PS MEET MINAR OPS MI

UNODA OCCASIONAL PAPERS No. 36, August 2020

inar ops *n* emin

MINARS STATEMENTS SYMPOSIA WORKSHOPS Ops meetings presentations papers semin Minars statements symposia workshops [

Conventional Ammunition Management

DEVELOPMENTS AND CHALLENGES FROM COVID-19

by Jovana Carapic

MINARS STATEMENTS SYMPOSIA WORKSHOPS A OPS MEETINGS PRESENTATIONS PAPERS SEMIN MINARS STATEMENTS SYMPOSIA WORKSHOPS A UNODA OPS MEETINGS PRES Internotion of the formation of th



UNODA OCCASIONAL PAPERS No. 36, August 2020

CONVENTIONAL AMMUNITION MANAGEMENT

DEVELOPMENTS AND CHALLENGES FROM COVID-19

BY JOVANA CARAPIC



United Nations

The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) publishes the UNODA Occasional Papers series to feature, in edited form, papers or statements made at meetings, symposiums, seminars, workshops or lectures that deal with topical issues in the field of arms limitation, disarmament and international security. They are intended primarily for those concerned with these matters in Government, civil society and in the academic community.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the United Nations or its Member States.

Material in UNODA Occasional Papers may be reprinted without permission, provided the credit line reads "Reprinted from UNODA Occasional Papers" and specifies the number of the Occasional Paper concerned. Notification to the following e-mail address would be highly appreciated: unoda-web@un.org.

Symbols of United Nations documents are composed of capital letters combined with figures. These documents are available in the official languages of the United Nations at http://ods.un.org. Specific disarmament-related documents can also be accessed through the disarmament reference collection at www.un.org/disarmament/publications/library.

Author

Jovana Carapic, Programme Manager, Ammunition Management Advisory Team (AMAT), Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining—Ms. Carapic implements the AMAT four-year strategy by coordinating activities and developing partnerships with donor Governments, national authorities and relevant international and regional organizations. She provides programmatic and policy advice and technical support on ammunition management as requested by States. Prior to joining AMAT, Ms. Carapic was a researcher at the Geneva-based Small Arms Survey. She worked on various projects within the field of weapons and ammunition management, with a focus on South-East Europe. She has authored several publications on ammunition life-cycle management, unplanned explosions at munitions sites, as well as training and capacity-building in physical security and stockpile management.

This publication is available from www.un.org/disarmament

UNITED NATIONS PUBLICATION Sales No. E.20.IX.6 ISBN 978-92-1-139185-5 eISBN 978-92-1-005173-6

Copyright © United Nations, 2020 All rights reserved Printed at the United Nations, New York

Contents

Introduction
Part I Situating COVID-19 in the multilateral ammunition policy landscape
Diverging from the United Nations small arms process .4
Towards a conventional ammunition management framework7
COVID-19 and the United Nations ammunition management process9
Part II
COVID-19's impact on ammunition management practice .11
New risks to "national ownership"11
A potential increase in accidental explosions
A possible rise in diversion
Emerging risks to supply-chain security
New obstacles in monitoring and diagnostics
Disruptions to current projects
Anticipating impacts on future donor funding and international assistance
Conclusions and recommendations
Annex
Acknowledgements

Introduction

When 2020 began, the year appeared to be filled with promise for ammunition management policy and practice. A new, group of governmental experts (GGE) mandated by the United Nations would spotlight the benefits of safely, securely and effectively managing ammunition stockpiles, with potential positive implications for international debates and multilateral processes on conventional disarmament and arms control. Indeed, some observers believed the GGE would kick-start the emergence of conventional ammunition management as a standalone process under United Nations auspices.

Then the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic hit, upending all expectations. As the world continues to grapple with the immediate effects of this unprecedented public health challenge, its near- and longer-term social, economic and political consequences are still far from clear.

In the context of conventional ammunition, however, there are worrying signs. The pandemic is already undermining international and national policymaking on safe and secure ammunition management. If this area continues to be overshadowed as a priority, relevant management capacities could atrophy, increasing risks of accidental explosions at munition sites and diversion of ammunition to illicit markets.

These impacts from COVID-19 could undermine not just the safety of local communities, but also the security of States and societies. Yet, as the pandemic reveals and exacerbates existing challenges in this area, it is also highlighting opportunities for reform.

This paper is divided into two parts, the first of which situates the ammunition management efforts of the United Nations within the broader international disarmament and arms control agenda.¹ Part II offers a preliminary analysis of the effects of COVID-19 on the practice of conventional ammunition management. The paper then concludes by offering recommendations for improving conventional ammunition management, both in and beyond the current crisis.

Box 1 Conventional ammunition management: a working definition

The International Ammunition Technical Guidelines define conventional ammunition as a "complete device (e.g., missile, shell, mine, demolition store, etc.) charged with explosives, propellants, pyrotechnics or initiating composition for use in connection with offence, or defence, or training, or non-operational purposes, including those parts of weapons systems containing explosives".² In practice, conventional ammunition is a category that encompasses ammunition for small arms, light weapons and major conventional weapons. It includes a wide range of munitions, ranging from the largest-calibre artillery shells and free-flight rockets to the cartridges, grenades, rockets, and guided missiles that are used in small arms and light weapons. Conventional ammunition management is a term used to refer to the safe, secure and effective management of conventional ammunition across its life cycle (planning, procurement, storage and disposal) and along its supply chain (from manufacture, through transfer, storage and use, to disposal).

