexican government, an analysis of the physical characteristics and condition of recovered weapons, along with information received from law enforcement agencies in other countries, indicates that a •significant number• of weapons and military explosives seized in Mexico come from regional surplus stockpiles of weapons acquired in the 1980s and 1990s. Equally important, the Mexican government does not report having seized any MANPADS, ATGWs, machine guns of calibres greater than 12.7 mm, artillery rockets, or anti-tank mine³⁹.

Additional types and models of light weapons identified in photographs and other accounts of weapons seized from DTOs include PG-7V and PG-7M RPG rounds; M79 and M203 grenade launchers; various projected, rifle, and hand grenades; and at least one AT-4 infantry rocket. In recent years, the DTOs have constructed various IEDs. In a car bomb attack in Juárez in 2010, one of the cartels used a wounded man dressed as a police officer as bait to attract first responders. When a doctor and a police officer approached the man, the cartel detonated the IED with a cell phone, killing the wounded man, the doctor, the police officer, and a bystander. The bomb reportedly contained 20 pounds of explosives laced with three-inch drywall screws (Esposito, 2010).

The data suggests that at least some DTOs have access to relatively large quantities of certain types of light weapons and ammunition, but not the full array of light weapons available to the •armies of nations•, as is sometimes claimed. There are no references to seized MANPADS, anti-tank guided missiles, anti-tank mines, or artillery rockets in the data studied. Indirect fire weapons are limited to a handful of 60 mm mortars, and there is no evidence of widespread acquisition of latest-generation infantry rockets. Thus, while formidable, the arsenals of light weapons acquired by criminal groups in Mexico are not the equivalent of those of state actors.

In some respects, illicit light weapons acquired by the DTOs are also more limited than the weapons acquired by non-state groups in other regions. Armed groups in Iraq, Lebanon, the Russian Federation (Chechnya), Somalia, Sri Lanka, and Syria have inventories of light weapons that are more varied and technologically sophisticated than those acquired by DTOs in Mexico.³⁹ Light weapons seized from illicit arms caches in Iraq, for example, include anti-tank mines, 120 mm mortars, artillery rockets, advanced IEDs, and limited numbers of anti-tank guided weapons, first- and second-generation MANPADS, and advanced anti-armour rockets (Small Arms Survey, 2012, pp. 322...29).

There are several possible explanations for the DTOs• comparatively limited arsenal. One is that, tactically, they simply do not need some of these weapons, including anti-tank missiles or rockets with tandem high explosive anti-tank (HEAT) warheads. Rival DTOs generally do not drive heavily armoured vehicles, and publicly available data suggests that the Mexican army does not have any armoured vehicles with modern reactive armour. High-powered rifles, RPGs, and grenade launchers are adequate for the vehicles most frequently targeted by the DTOs. Thus, the absence of these types of weapons in the cartels• arsenals may say little about their capacity to acquire them.

This explanation is less convincing when applied to other types of light weapons, including MANPADS. As mentioned above, no surface-to-air missiles are listed in f thmrMmmaies of I thmrized faches itudied. and there is nittle

additional evidence of illicit acquisition or use of MANPADS by the DTOs. The few media references to illicit surface-to-air missiles in Mexico are either unsubstantiated or demonstrably erroneous. Most recently, five anti-aircraft missiles reportedly recovered from an arms cache in Coahuila (Prensa Latina, 2012) were actually RPGs, as revealed by photographs of the seized items.

In a written correspondence with the Small Arms Survey, the Mexican government confirmed that it has no evidence of illicit acquisition of anti-aircraft missiles, guided rockets, or machine guns of calibres greater than .50 by the DTOs. According to the government, attacks on aircraft to date have been perpetrated with firearms of calibres ranging from 7.62 mm to .50 BMG.⁴⁰ While these weapons are capable of shooting down aircraft, they lack the range and accuracy of dedicated anti-aircraft weapons, such as MANPADS. Whether and to what extent the DTOs are actively seeking these weapons is unclear. As noted below, there is some anecdotal evidence of active DTO interest in procuring MANPADS, but this evidence is extremely limited.

