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TRI-BORDER TRANSIT

Trafficking and Smuggling in the Burkina Faso–Côte d'Ivoire–Mali Region

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Front cover photo

A typical scene at a border crossing in the tri-border region, with people waiting to cross the frontier between Burkina Faso and Mali.
Source: Eitan Simanor/Alamy, 2009.

Overview

This Briefing Paper examines smuggling and trafficking in the tri-border subregion between Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali, with a particular focus on arms trafficking. It identifies the three primary axes of illicit trade and who is involved in smuggling and illicit flows along these axes. The paper also looks at the impact of the illicit arms trade on communities, both currently and how it might develop. Finally, it concludes with a set of reflections to help policymakers and others frame their thinking and planning with regard to the issues dealt with in the paper.

This Briefing Paper is drawn from a larger study of illicit arms flows in West Africa funded by the German Federal Foreign Office. It is based on a series of 62 interviews with key informants, security providers, community members, traffickers, members of armed groups, and others in the region (see 'Methodology', below).

Key findings

- There are three key trafficking axes in the tri-border area, and the states involved are largely unable to enforce customs and border regulations to prevent such trafficking.
- Illicit firearms and ammunition move along the same routes as and are often transported together with other illicit goods, mainly by the ants trade method.
- Demand for illicit firearms is driven by banditry, communities' need for self-defence, traditional hunters, and artisanal and small-scale gold mining.
- National governments are increasingly relying on traditional groups of hunters or traditional leaders to provide community protection. This trend risks unintended consequences, including the excessive use of force, harsh punishments, or even extra-judicial killings.
- The increased presence of jihadist groups, combined with the increased wealth in the subregion derived from gold mining, heightens the risk of insecurity and economic instability, and increases the demand for illicit arms.

Introduction

The border regions of Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali constitute what is referred to in this Briefing Paper as the tri-border area. This area has long been an important zone of commerce for West Africa, and a key transit route for the trade flowing between the coastal countries on the Gulf of Guinea, and the Sahel, Sahara, and Mediterranean.[2] Trade ties among the three nations are long-standing and the population of the tri-border subregion is relatively homogeneous, consisting mainly of members of the Seoufo, Myanka, and Malinké groups.[3] In recent years, however, the trafficking of illicit goods and firearms has risen in the subregion. At the same time, the ability of governments in the region to monitor and control their borders and limit smuggling and trafficking, including of firearms, has remained static or even decreased.

Cross-border exchanges among the three countries are historically informal, but play an important role in economic and social exchanges. Family and social connections also play an important role in illicit trade. Political unrest in distant national capitals and the resultant economic pressures and lack of security are drivers of the illicit trade in firearms and ammunition in the subregion. But new economic activity, especially gold mining, is also playing a significant role in changing long-established trading parameters, and creates a demand for illicit firearms and ammunition in various ways.

It should be noted at the outset that illicit trafficking in small arms is rampant in the tri-border subregion. It is difficult to conclusively identify sources of the flows, however, given the lack of systematic data collection by national security agencies and the perceived 'national security issues' affecting the willingness or ability of governments to share what data they possess. This lack of data also limits the analysis required to identify or implement specific policy responses aimed at stemming particular flows. To make a stronger case, further efforts to gather data from security agencies in the countries studied would be required.

The paper begins with an explanation of the methodology and terminology used, followed by a detailed mapping of key enablers responsible for the smuggling and trafficking of goods, commodities, and arms across the tri-border area; the characteristics of such trafficking, including the routes used; and the quantities of goods involved. It then identifies the drivers of arms trafficking and the intended end users of the trafficked arms, who mostly fall under the categories of bandits, self-defence groups, traditional hunters, and artisanal and small-scale miners. The risks of insecurity and instability in the tri-border area due to a spill over of the unrest in central and northern Mali and eastern Burkina Faso are further important drivers of illicit arms flows in the region. The paper then assesses the impacts of arms trafficking, including on local communities. It concludes by exploring ongoing responses at the local, national, and regional levels to address the threat, and possible entry points for counter-trafficking interventions.