¹ Part I builds on GGE/PACAS/2020/4.

² United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. 2015. Module 01.40, para. 3.58.

Part I Situating COVID-19 in the multilateral ammunition policy landscape

The following section examines the evolution of ammunition management as a topic of discussion at the United Nations since the end of the Cold War. In discussing the incremental development of a United Nations ammunition process within broader debates on the humanitarian impact of conventional weapons (for a definition see Box 2), it reveals why 2020 was shaping up to be a pivotal year in this process before COVID-19's onset. Part I concludes by examining how the pandemic may affect these multilateral policy efforts.

Box 2 Defining Conventional Weapons

According to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, the categories of major conventional weapons are:

- 1. Battle tanks
- 2. Armoured combat vehicles
- 3. Large-calibre artillery systems
- 4. Combat aircraft
- 5. Attack helicopters
- 6. Warships
- 7. Missiles and missile launchers.

"Seven plus one" formula for conventional weapons

Small arms and light weapons represent an additional category of conventional arms, although they remain outside the official seven categories of the Register. In 2019, the Group of Governmental Experts to review the operation, relevance and further development of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms recommended that Member States continue the "seven plus one" formula, whereby they can report international transfers of small arms and light weapons in parallel to the seven categories of conventional weapons.³

³ A/74/211.

Diverging from the United Nations small arms process

To a large extent, the current multilateral discussions on conventional ammunition have been shaped by the trajectory of the United Nations process on small arms and light weapons (SALW).⁴ As States took a growing interest in the issue of SALW during the 1990s—not least due to the increased prevalence of such arms in conflict-affected settings after the Cold War—associated ammunition and explosives initially were a part of their discussions.

In 1997, a Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms⁵ concluded that ammunition and explosives formed an integral part of SALW used in conflict, with the availability of ammunition being an important independent element in conflict dynamics.⁶ Then, in June 1999, a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on the problem of ammunition and explosives concluded that (a) ammunition was an inseparable part of the problem of excessive and destabilizing accumulation, transfer and misuse of SALW; and (b) measures to control SALW would not be complete if they did not include ammunition and explosives.⁷

But the recognition that ammunition and explosives were integral to the issue of SALW control did not translate into political agreement among States. Although Governments discussed ammunition and explosives while negotiating the

⁴ This section builds on GGE/PACAS/2020/2.

⁵ The Panel was established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 50/70 B of 15 January 1996.

⁶ A/52/298, paras. 29 and 30.

⁷ The GGE—established in late 1998 in accordance with resolution 52/38 J, para. 3—assessed whether and how enhancements to controls on ammunition and explosives could help prevent and reduce the excessive and destabilizing accumulation and proliferation, as well as abuse, of SALW (A/54/155, para. 7). In support of its work, the GGE examined what was known about the ammunition and explosives at the time, on issues such as manufacture, legal transfers and illicit trafficking, stocks and surpluses, legislative control measures, marking, programmes for the reduction of stockpiles.

United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects of 2001 (Programme of Action), they reached no consensus on including them explicitly. The linkage they had previously established between ammunition and explosives was partly to blame, as some States were hesitant to broaden the scope of the arms control debate to address explosives.⁸

Meanwhile, others argued that the inclusion of ammunition in the Programme of Action was implied by a reference, in the Programme's full title, to the purpose of addressing the illicit SALW trade "in all its aspects". Yet, while certain provisions of the Programme of Action arguably could apply to SALW and ammunition, questions on the framework's scope were left to the discretion of individual States.⁹

Governments remained reluctant to confront their differences over ammunition as they developed the International Tracing Instrument of 2005.¹⁰ In recommending the negotiation of such an instrument two years earlier, a GGE on Tracing Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons noted that ammunition and explosives were generally regarded as a part of SALW, but the body did not resolve whether or not ammunition should be included in the scope of the negotiations.¹¹ When these talks

⁸ Sarah Parker and Marcus Wilson. 2016. A Guide to the UN Small Arms Process. 2016 Update. Geneva: Small Arms Survey, p. 44.

⁹ In particular, provisions of the Programme of Action related to stockpile management and surplus destruction could be interpreted as applying to ammunition. Bevan, James, Glenn McDonald, and Sarah Parker. 2009. "Two Steps Forward: UN Measures Update," in *Small Arms Survey* 2009: Shadows of War. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 145.

¹⁰ The International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace, in a Timely and Reliable Manner, Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons was adopted in 2005 to facilitate international cooperation in tracing illicit small arms and light weapons by requiring States to ensure that weapons are properly marked and that records are kept.

¹¹ The General Assembly established the GGE on Tracing Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons by paragraph 10 of resolution 56/24 V. In its report (A/58/138), the Group made reference to the 1999 GGE on the problem of ammunition and explosives.

later took place, many States opposed including ammunition in the instrument,¹² and it was ultimately omitted from the text. The negotiators recommended, however, that "the issue of small arms and light weapons ammunition be addressed in a comprehensive manner as part of a separate process conducted within the framework of the United Nations".¹³ The divergence of views on the subject of ammunition was still evident in 2018, when States called votes on two explicit references to ammunition in the final document of the Third Review Conference of the Programme of Action.¹⁴

Although discussions on SALW ammunition preceded the International Tracing Instrument, negotiations on the Instrument opened space at the international level to address ammunition as a topic in its own right. In 2004, the General Assembly added an agenda item for the following year, entitled "Problems arising from the accumulation of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus".¹⁵ The body adopted its first substantive resolution on this matter at its sixtieth session (60/74), asking the Secretary-General to seek views from Member States.¹⁶ This was followed by a second resolution (61/72) by which the Assembly established a GGE to consider how to enhance cooperation on the issue.