In 2009, David Díaz Sosa, a Mexican national acting on behalf of a representative of the Sinaloa cartel, attempted to purchase a Stinger missile and other weapons from undercover US agents. A US agent involved in the case claimed that, when Díaz Sosa was inspecting weapons assembled by ATF as part of the operation, he said he was not interested in that particular Stinger missile because it was a couple years old. Instead, they were interested in a new one or MANPADS. according to the agent (USDC Arizona, 2011, p. 18). It is unclear whether this attempt was part of a broader, systematic effort by the Sinaloa cartel to acquire MANPADS, or whether other DTOs have engaged in similar efforts. The DTOs need for such weapons is presumably less pressing than armed groups facing large-scale counter-insurgency air operations, but the potential tactical and strategic value is significant, and no weapon currently in their arsenals is an adequate substitute for MANPADS.

Given their potential utility, why have the DTOs not acquired MANPADS and modern infantry rockets? Regarding MANPADS, one possible explanation is that the perceived benefits are lower than potential costs, which extend beyond the high price tag of the weapons themselves. Because of the terrorist threat posed by MANPADS, they are closely tracked by intelligence agencies worldwide. Their acquisition by the DTOs, which are already widely viewed as a serious regional security threat by US authorities, could prompt greater action against the cartel by US military, law enforcement, and intelligence agencies. While some DTOs have reportedly sought to increase US involvement in Mexico through attacks on US targets,⁴¹ they must be careful not to go too far, as illustrated by aggressive action against the Guadalajara cartel following their brutal execution of an agent of the US Drug Enforcement Administration in 1985 (Stewart, 2011b). As one US government official noted: "The cartels are smart enough to know that if they acquired weapons that can be used in terrorism, they would likely attract a lot of unwanted attention from the US Defense Department."⁴²

Supply-side dynamics are another possible explanation for the apparent absence of MANPADS in DTO arsenals. A decade-old global counter-MANPADS campaign has significantly reduced the world's inventory of surplus and poorly secured missiles, and most exporters apply special controls to transfers of MANPADS. As a result, it is extremely difficult for non-state groups to acquire MANPADS in most regions of the world, including the Americas. Lending credence to this theory is the seizure of craft-produced weapons from cartel members, which suggests that at least some members have had difficulty acquiring sufficient quantities of more commonplace light weapons, let alone MANPADS. Particularly notable is the seizure of dozens of craft-produced under-barrel grenade launchers and components for hundreds of craft-produced hand grenades⁴³ from DTOs in recent years.

As noted above, approximately half of the 374 seized hand grenades studied were described as inert or practice grenades, which US authorities claim are often converted into live grenades. When queried about this practice, the

Mexican government indicated that it has seized at least 500 craft-produced (artisan) grenades in recent years. Given that craft-produced grenades are likely to be less reliable than their factory-built counterparts, it seems unlikely that DTOs or their suppliers would go to the trouble of acquiring the various components and assembling the grenades if they had consistent and unfettered access to conventional grenades.

The conversion of 37 mm flare launchers into grenade launchers is another sign that access to illicit light weapons may be more limited than commonly assumed, at least for some criminal groups. According to a 2010 US government report, Mexican authorities seized at least 34 counterfeit grenade launchers in 22 seizures from 2007 to 2009. The counterfeit launchers were reportedly made from the trigger housing of 37 mm Cobray flare launchers, which are easily purchased from a variety of locations, including on the Internet, for a retail price of approximately \$550 (USDOJ, 2010, p. 6). According to the Mexican government, the converted launchers are used to fire 40 mm rounds, mainly K200, M406, or M433 grenades manufactured in South Korea and the United States.

As noted above, the US government believes that production of the counterfeit launchers may be motivated by the large profit margins resulting from low supply and high demand. ATF observes that actual military weapons are extremely difficult for the DTOs to acquire, and they are willing to pay top dollar for them (USDOJ, 2010, p. 8). Regardless of their motivation, the procurement of craft-produced weapons is another example of how even the best-funded non-state groups do not have the same access to light weapons as the armies of nations.

ILLICIT SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS IN THE PHILIPPINES

Many insurgent groups are engaged in low-intensity armed conflict in the Philippines. Some of them have been fighting against the government for decades. This is the case with the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines, which was founded in 1969 and engages in complex raids and other guerrilla

or ATGWs were identified. The types of weapons seized and their corresponding share of all weapons studied is presented in Table 12.9.

Most of the data on the seizures studied for this chapter identifies the end user (or suspected end user) of the seized weapons. Disaggregating the data by end user reveals that most of the weapons were seized from the insurgent groups in Table 12.8, with the New People's Army accounting for the vast majority of seized weapons. Combined, these three groups accounted for more than 80 per cent of the seized light weapons and ammunition, and nearly all of the landmines and RPGs. Other illicit end users include suspected members of a political clan, drug trafficking groups, fishermen, gun dealers and gun store owners, militias associated with insurgent groups, and unspecified •communist terrorists•, •criminal elements•, and •private armed groups•.