Methodology and terminology

Methodology

This paper is based on a series of 62 key informant interviews with respondents such as security providers, community members, traffickers, members of armed groups, and others in the region. Fieldwork for the case study that forms the basis of this Briefing Paper was conducted between April and May 2018, with follow-up work in 2019 and 2020. The research team planned to deploy into northern Côte d'Ivoire, southern Burkina Faso, and southern Mali, along the border and up to regional capitals such as Bobo Dioulasso in Burkina Faso and Sikasso in Mali. However, authorities in Côte d'Ivoire did not grant the researchers the authorization to carry out fieldwork in Côte d'Ivoire on the topic of arms trafficking. As a result, fieldwork was conducted in Burkina Faso and Mali along the border with Côte d'Ivoire. There, the research team interviewed nationals from all three countries in the tri-border subregion. Interviews were also conducted with civil authorities (mayor's office, prefecture), law enforcement officers (gendarmerie, police, customs), and members of communities (Dozo or hunters, small-scale traffickers, transporters, bus and truck drivers, etc.) in Burkina Faso and Mali.

In addition, a systematic review of media reports about events involving traffickers, the seizure of arms, or the disruption of arms trafficking was used to provide insight into the persons involved in arms trafficking in the tri-border subregion, their methods and motivations, and the types of weapons trafficked. This information was supplemented by a review of data on seizures and trafficking cases provided by national, regional, and international institutions, as well as relevant studies or other materials.

Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this Briefing Paper, the following definitions are used:

- **Small arms**: weapons capable of being carried by one person. These include items such as revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles, assault rifles, sub-machine guns, and light machine guns (UNGA, 1997, paras. 24–27).
- **Trafficking** refers to the trade, production, or distribution of an illicit good.
- **Smuggling** involves moving (goods, people) illegally into or out of a country.
- **Illicit small arms**: 'weapons that are produced, transferred, held, or used in violation of national or international law' (Schroeder, 2014, p. 246). This definition acknowledges the many different forms that illicit arms flows can take.

Background: the context of arms trafficking in the subregion

Enablers of illicit economic activity linked to political instability and insecurity

In recent years Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali have experienced unrest that has significantly weakened the ability of their central governments to control their respective territories and the borders between them. Côte d'Ivoire faced an insurgency from 2002 to 2011 that left the country essentially divided in half. The southern part remained in government hands, while the northern half formed a pseudo-state under the rule of the Forces Nouvelles (FN) rebel group. The FN received vital funding to purchase arms and equipment by smuggling illicit goods from northern Côte d'Ivoire to Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Mali. In December 2010, following former president Laurent Gbagbo's refusal to accept his defeat to President Alassane Ouattara in presidential elections, renewed violence broke out. After the intervention of the UN and the international community, Gbagbo was arrested and President Ouattara took the oath of office. The FN 'zone commanders' (called 'comzones') were integrated as high-ranking officers into the national army[4] or held key posts in territorial administration and public service agencies, but maintained control over their former strongholds. This allowed them to continue their illegal economic activity and smuggling.[5]