The GGE met in 2008 and took the first steps to comprehensively address ammunition at the international

¹² Parker and Wilson (2016), p. 54.

¹³ A/60/88.

¹⁴ Specifically, one paragraph welcomes the GGE process established under General Assembly resolution 72/55 on problems arising from the accumulation of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus, and another paragraph acknowledges that States that apply provisions of the Programme of Action to ammunition can exchange and apply relevant experiences, lessons learned and best practices. See A/CONF.192/2018/ RC/3, annex.

¹⁵ 59/515, A/59/49 (Vol. II), p. 15.

¹⁶ These views were published in 2006 (A/61/118 and A/61/118/Add.1) and in 2007 (A/62/166 and A/62/166/Add.1).

level, including by issuing recommendations¹⁷ that led to the establishment of the United Nations SaferGuard Programme (UN SaferGuard) and the development of the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines. Then, in 2017, the General Assembly requested by resolution 72/55 that the Secretary-General convene another GGE in 2020 to further analyse the accumulation of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus.

Towards a conventional ammunition management framework

There is no comprehensive multilateral instrument dedicated to the issue of conventional ammunition management.¹⁸ Existing legally binding instruments at the international level do not cover the issue comprehensively; rather, they tend only to address ammunition used in small arms and only within one part of the life cycle, not as part of a sustainable "through-life management" framework.

International non-legally binding instruments, frameworks, standards and guidelines provide additional focus in this area. The International Ammunition Technical Guidelines, for example, are a "living" document reviewed by UN SaferGuard at least once every five years to reflect current best practices on ammunition management, as well as changing international regulations and requirements. Additional guidance is developed, as required, to address emerging areas of need.¹⁹

¹⁷ A/63/182, paras. 65–74.

¹⁸ For a detailed overview of existing applicable frameworks, see GGE/ PACAS/2020/4.

¹⁹ Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 63/61, United Nations Secretariat developed the Guidelines in collaboration with the United Nations Mine Action Service and with oversight from a Technical Review Panel, later renamed the Technical Review Board. The first edition was finalized in early 2011, after which the Assembly welcomed, by its resolution 66/42, the guidelines and the establishment of the UN SaferGuard knowledge resource management programme. As of this writing, the Guidelines were in their second edition, published in 2015, and a third version was scheduled for publication in early 2021.

Recognizing the growing demand for assistance in implementing these Guidelines, the Secretary-General committed under his Agenda for Disarmament to establishing an international mechanism to provide technical support to States.²⁰ In 2019, this commitment was fulfilled by the establishment of an "Ammunition Management Advisory Team" as a joint initiative of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining.

The General Assembly further underscored the importance of ammunition management in its resolution 74/65 of 12 December 2019, encouraging States to consider such management as an intrinsic part of their efforts to achieve relevant targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.²¹

For more information, visit UN SaferGuard's website. Also see, United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. 2019. *Critical Path Guide to the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines*. New York: United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs.

²⁰ United Nations. 2018. "Acton 22: Secure excessive and poorly maintained stockpiles", in Agenda for Disarmament. New York: UN.

²¹ The issue of conventional ammunition is integral to the successful implementation of the Goals, especially Goal 11 (safe and sustainable cities and communities) and Goal 16 (peaceful, just and inclusive societies). Robust ammunition stockpile management is essential for preventing and mitigating the effect of accidental explosions, leading to increased urban safety (target 11.7) and protection of civilians (target 16.1) and is key to preventing diversion and curbing illicit arms flows (target 16.4). Effective and sustainable through-life management of conventional ammunition also contributes to the strengthening of national institutions and overall governance by promoting their effectiveness, accountability and transparency (target 16.6 and 16.A). See Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining. 2018. Towards Security, Peace and Development: the State of Play in Safe and Secure Management of Ammunition. Geneva: GICHD, p. 15.

Box 3 The Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament

In his Agenda for Disarmament, released in May 2018,²² the United Nations Secretary-General underscored his concern about the deteriorating international security environment and committed to undertaking 40 practical measures, or "actions", aimed at reinvigorating the field of multilateral disarmament. In his Agenda, the Secretary-General drew a distinction between global efforts towards the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, which he described as "Disarmament to Save Humanity", and activities to control conventional arms, which he called "Disarmament that Saves Lives".

Under the rubric of "Disarmament that Saves Lives", the Secretary-General set out two overarching goals: mitigating the humanitarian impact of conventional weapons and addressing the excessive accumulation and illicit trade of such arms (see Box 2). These goals were to be achieved through 10 concrete actions, including one on securing excessive and poorly maintained stockpiles.²³

COVID-19 and the United Nations ammunition management process

COVID-19 took a rapid toll on multilateral disarmament and arms control processes, including those dedicated to tackling threats from conventional weapons and ammunition. In May 2020, the General Assembly postponed to 2021 the seventh Biennial Meeting of States on the Programme of Action, thus

²² United Nations. 2018. Securing our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament.