End users of the illicit small arms studied were more diverse than end users of light weapons. Most handguns and craft-produced firearms were seized from users other than the three main insurgent groups, whereas the vast majority of rifles, most of which were identified as military rifles, were seized from insurgents. Notably, all of the recoilless rifles and nearly half of the mortars and machine guns, were reportedly seized, not from the insurgent groups listed above, but from •the Ampatuans•, members and supporters of a powerful political family in the province of

Table 12.9 Illicit weapons seized by the Philippines, 2007...12

Weapon category	Percentage of total
Firearms	69%
Grenades* and grenade launchers	
Landmines	12%
IEDs	3%
Mortar systems and rounds	
RPGs and rounds	
Anti-tank rockets and recoilless rifles	
MANPADS and ATGWs	

Small arms

As noted above, firearms were the items most frequently recovered by authorities in the seizures studied. A total of 690 firearms were recovered, most of which were rifles. Nearly half of the seized rifles were identified as M16s or craft-produced M16s. Several dozen older-model US-designed semi-automatic rifles were also seized, including the Vietnam-era M14 and the M1 Garand, which was first fielded in the 1930s. Pistols and revolvers were also recovered in comparatively large quantities; together, they account for approximately 30 per cent of all seized firearms. Forty-five-calibre pistols were the most commonly seized handgun, followed by .38-calibre revolvers.

The remaining firearms consisted of shotguns (7 per cent), sub-machine guns (2 per cent), and machine guns (2 per cent). A detailed listing of the seized firearms is provided in Table 12.10.



Table 12.10 Total firearms seized in the Philippines

Type	Model/calibre*	Quantity
Firearm (unspecified)	Various	17
	Improvised	6
	Total	17
Pistol	.45 calibre	1
	9 mm	9
	Improvised	6
	.38 calibre	2
	Other/unspecified	1
	Total	103
Revolver	.38 calibre	1
	Improvised	2
	.22 calibre	1
	.357 calibre	1
	Other/unspecified	1
	Total	99
Shotgun	Improvised	1
	12-gauge	1
	Unspecified	2
	Total	48
Rifle	M16	19
	M14	60
	Garand (including M1)	1
	Carbine, unspecified	1
	M653	1
	Improvised	9
	.30 calibre, various	1
	M2	8
	AK-47	5
	.50 calibre	2
	Other/unspecified	2
	Total	395

detonated weapons (controlled role), meaning that they are detonated by the operator rather than the victim, or as victim-actuated weapons (uncontrolled role). The data contains little descriptive information about the seized anti-tank mines.

The remaining light weapons identified in the data include 17 mortars and mortar rounds, 13 RPG launchers and

weapons acquired by insurgent groups, differ in key ways from light weapons in high-intensity armed conflict. Table 12.12 compares small arms and light weapons seized in the Philippines with weapons seized in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Mexico. As illustrated in the table and explained in the Small Arms Survey 2012¹² the majority of weapons recovered from caches in Iraq and Afghanistan were light weapons and their ammunition, which accounted for more than 88 per cent of the seized weapons studied in Iraq and 96 per cent of seized weapons in Afghanistan. In contrast, most small arms and light weapons seized in the Philippines were firearms.

Particularly notable are the differences in the quantity of indirect fire weapons (such as mortars) seized in Iraq and Afghanistan vs. those seized in the Philippines. Only a handful of mortar systems and mortar rounds were identified in the Philippines seizures studied, and several of them were converted into IEDs rather than used as designed. The quantity and type of seized mortars and RPGs is consistent with other accounts of armed groups and their weapons.

These reports indicate that military and police depots are sources of illicit weapons and ammunition.¹ Weapons stockpiled by, or intended for, Philippine security forces are acquired by armed groups and other unauthorized end users in a variety of ways. Some are looted from overrun outposts and taken from security forces captured or killed in battle (PCTC, n.d., p. 7). Others are reportedly stolen or diverted from depots and stockpiles. In one particularly brazen incident, NPA members donned police uniforms, walked into a police station, and simply helped themselves to weapons and ammunition (Quilop, 2010, p. 242).