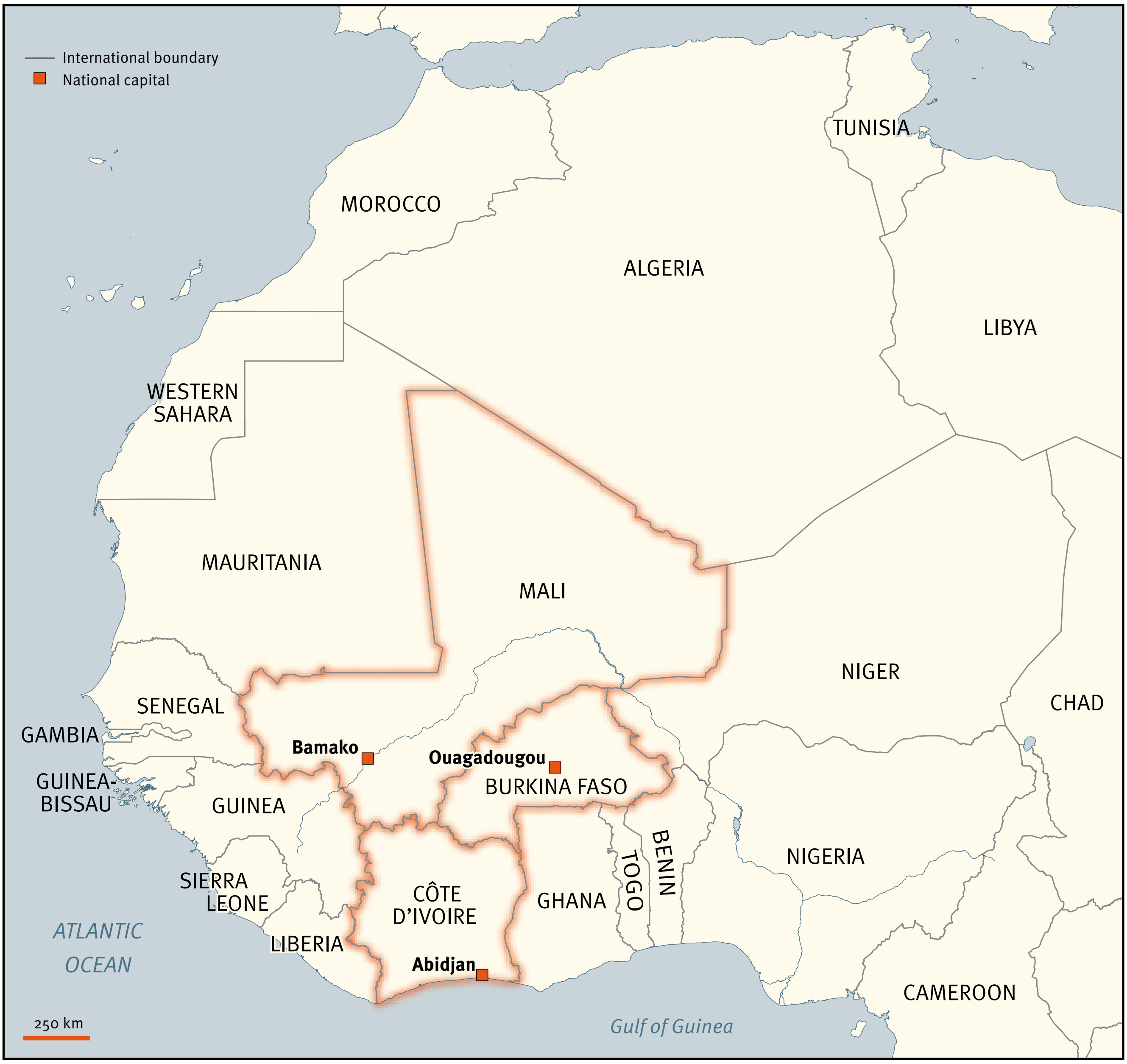
In Burkina Faso, the 2014 ousting of Blaise Compaoré after 27 years in power resulted in a number of failed coup attempts by his lieutenants.[6] The tangible result of these series of events has been the dismantling of the country's security and defence apparatus, especially the elite Presidential Guard, and a generalized climate of mistrust among senior officers and low morale within the ranks.[7] The increase in terrorist activity that the country has experienced (see below) has been exacerbated by the lack of stable and effective government and security forces.

In Mali, a Tuareg rebellion swept the northern part of the country in 2012. The rebels benefitted from a significant influx of arms and combatants from Libya as a result of the 2011 fall of the Qaddafi regime. In particular, the arms allowed the rapid advance of insurgents who—with the support of radical Islamist groups already present in the subregion—routed the Malian army, threatening to seize major cities that were previously firmly under government control. The deployment of two consecutive French military operations (Operation Serval in 2012 and Operation Barkhane in 2014) helped to control the insurgency.

The UN is also involved in Malian peacekeeping efforts. Its mission—the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)—established in 2013 (UNSC, 2013b)—is the most dangerous UN peacekeeping mission for its personnel in the world, with 177 peacekeeper fatalities through early 2019 (Goldberg, 2019). Though relatively stable as compared to 2012, Mali experienced a gradual deterioration of the security situation and a southward movement of Islamist groups, including towards the border between Mali and Côte d'Ivoire. The impact of the coup in 2020 on that stability is an unknown (BBC News, 2020). And the impact of both the coup and the subsequent ECOWAS sanctions on tri-border trafficking is equally unknown. But worrying developments before the coup—for example, Burkina Faso's shelling of suspected militant positions in Ivorian territory—may indicate that the near- to medium-term effects on both stability and trafficking are likely to be significant.