²³ Action 22 states, "The United Nations, through its coordinating mechanism on small arms under the leadership of the Office for Disarmament Affairs, will promote more effective State and regional action on excessive and poorly maintained stockpiles in all available forums and through its regional centres, as well as through new and existing partnerships."

delaying any new discussions on addressing ammunition within this framework.²⁴

COVID-19 also had an immediate procedural impact on the new GGE on problems arising from the accumulation of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus, which had held its first formal session in January 2020. Its second session, originally scheduled to be held in Geneva in April, took place instead in an informal format through videoconferencing. The Chair pursued bilateral consultations and other innovative ways to facilitate the equal participation of Experts in these virtual discussions,²⁵ but decided to delay finalizing the GGE work and therefore the publication of its report—until 2021.²⁶

While it remains unclear as of this writing whether the postponement will affect the ability of the GGE to adopt a substantive report, the pandemic has stalled—at least for the short term—global action to tackle the safety and security challenges of conventional ammunition.

²⁴ The exact date was to be decided by the General Assembly at its seventyfifth session. See Amayo Lazarus O. 2020. *Letters from the Chair*, 15 May 2020.

²⁵ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. "The UN Office for Disarmament Affairs continues to fulfil its mandates and support Member States – Latest message on how Covid-19 is impacting multilateral disarmament and arms control. A Message from High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu", 4 June 2020.

²⁶ The General Assembly would mandate such a delay in its seventyfifth session, in the relevant resolution on problems arising from the accumulation of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus.

Part II COVID-19's impact on ammunition management practice

This section considers how the pandemic is affecting the broader ammunition management sector. After considering structural risks to relevant control and management activities,²⁷ it explains how shifts in national priorities and resources threaten to undermine the ammunition management sector, potentially increasing the likelihood of accidental explosions and diversion to illicit markets. It then looks at how the pandemic may already be impacting the sector by impeding (a) the collection and analysis of data on accidental explosions at storage sites and diversion risks; (b) national ammunition management-related programming; and (c) international assistance, cooperation, and funding initiatives.

New risks to "national ownership"

Central to safe, secure and sustainable ammunition management is the willingness of States to accept responsibility for adopting and implementing effective policies and practices inside their borders. National actors—including relevant political decision makers, armed forces personnel and other authorities—have to prioritize the safety and security of ammunition stockpiles, while also enforcing accountability and control of resources and personnel through the ammunition life cycle and supply chain.²⁸

The COVID-19 pandemic threatens to undermine this sense of national ownership, especially in fragile settings

²⁷ Manuel Martinez Miralles and Anna Mensah. 2020. Conventional Ammunition Management: Gap Analysis. Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR).

²⁸ Definition based on Jovana Carapic, Eric J. Deschambault, Paul Holtom, and Ben King. 2018. A Practical Guide to Life-cycle Management of Ammunition: Handbook. Geneva: Small Arms Survey, p. 48.

where resources are scarce, institutions are relatively weak and violence or crime are frequent. Pandemic-related health and economic concerns could dominate the attention of national authorities in these settings at least for the short term,²⁹ potentially cutting into resources available for ammunition management.

Before the onset of COVID-19, national actors facing severe ammunition management challenges could turn to international assistance to help them identify problems, define needs and develop the capacity to address them. But, as later sections of this paper will explore, the current health crisis is also undermining institutional capacities at the international level.

The security sector, and especially police and armed forces, have faced increasing calls to ensure public order and compliance with lockdown and social distancing measures.³⁰ In many States, the global health crisis will pull security personnel away from their daily duties, including on ammunition management. This applies, in particular, to Governments that already lacked the structural capacity and accountability systems needed to ensure that ammunition remains under the control of their defence and security forces.

This dynamic has taken hold in some countries. For instance, in Bosnia and Herzegovina—a country that in the past decade has placed considerable emphasis on establishing a comprehensive ammunition life-cycle management system— COVID-19 has led to the redeployment of armed forces personnel to patrol national borders. This decision, along with measures to ensure safe distancing, reduced the workforce at

²⁹ International Crisis Group (ICG). 2020. "COVID-19 and Conflict: Seven Trends to Watch", Crisis Group Special Briefing N°4. New York/ Brussels: ICG.

³⁰ Peter Beaumont. 2020. "More Countries Deploy their Military to Help During COVID-19 Crisis." 27 March 2020. *The Guardian*; North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). N.d. "NATO and COVID-19".

the local ammunition demilitarization facility to one third its previous size and forced a disposal site to suspend operations for at least a matter of months. According to a senior European military official, the country consequently reduced or postponed its destruction of unsafe and ageing ammunition.

It is still unclear whether such cuts could increase the probability of explosions or diversion, but it is worth considering with urgency how to manage the risks of surplus ammunition as it awaits disposal during the pandemic.

A potential increase in accidental explosions

Analysts suggest that the pandemic is likely to lead to a global recession, not least due to disruptions in transport, trade and food supplies; the closure of businesses; and skyrocketing unemployment rates.³¹ The resulting discontent could erupt into outbursts of violence, especially in fragile environments. As military personnel redeploy from ammunition storage sites, such facilities may become less able to implement and monitor safety measures, and some may face greater threats from criminals. Political turmoil and conflict can thus contribute towards conditions associated with accidental explosions at munition sites.