Diversion is often more subtle and is sometimes facilitated by corrupt or sympathetic government officials or members of government-sponsored civilian militias composed of relatives and former members of insurgent groups, according to IHS Jane's (2010, p. 3). Some weapons intended for security forces are also reportedly diverted shortly after import. According to Quilop, arms dealers acting on behalf of local governments order more weapons than are needed by the agency and then sell the excess weapons on the black market (Quilop, 2010, p. 242).

Craft production is another source of illicit small arms and light weapons in the Philippines, although the extent of this production, and the utility of the weapons produced, is difficult to assess. As noted above, there is a long tradition of craft production of firearms that continues to some extent today, although the quantity of craft-produced weapons has declined in recent years, according to the Philippine government.² Some insurgent groups have reportedly developed the capacity to produce a variety of small arms and light weapons. Several analysts claim that the MILF is able to produce semi-automatic and automatic firearms, M79 grenade launchers, and RPG-2 launchers (IHS Jane's, 2010; Chalk et al., 2009, p. 42).



There is a sub-group of paltik firearms that the Philippine government considers “high quality (class A)”⁵³. However, the quality of most craft-produced weapons is reportedly low. Commenting on craft-produced guns, a Philippine government official explained that “[t]hese weapons are useable but do not last very long” and that, in some cases, “the ammunition for which the firearm is designed does not fit properly, or the gun misfires and injures the user”⁵⁴. IHS Jane’s describes the quality of the MILF’s light weapons as “questionable”, noting that “some sources clai[m] that the only weapon that the MILF can successfully produce is the crude RPG-2” (IHS Jane’s, 20f0).

Finally, weapons are reportedly shipped to armed groups by sympathizers located abroad. The Philippine government confirmed that these shipments are often large but did not provide any additional information.⁵⁶ An undated government report on arms trafficking notes that Philippine nationals living abroad are a major external source of illicit weapons, and particularly of “the more sophisticated and high powered firearms” (PCTC, n.d., p. 5). The report notes that the weapons are smuggled into airports and maritime ports with assistance from corrupt officials. Other modes of delivery reportedly include door-to-door shipments of commercial goods and international aid (p. 4). The report cites data on weapons seized at Ninoy Aquino International Airport from 1991 to 1999, suggesting that the information is quite dated. Whether the methods and routes highlighted in the report are still used is unclear.

CONCLUSION

Data on weapons seized in Mexico and the Philippines sheds important light on illicit weapons in these and other countries studied as part of this project. The data presented here suggests that most illicit weapons in Mexico and the Philippines are firearms. This contrasts sharply with previously compiled data on weapons seized in Iraq and Afghanistan, where illicit light weapons and light weapons ammunition were overwhelmingly more common than firearms (Small Arms Survey, 2012a).

The types of light weapons most frequently acquired by armed groups in the five countries also varied significantly. Whereas RPGs and mortars constituted the bulk of seized light weapons in Iraq and Afghanistan, hand grenades and 40 mm grenade launchers were the most commonly recovered light weapons in Mexico and the Philippines. There are also notable differences in the models and provenance of illicit weapons in the countries studied, with US and European designs constituting most of the seized weapons in the Philippines and Mexico, and Soviet- and Chinese-designed systems accounting for most weapons seized in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia.

Illicit small arms and light weapons in the five countries studied are also similar in several ways. Among the most notable similarities is the apparent absence of latest-generation light weapons. There is no evidence that any armed groups in the countries studied have acquired the most recently fielded MANPADS or ATGWs, and groups in Mexico and the Philippines have acquired few, if any, portable missiles. Other advanced light weapons are also scarce. There is no mention of thermobaric or tandem HEAT infantry rockets, or light weapons (that is, mortars or automatic grenade launchers) equipped with computerized fire control systems, or thermal weapon sights. Armed groups in Iraq have acquired some of these systems, namely tandem HEAT RPGs, but only in very small quantities.

Another similarity is the widespread acquisition and use of craft-produced weapons. In Mexico, the DTOs have acquired craft-produced shotguns, rifles, hand grenades, and grenade launchers. In the Philippines, craft-produced weapons include handguns, rifles, shotguns, sub-machine guns, RPG launchers, grenades, grenade launchers, and landmines. In Iraq and Afghanistan, craft-produced launchers for artillery rockets are common. Uniting all of these

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27 According to data provided by the government of Mexico, Mexican authorities seized 154,943 firearms from December 2006 to August 2012.

Of the data provided by the government of Mexico, 94,943 firearms were traced to the 2006-2012 period. Of the 94,943 firearms, 69,691 were traced to the 2006-2012 period.

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