Mali and Burkina Faso in particular have been adversely affected by the activities of terrorist groups, which have undermined security and exacerbated arms trafficking. The two countries are in the area of influence of both al-Qaeda-linked terrorist groups Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM)[8] and Ansaroul Islam, and the non-state group Islamic State—West Africa Province (IS-WAP), which is IS's West African franchise and was formerly known as IS in the Greater

Map 1 Overview of the tri-border subregion


International boundary
National capital
TUNISIA
MOROCCO
ALGERIA
LIBYA
WESTERN SAHARA
MAURITANIA
MALI
NIGER
CHAD
SENEGAL
GAMBIA
Bamako
Ouagadougou
BURKINA FASO
GUINEA-BISSAU
GUINEA
NIGERIA
BENIN
TOGO
SIERRA LEONE
CÔTE D'IVOIRE
GHANA
ATLANTIC OCEAN
LIBERIA
Abidjan
CAMEROON
250 km
Gulf of Guinea

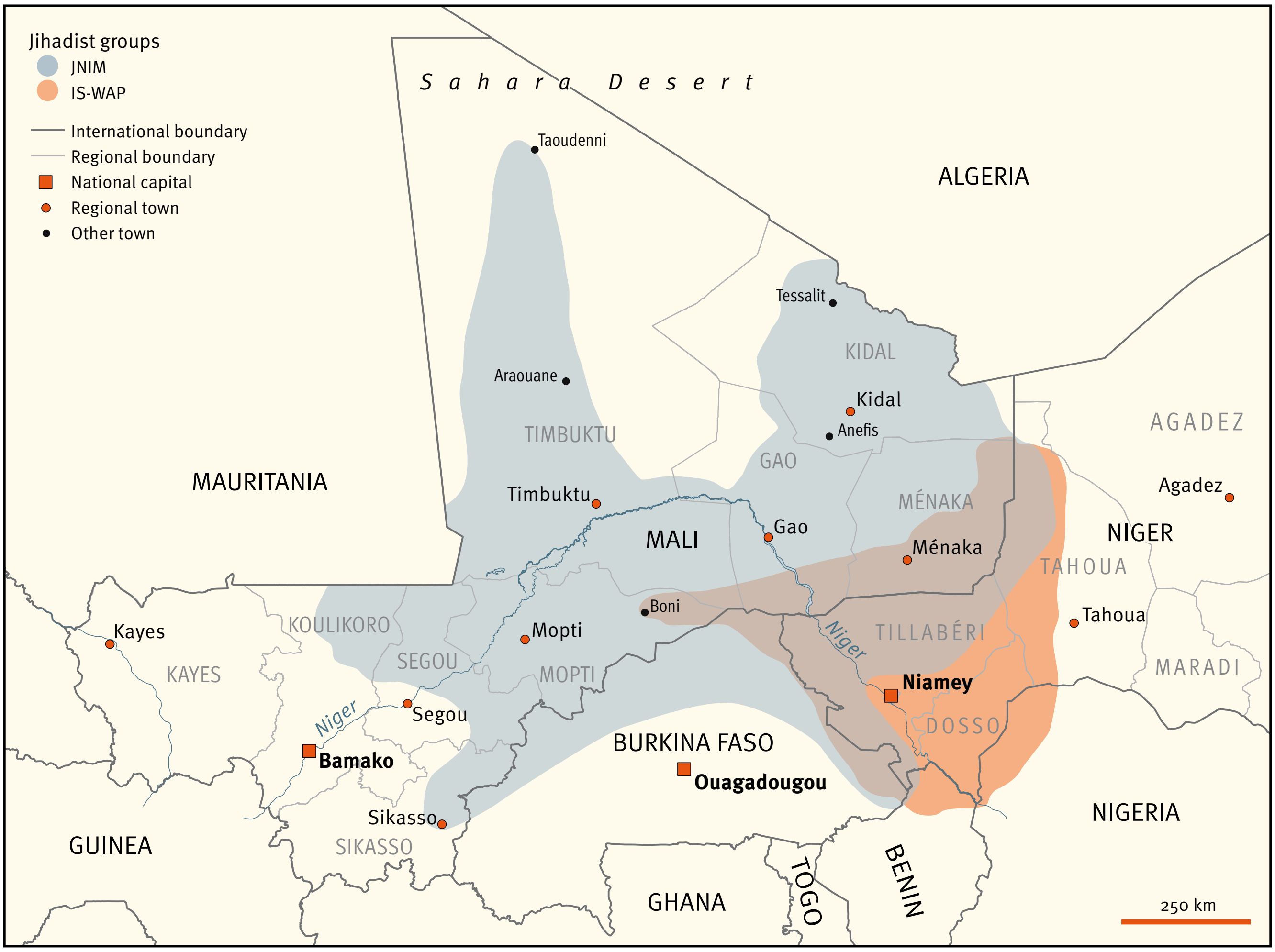
Sahara.[9] These groups rely on weapons looted from national armouries or trafficked from Libya after the fall of the Qaddafi regime in 2011, not arms smuggled through the tri-border area.[10] Nevertheless, research by the authors showed that they may be benefitting from the trafficking of improvised explosive device (IED) components smuggled by actors along the routes examined in this paper (see Map 4).