This phenomenon has contributed to past tragedies. In 1997, as Albania experienced a national economic and political crisis following the collapse of its banking sector, the country endured more than 20 accidental munition explosions. These explosions killed or injured hundreds of people and displaced even more, all while damaging local infrastructure and contaminating the environment.

According to a database of unplanned explosions at munition sites maintained by the Small Arms Survey, an independent research organization, the blasts primarily resulted from attempted thefts and other acts by criminals who had been

³¹ ICG (2020), p. 8.

emboldened by the recent deterioration of security.³² Albania's case is not unique; political turmoil and armed conflict also figured into accidental explosions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic and Ukraine.³³

Ensuring the safety of ammunition stockpiles requires instituting measures like those found in the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines, designed both to reduce the risk of accidental explosions and to mitigate the effects of any explosions that take place. However, this dual approach is difficult to execute in fragile settings, not least due to the lack of effective normative frameworks, organizational structures, resources, technical personnel and equipment, as well as poor management infrastructure.

These challenges are likely to intensify as fragile environments continue to face impacts from COVID-19. To prepare, decision makers can begin by studying successful past efforts to improve the safety of ammunition stockpiles in conflict-affected, low-capacity settings.³⁴

A possible rise in diversion

Volatile social conditions during the pandemic could encourage armed groups, criminal organizations and other non-State actors to target ammunition.³⁵ As alluded to above, the risk of infiltration and diversion could be particularly great at

³² Small Arms Survey. n.d. Unplanned Explosions at Munition Sites (UEMS) Database. Accessed 2 April 2020; Berman, Eric G. and Pilar Reina, eds. 2014. Unplanned Explosions at Munitions Sites (UEMS): Excess Stockpiles as Liabilities Rather than Assets. Handbook. Geneva: Small Arms Survey, p. 15.

³³ Small Arms Survey (n.d). Accessed 2 April 2020.

³⁴ UNIDIR. 2019. Utilizing the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines in Conflict-affected and Low-capacity Environments. Geneva: UNIDIR.

³⁵ Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime (GIATOC). 2020. Crime and Contagion. The Impact of a Pandemic on Organised Crime. Geneva: GIATOC.

munition sites where COVID-19 has reduced capabilities to, for example, control depot and perimeter access and maintain lock-and-key systems.

Since uncontrolled diversion ultimately can jeopardize the capacity of security forces to maintain law and order,³⁶ it is worth noting that a lack of ability or will among State security forces to control ammunition stockpiles appears to be at the root of diversion in all its varieties.³⁷ Analysis conducted by the investigative organization Conflict Armament Research indicates that the most common types of diversion (in descending order) are battlefield capture, loss from national custody by undetermined means, State-sponsored diversion, ineffective physical security and stockpile management, and State collapse.³⁸

Armed groups and criminal organizations are likely to take advantage of the COVID-19 situation, seizing the opportunity to scale up their activities and gain territory and resources, including targeting State security forces and national holdings of arms and ammunition stockpiles. During a recent webinar organized by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, representatives of several States in Africa acknowledged seeing evidence of increased demand for

³⁶ An independent watchdog group has assessed the most common causes of diversion, in descending order, to be (a) battlefield capture, (b) loss from national custody by undetermined means, (c) Statesponsored diversion, (d) ineffective physical security and stockpile management, and (e) State collapse. See Conflict Armament Research. 2018a. *Typology of Diversion A statistical analysis of weapon diversion documented by Conflict Armament Research*, Diversion Digest No. 1. London: CAR, p. 9; United Nations General Assembly. 2020. "Matters relevant to problems arising from the accumulation of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus, taking into account the exchanges in the open, informal consultations held in 2018 and 2019", Group of Governmental Experts on problems arising from the accumulation of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus. GGE/PACAS/2020/3.

³⁷ For a typology of diversion, see GGE/PACAS/2020/3.

³⁸ Statements given by States during the UNIDIR Weapons and Ammunition Management Update Meeting, 6 May 2020. Held Virtually.

illicit arms and ammunition during the pandemic. One country saw more ammunition being diverted for terrorists to use in improvised explosive devices, according to an official at the meeting.³⁹

Emerging risks to supply-chain security

Restrictions imposed on travel and movement to counter the pandemic⁴⁰ are likely to also undermine existing illicit ammunition flows, prompting the emergence of new trafficking routes that could reshape illicit markets. To meet growing demands for ammunition during a period of relative scarcity, armed groups, criminal organizations and other unauthorized end-users may look beyond State stockpiles to target weaknesses in the broader supply chain.⁴¹

Unlike weapons that can circulate on illicit markets for long periods, ammunition is a consumable good that remains in demand, particularly during periods of sociopolitical instability.⁴² If the demand for ammunition exceeds the legal supply, it can drive criminal attempts at diversion. There are signs that this dynamic is playing out during the pandemic. The demand for ammunition has already jumped amid fears of COVID-19's social, economic and political effects—sales of arms and ammunition are soaring in the United States, Canada

³⁹ Statements given by States during the UNIDIR Weapons and Ammunition Management Update Meeting, 6 May 2020. Held Virtually.