Theoretically, the two largest terrorist organizations have separate areas of influence: JNIM focuses on Mali and northern Burkina Faso, and IS-WAP operates mostly in eastern Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, and the Lake Chad basin. There were indications that in the Sahel, al-Qaeda and IS franchises formerly acted in concert or at least did not to oppose one another. For example, evidence of hostage exchanges (from one group to the other) and similarities in the design of IEDs suggested patterns of cooperation, including the sharing of intelligence and technical know-how (Menastream, 2020a; see also Map 2). This entente was apparently abandoned, however, in May 2020. In an edition of its official weekly newsletter *Al Naba*, IS-WAP announced that it would begin targeting JNIM positions in Burkina Faso and Mali (BBC, 2020; Libération, 2020). Data collected by ACLED suggests this is now the reality on the ground. The data shows an increase in number of battles as compared to 2019, and suggests that some 250 combatants have died in clashes between the JNIM and IS-WAP (ACLED, 2020). What impact, if any, this development will have on cross-border trafficking are as yet unknown.

The year 2019 saw a step-up in the lethality of actions claimed by or attributed to terrorist groups in Burkina Faso, totalling 641 incidents that caused 2,195 fatalities. Incidents involving violence against civilians accounted for over a half of the total (349 incidents) and 1,295 fatalities. In the same period 1,126 members of the security forces were killed, with a sharp increase of fatalities in the last quarter of the year (ACLED, 2019). In addition, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimated that by February 2020 there were more than 765,000 displaced people in the country, which represents a 1,200 per cent increase since January 2019 (UNOCHA, 2020).

Furthermore, in recent years, all three countries have experienced intercommunal violence opposing nomadic Fulani

Map 2 Jihadist groups' areas of operation



Jihadist groups
JNIM
IS-WAP
International boundary
Regional boundary
National capital
Regional town
Other town
Sahara Desert
Taoudenni
ALGERIA
Tessalit
KIDAL
Araouane
Kidal
Anefis
TIMBUKTU
GAO
AGADEZ
MAURITANIA
Timbuktu
MÉNAKA
Agadez
Gao
MALI
NIGER
Ménaka
TAHOUA
Boni
Tahoua
Kayes
KOULIKORO
Mopti
TILLABÉRI
Niger
KAYES
SEGOU
MOPTI
Niamey
MARADI
DOSSO
Niger
Segou
BURKINA FASO
Bamako
Ouagadougou
NIGERIA
Sikasso
GUINEA
SIKASSO
TOGO
BENIN
GHANA
250 km

Source: Adapted from ECFR (2019)

herders, locally known as Peul, to settled farmers. The death toll from these clashes has been exacerbated by the widespread availability of arms among the various opposed groups. While conflict between herders and farmers over land tenure is common in the entire region, and violent reprisals between communities have been common in Mali since 2012, community-motivated mass killings were unknown to Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso before the incidents at Bouna (March 2016) and Yirgou (January 2019), respectively, that deeply affected the populations of these areas (France 24, 2016; Al Jazeera, 2019).[11] Incidents of this kind inevitably increase the demand for (illicit) firearms, as will be discussed below.

Enablers of illicit economic activity linked to informal extractive activities

In addition to political and security instability, other factors also play significant roles in the decline of state power in the tri-border subregion and the concurrent rise in various forms of smuggling and trafficking. Chronic unemployment, economic deprivation, and population growth (with the attendant 'youth bulge') are all key factors. Indeed, one of the unique aspects of smuggling and trafficking dynamics in the tri-border subregion is these practices' easy accessibility. The porous, poorly monitored borders and the strong cross-border kinship ties in many communities make it easy for people in the subregion to become involved in smuggling or trafficking, even if they are not involved in organized crime syndicates or armed groups.

In line with the entire West African Economic and Monetary Union area, duties and charges levied by the General Directorate of Customs in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali are the largest contributors to these countries' state coffers, contributing 21.75 per cent of the total (tax and non-tax) state revenues in Côte d'Ivoire, 11.3 per cent in Burkina Faso, and 8.9 per cent in Mali (OECD, 2020). As a result, these countries' customs services are focused almost exclusively on the collection of duties, to the exclusion of action to curb smuggling, eliminate fraud, or prevent and intercept trafficking.[12] In addition, the customs services of all three nations suffer from lack of equipment, insufficient numbers of personnel, and lack of training.[13] All of these factors limit their ability to efficiently perform their full range of tasks, even should they wish to do so.

To offer two concrete examples, it is instructive to look at gold exports. Côte d'Ivoire's commercial gold exports increased from 4.2 tonnes in 2008 to 22.3 tonnes in 2015 (UNSD, n.d.). The Group of Experts on Côte d'Ivoire estimated that the contribution of artisanal gold mining (or '*orpaillage*') accounted for an additional 5 tonnes per year. Production and trade of *orpaillage* has been and likely remains both a key source of revenue for regional strongmen like the comzones and an avenue for bribes for government officials (UNSC, 2015; 2016). Two such examples illustrate the problem.

- The late Ivorian colonel and former comzone Issiaka Ouattara (also known as 'Wattao')[14] held a monopoly on gold smuggling between Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso. The profits from this monopoly were used to fund 500 armed men, whom he employed to protect his smuggling activities. The arms and ammunition required to equip these men were likely also the result of illicit trafficking, and contributed to demand (UNSC, 2015; 2016).

- Gold mining in the Bouna and Doropo area was financed by two Burkinabé brothers, Issiaka and Sayouba Ouedraogo (the latter was also known as 'the Mayor'). The brothers enjoyed state-level protection that allowed their vehicles to cross the Côte d'Ivoire–Burkina Faso border without being checked by customs (UNSC, 2015, 2016; Martin and Helbig de Balzac, 2017).

The artisanal gold trade in the tri-border subregion is based on a pre-financing system.[15] All transactions in this cash-based and largely unregulated industry are based on trust. Supply chains in the three countries are also tightly interconnected. Porous borders, the continuity of most mining areas across these borders, and the homogeneity of the ethnic origin or affiliation of the actors involved in mining and trading allow for a high degree of labour mobility in the mines and exacerbate smuggling.

Customs enforcement officials repeatedly raise concerns that high-value commodities such as gold and diamonds serve as alternative currencies in money-laundering schemes, while also financing terrorist organizations in West Africa (Martin and Helbig de Balzac, 2017, p. 3). Gold mining is also linked to arms trafficking. Commercial hubs such as Bobo Dioulasso, Bamako, and Ouagadougou are areas of concentration for illicit transfers, where goods are stockpiled before being dispatched to the intended end users and where most of the capital fuelling the trafficking rings resides. Artisanal mining areas also generate high demand for illicit arms. The authors' interviews and research have shown that, even though smuggling networks specialize in a specific kind of trafficking (for example, gold smugglers would not smuggle arms and traffickers of artisanal weapons would not have access to modern weaponry), they often use the same routes and methods used to smuggle gold, arms, and ammunition across borders.