⁴⁰ GIATOC (2020).

⁴¹ Conflict and Armament Research 2018b Conventional Ammunition Diversion: A Supply Chain Security Approach to International Control Measures. London: Conflict and Armament Research, p. 9; Wilton Park report, p. 4.

⁴² Notably, ammunition in conflict areas is often found to have been produced recently. See Conflict Armament Research 2018b, *Conventional Ammunition Diversion: A Supply Chain Security Approach to International Control Measures*. London: Conflict and Armament Research, p. 9; Wilton Park report, p. 4.

and Australia,⁴³ for example—and the suspension of work by some manufacturers has contributed to fears that supplies will run dry.⁴⁴

If disruptions to the legal market continue, further supplychain threats could come from States themselves. To meet the burgeoning demand for ammunition, Governments may be tempted to boost their flagging economies by loosening their controls on ammunition transfers, perhaps by licencing exports to States either with weak procurement, control and management policies or with ineffective stockpile management practices. In addition, exporting countries could alter their legal transfer routes in response to new travel restrictions, increasing the movement of ammunition through States with weak regulation or management.

Stakeholders may thus wish to consider whether COVID-19 has exposed security shortcomings in the ammunition supply chain and how to engage actors to ensure its continued security. Governments, for example, could examine (a) how private companies work to ensure the supply chain's integrity and (b) the role of private-public partnerships in security mechanisms along the supply chain.

⁴³ Ed Pilkington. 2020. "US sales of guns and ammunition soar amid coronavirus panic buying", March 2020. *The Guardian*. Accessed 16 April 2020; Colin Perkel. 2020. "Coronavirus: Firearms and ammo sales spike across Canada amid COVID-19, gun law fears" 20 March, Global News. Accessed 16 April 2020; Hank Davis. 2020. "Gun sales increase, dealers face ammo shortages during the COVID-19 outbreak," 30 March KTUU. Accessed 15 April 2020.

⁴⁴ For example, major ammunition plants in the United States have halted work in response to COVID-19, leading to production and shipment delays. Meanwhile, the Prvi Partizan ammunition factory—the biggest ammunition producer in Serbia—suspended operations in April 2020. See Chris Eger. 2020. "COVID-19 closures force some gun makers to pause production," 25 March, Guns.com; Igor Bozinovski. 2020. "COVID-19: Serbia's biggest ammunition producer suspends production", 31 March 2020, Jane's Defence Industry. Accessed 14 April 2020.

New obstacles in monitoring and diagnostics

Effectively monitoring for and diagnosing conditions tied to accidental explosions and diversion is vital to improving the safety and security of ammunition stockpiles. COVID-19 is creating new disruptions to this oversight, potentially frustrating efforts to assess the pandemic's effects on the number and scale of stockpile incidents.

Monitoring and diagnostics constitute a growing field of data collection and analysis. They encompass, for example, activities by the United Nations to monitor sanctions implementation; reporting on accidental explosions by civil society organizations like the Small Arms Survey; efforts by international law enforcement agencies and organizations like Conflict Armament Research to expose cases of diversion; and physical security and stockpile management programmes undertaken by States and non-governmental organizations.⁴⁵

By helping to identify and address shortcomings in the management of ammunition through its life cycle and across its supply chain, these activities can be critical to staunching flows of ammunition that would otherwise fuel armed conflict, crime and terrorism.⁴⁶

Pandemic-related travel restrictions will make it harder to investigate, monitor and report on accidental explosions and cases of diversion. Disruptions in international travel also may complicate access to conflict- and crime-affected areas for the purpose of tracing or profiling ammunition. In turn, these new difficulties could force organizations to weigh relative risks of diversion, dangers to staff and ease of access in prioritizing

⁴⁵ Definition builds on the explanation of "monitoring and diagnostics" provided by Conflict Armament Research (2018b), p. 8.

⁴⁶ The scale and scope of diversion, in particular, have become clearer in recent years due in large part to the growing reliability of findings and reports by traditional monitoring bodies, including United Nations sanctions groups and non-governmental entities such as Conflict Armament Research. See Conflict Armament Research (2018b).

their missions. Without adequate information from monitoring and diagnostics on the risk and scale of accidental explosions and diversion, it will be difficult to identify and develop effective international assistance projects and targeted national programmes in the pandemic's immediate aftermath. A lack of up-to-date information also could undermine decision-making in related areas, including export assessments.

As information from monitoring and diagnostics becomes more limited, practitioners will need to work harder to compete for the limited attention of national and international authorities, while at the same time advocating to maintain ammunitionrelated monitoring and diagnostics as a priority to ensure the security of States and societies.

Disruptions to current projects

COVID-19 has forced the suspension of many capacitydevelopment projects related to ammunition management.