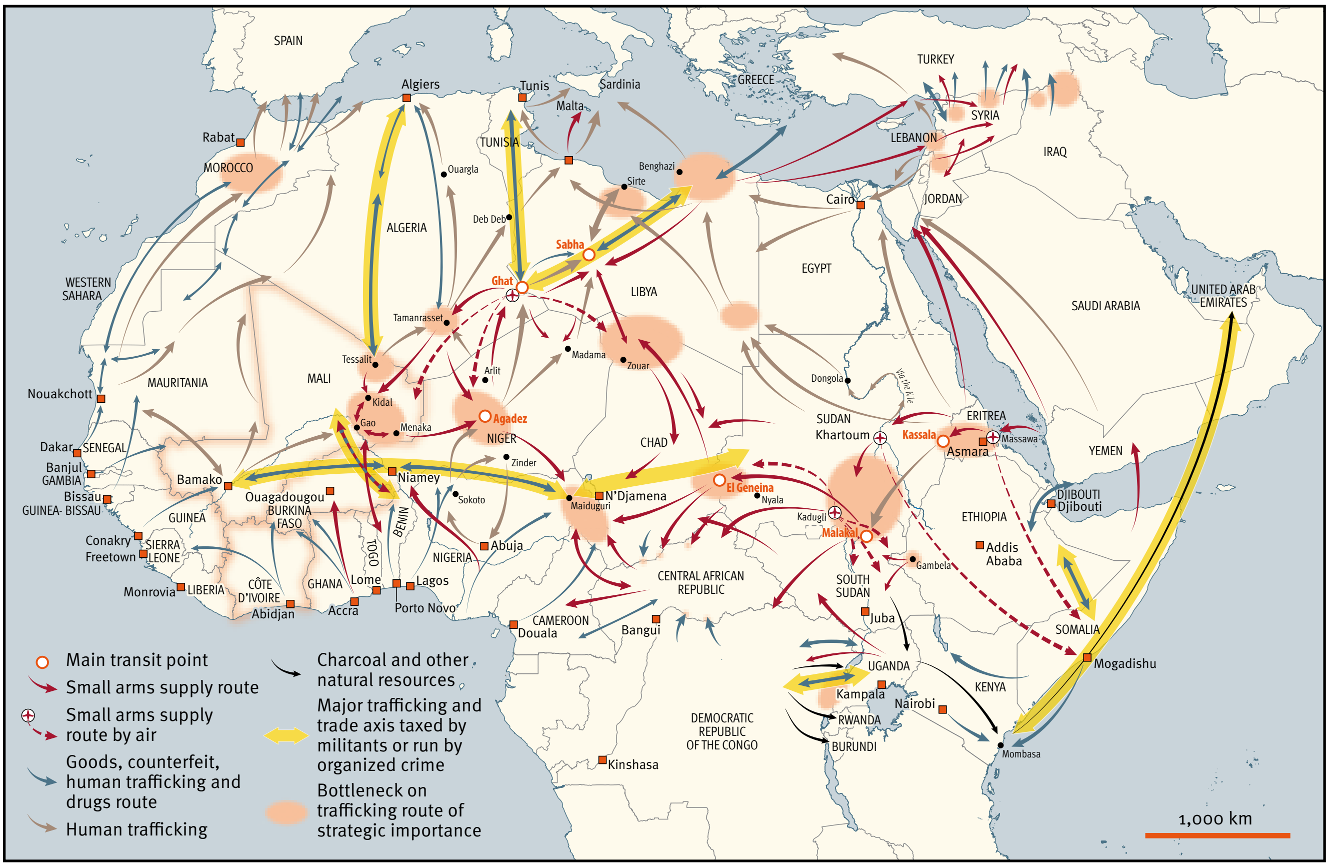
In the tri-border subregion the presence of gold has begun to provoke increased demand for weapons, especially easy-to-conceal handguns. As miners seek to protect themselves from those who would prey on their success, the people nearby are also increasingly turning to armed members of their communities to protect them and to prevent insecurity and instability from taking hold. This, in turn, drives demand from criminals for even greater firepower to subdue those ranged against them. Demand thus increases and is reinforced in an ever-growing, self-perpetuating cycle.[16]

Characterizing trafficking

The nature of trafficking routes in the tri-border area and beyond

Traffickers and trafficking networks in the tri-border subregion tend to operate within a limited area, transporting and selling their goods inside the subregion. Illegal border crossings in the subregion can be conducted with ease and do not require a great amount of organization to arrange. This is in contrast to the nature of trafficking in other areas of the region—Niger, northern Mali, etc.—where traffickers usually operate in the vast open spaces in the Sahel–Sahara region, using difficult routes in challenging circumstances. Research suggests that Bamako, Ouagadougou, and to a lesser extent Niamey are all key hubs[17] for regional trafficking networks from the southern Sahel and coastal regions.[18] The complex network