At an online meeting on weapons and ammunition management organized by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research and Germany on 6 May 2020, representatives of African States⁴⁷ said the pandemic had adversely affected related work, forcing relevant national commissions and points of contact to close or reduce their hours and also to suspend activities requiring close human contact. The affected activities included registration and licensing, national surveys on supplies of craft weapons, armoury inspections and renovations, parliamentary reviews of legislation, and arms disposal and collection. National authorities had to refocus on remote work, including reporting and drafting proposals for

⁴⁷ The participating State representatives included weapons and ammunition management focal points and representatives from the National Commissions on Small and Light Weapons of Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, the Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Somalia, as well as officials from Germany and the United States.

future projects, as well as conducting distance risk education and sensitization activities over radio or social media.⁴⁸

Although international cooperation and assistance projects were also affected, a number of donors and funding agencies said they were actively working with practitioners to continue projects and activities while ensuring the safety and security of staff and local populations. Within the United States Department of State, the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement of the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA) said its programmes on small arms, light weapons, ammunition and humanitarian mine action had experienced \$240 million in disruptions, affecting 103 projects in 36 countries.⁴⁹

Meanwhile, the United Nations High Representative for Disarmament Affairs said in April 2020 that the pandemic had delayed some of the United Nations Secretariat's practical support for projects focused on conventional arms and ammunition. She added, however, that the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs was continuing to carry out essential preparatory work to guarantee the successful, full implementation of these efforts when the situation allowed. While a review of the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines by UN SaferGuard and Member States was expected to conclude on schedule in 2020,⁵⁰ the United Nations Institute

⁴⁸ UNIDIR. 2020. Weapons and Ammunition Management (WAM) in Africa Online Meeting Summary 6 May 2020. Geneva : UNIDIR, p. 11.

⁴⁹ These disruptions peaked in April 2020, and projects began to resume as beneficiary countries relaxed their COVID-related restrictions. As of 26 May 2020, however, disruptions continued to affect 56 projects in 23 countries, totalling \$154.4 million. To ensure the continuation of these efforts, PM/WRA was working with implementing partners to find practical solutions such as project scope revisions, timeline adjustments, or the continuation of some support costs, depending on each project's specific circumstances. Email correspondence with PM/WRA, 31 March 2020 and 27 May 2020.

⁵⁰ Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, "The UN Office For Disarmament Affairs Remains Active And Committed – How The Covid-19 Pandemic Is Affecting The Work Of Disarmament. A

for Disarmament Research—an autonomous entity—had to postpone a number of regional lessons-learned seminars on weapons and ammunition management until late 2020 or 2021.⁵¹

COVID-19's effect on various in-country ammunition management projects has hinged largely on the potential for their current activities to be completed remotely. The Governments and non-State implementers surveyed for this paper⁵² opted to shift to remote work where possible, while partially or fully suspending their in-country programmes and on-the-ground activities. Remote work included consolidating contracts, developing training packages, conducting desk research, consulting and coordinating with national counterparts and key project partners, and preparing workshop and sensitization materials.⁵³ Organizations focused on "upstream" capacity-building and knowledge products have thus been able to continue many of their activities during the pandemic.

Meanwhile, some implementers with considerable in-country footprints shifted some of their resources towards fighting the pandemic (Box 4).

Message From High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu". United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, 3 April 2020.

⁵¹ Statements given by UNIDIR representatives during the UNIDIR Weapons and Ammunition Management Update Meeting, 6 May 2020. Held Virtually.

⁵² Implementers surveyed included the Austrian Ministry of Defence, International Capacity Building and Training Cell, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Golden West Humanitarian Foundation, the HALO Trust, Humanity and Inclusion, ITF Enhancing Human Security, and Mines Advisory Group.

⁵³ Email correspondence with partners, 31 March 2020.

Box 4 Mutatis mutandis: Civil society joins the fight against COVID-19

Some non-governmental organizations are using their in-country footprint to provide support to national authorities to fight the pandemic:

- The HALO Trust is providing its logistical and organizational expertise to support COVID-19 response.⁵⁴
- Humanity and Inclusion is reviewing its current response and implementing new projects (including logistics support to the health sector and awareness-raising) to protect local populations from the virus and deal with the impact of the crisis, with a focus on people with disabilities, children, women, and isolated and older people.⁵⁵
- The Mines Advisory Group has placed greater emphasis on remote delivery of risk education, reduction of contact through logistical changes, and the dissemination of appropriate health and safety messages by its medical staff.⁵⁶
- Golden West repurposed engineers and equipment at its Cambodia-based Design Lab to manufacture medical face shields for front line workers at the Cambodian Ministry of Health. Additionally, Golden West has joined a research and development consortium committed to designing, testing and manufacturing a low-cost (≤ \$150) ventilator for clinic/hospital use in developing countries.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ HALO Trust. n.d. "A Message from HALO's CEO: Meeting a Global emergency." Accessed 9 April 2020.

⁵⁵ HI. 2020. "HI adapts its action to combat COVID-19 and protect the most vulnerable." Accessed 5 April. Also see https://reliefweb.int/sites/ reliefweb.int/files/resources/covid_19_policy_paper_the_halo_trust.pdf.

⁵⁶ Mines Advisory Group. 2020. "COVID-19 message from MAG CEO, Jane Cocking". Accessed 5 April.

⁵⁷ Taing Rinith. 2020. "Golden West produces face shields for Kingdom's Frontliners", 31 March, Khmer Times. Accessed 5 April; Phnom Penh Post. 2020. "Cambodian engineers join race to build ventilators amid outbreak", 6 April, Phonm Penh Post. Accessed 6 April 2020.

Anticipating impacts on future donor funding and international assistance

COVID-19 is already affecting funding streams both for conventional ammunition management and arms control more broadly. The United Kingdom announced on 31 March 2020 that it was reviewing the finances of its Counter-Proliferation Programme,⁵⁸ and the European Union appeared likely to review its overall funding strategy (including those related to ammunition management) in light of the financial limitations faced by Member States as a result of the pandemic.⁵⁹

Other donors remained cautiously optimistic. For instance, PM/WRA did not foresee the pandemic having a major impact on future programmatic decisions beyond expected delays and suspensions, but the Office said it may need to re-evaluate this stance should the current situation persist.⁶⁰ Germany, which has devoted a majority of its arms control funding to Africa, reaffirmed its commitment to continued engagement on weapons and ammunition.⁶¹

While COVID-19 might not have an immediate impact on donor decisions on ammunition management, a prolonged pandemic could require donors to reassess how they allocate funds. In the aftermath of the health crisis, donors may choose to focus on smaller, high-impact projects to support States in mitigating immediate safety and security risks, rather than on comprehensive and potentially more costly capacity-building efforts designed to address underlying, systemic causes of accidental explosions and diversion.

⁵⁸ United Kingdom Government. N.d. Counter proliferation Programme. Accessed 9 April 2020.

⁵⁹ Author discussion with senior EU representative, Geneva, 9 April 2020.

⁶⁰ Email correspondence with PM/WRA, 31 March 2020.

⁶¹ Statements given by German representatives during the UNIDIR Weapons and Ammunition Management Update Meeting, 6 May 2020. Held Virtually.

In response to a challenging financial climate, donors and implementers could consider pooling their resources to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of ammunition management projects. In addition, national authorities could create new efficiencies by collaborating at the regional level, particularly as the response to COVID-19 has underscored the value of regional cooperation.

The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of integrating ammunition management into the broader arms control framework, particularly as it relates to sustainable development. In COVID-19's wake, successful project proposals may need to establish more concrete linkages between ammunition management and broader security, peacebuilding and development agendas. In this regard, proposals could further emphasize how ammunition management can support peacebuilding, sustainable development, good governance, urban safety and security, and gender equality.

Conclusions and recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic is a complex, multi-dimensional challenge, and ammunition-management stakeholders will need to reflect on its implications for their work. In doing so, they generally will be able to regard the capability of various States to manage their ammunition stockpiles prior to the pandemic as a predictor of their fortunes going forward.

While COVID-19 will not necessarily create new problems for the safe, secure and effective management of ammunition, it could exacerbate existing challenges in these ways:

- Undermining national ownership for and control over conventional ammunition stockpiles
- Disrupting surveillance and disposal practices and increasing the accumulation of surplus ammunition, thus making accidental explosions more likely
- Creating new opportunities for diversion along the ammunition supply chain, facilitating the emergence of new illicit markets, and establishing new incentives for irresponsible international transfers
- Limiting relevant counter-proliferation initiatives, including monitoring and diagnostic activities, while also reducing the scope and financing of international cooperation assistance, especially in fragile settings.

During and after COVID-19, implementing effective and sustainable ammunition management policies and practices despite these challenges will ultimately help States to manage risks when new crises arise. To this end, the preliminary analysis in this paper highlights the following points for decision makers to consider:

• Fostering national ownership for ammunition management after COVID-19 will require engaging with national authorities—especially in fragile settings—to ensure their continued commitment to addressing the issue.

- Preventing and mitigating accidental explosions and diversion following the pandemic will require continued attention to stockpile management by applying the guidance in the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines.
- Preventing and addressing diversion during and after the pandemic will require improvements in the through-life management of ammunition, as well as strengthened controls across the ammunition supply chain, from manufacture, through transfer, storage and use, to disposal.
- Addressing the safety and security challenges from ammunition in the post-COVID-19 period will require recognizing the importance of, and supporting, ammunition-related monitoring and diagnostic activities. This information is crucial for identifying weak points along the ammunition supply chain that increase risks of diversion and accidental explosions.
- Accessing conflict-affected areas is generally difficult, and COVID-19 will complicate it further. Stakeholders thus could benefit from exploring and cooperatively pursuing alternative ways to gather monitoring and diagnostic information.
- Adjusting implementation strategies to better respond to the post-COVID-19 context will be important for implementing agencies in the short and medium term. Exploring virtual training and capacity-building efforts, or the development of new platforms and mechanisms for information exchange and support to States, could be a useful way forward.
- With available funding for ammunition management likely to drop in the short term, it will be critical to focus on collaborative initiatives aimed at multiplying impacts in addressing ammunition-related challenges.

Annex Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the following individuals for their reviews and comments: Andy Grantham, Angela Hoyos, Deval Desai, Frederic Maio, Irene Pavesi, John Rawson, Katherine Prizeman, Lee Moroney, Marco Baccini, Nadim Amer, Nora Allgaier, Oliver Jütersonke, Steve Costner and Samuel Paunila. Thanks are also due to Diane Barnes for editing and for her support in finalizing the study. EMINARS STATEMENTS SYMPOSIA WORKSHOPS Shops meetings presentations papers sem Seminars statements symposia workshop Shops meetings presentations papers sem Seminars statements symposia workshop Shops meetings presentations papers sem

SHOPS MEETINGS PRESENTATIONS PAPERS SEMI Seminars statements symposia workshop Shops meetings presentations papers semi Seminars statements symposia workshop Shops meetings presentations papers semi Seminars statements symposia Shops meetings presentations papers semi