Map 3 West African and trans-Sahara trafficking routes



SPAIN
TURKEY
GREECE
Sardinia
Malta
Tunis
Algiers
Rabat
MOROCCO
TUNISIA
Ouargla
Benghazi
Sirte
Deb Deb
ALGERIA
SYRIA
LEBANON
IRAQ
JORDAN
Cairo
EGYPT
LIBYA
Sabha
Ghat
Tamanrasset
WESTERN SAHARA
SAUDI ARABIA
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
Tessalit
Madama
Zouar
Arlit
Dongola
Via the Nile
MAURITANIA
MALI
Kidal
Nouakchott
Gao
Menaka
Agadez
NIGER
SUDAN
Khartoum
Kassala
ERITREA
Asmara
Massawa
YEMEN
Dakar
SENEGAL
Banjul
GAMBIA
Bissau
GUINEA-BISSAU
Bamako
Zinder
Niamey
CHAD
N'Djamena
El Geneina
Nyala
Kadugli
Malakal
DJIBOUTI
Djibouti
ETHIOPIA
Addis Ababa
Gambela
Ouagadougou
BURKINA FASO
Sokoto
Maiduguri
GUINEA
BENIN
TOGO
Conakry
SIERRA LEONE
Freetown
Abuja
NIGERIA
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
SOUTH SUDAN
Monrovia
LIBERIA
CÔTE D'IVOIRE
Abidjan
GHANA
Accra
Lome
Lagos
Porto Novo
CAMEROON
Douala
Bangui
Juba
SOMALIA
Mogadishu
UGANDA
Kampala
KENYA
Nairobi
RWANDA
BURUNDI
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
Kinshasa
Mombasa
○ Main transit point
Small arms supply route
⊕ Small arms supply route by air
Goods, counterfeit, human trafficking and drugs route
Human trafficking
Charcoal and other natural resources
Major trafficking and trade axis taxed by militants or run by organized crime
Bottleneck on trafficking route of strategic importance
1,000 km

Source: Adapted from ECFR (2019)

of routes between the Gulf of Guinea northwards across the Sahara to the Mediterranean and westwards to Eritrea and beyond are shown in Map 3.[19]

Actors in the tri-border area

Smuggling and trafficking through the tri-border area are carried out primarily either by individual 'transporters' or by trafficking rings.

- **Transporters** are small-scale, low-level smugglers. They carry contraband and counterfeit or illicit goods (sometimes including arms) across unmanned and uncontrolled border crossings, mostly in the bush. They travel on foot, by bicycle, or in small motor vehicles (motorcycles, small cars, etc.). They participate in smuggling as a primary occupation to support their families. They are usually unarmed and only loosely organized.
- **Trafficking rings** are organized gangs, often formed in the regional capitals that act as key trafficking hubs in the subregion: Korhogo (Côte d'Ivoire), Sikasso (Mali), and Banfora or Bobo Dioulasso (Burkina Faso). These groups may 'employ' transporters or subcontract for their services.

Transporters are generally members of the communities along the border areas. The young people involved in trafficking are from the villages and secondary urban centres along the border. They know the area well, often having worked as apprentice drivers for trucks and buses.[20] As community members, they know their neighbours, the local security situation, and—more importantly for their occupation—the disposition and motivation of law enforcement agencies and personnel in the area.

Local sources confirm this broad outline. The chief of the hunters' federation (the 'Dozo')[21] in southern Burkina Faso claimed that most trafficking in his area is small-scale and utilizes motorcycles driving on unmarked and uncontrolled routes through the bush.[22] Another interviewee reported that, although many transporters had been part of armed groups, it was not uncommon for them to become opportunistic traffickers transporting goods across the border through the bush in the areas they know best due to their past experiences in conflict situations.[23]

Actors involved in smuggling and trafficking of a wide range of goods originate from a variety of population groups and backgrounds. Former FN fighters that went through disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programmes; low-level criminals; and bus, truck, and motorcycle drivers, mostly based in communities along these borders and with solid ties across the porous borders, conduct such low-level and small-scale trafficking of all sorts of illicit goods, including firearms and ammunition.

Interviews with small-scale traffickers reveal that security forces can be both permissive and predatory. When customs or law enforcement officials catch transporters with illicit goods, it is not uncommon for these transporters to 'pay' their way out of trouble: bribes of up to XOF 10,000 (approximately USD 17) can be paid.[24] The success or amount of such payment is dependent on the goods being transported, however. Officials may check the illicit cargo and if they find drugs or weapons, for example, will intervene more readily or even arrest the transporter.[25]

Trafficking rings are organized by leaders living in transit hubs further from the actual border. Rings in Korhogo (Côte d'Ivoire), Sikasso (Mali), Banfora (Burkina Faso), and Bobo Dioulasso (Burkina Faso) are all active in the tri-border subregion. These rings are efficient. According to one informant, ringleaders can easily hire groups of transporters and their motorcycles to transport an entire truckload of goods. The operation can take up to 120 transporters to move this volume of goods, but can be completed in as little as one night. Sources estimated that Korhogo-based trafficking rings organize transporters from Niangoloko to work on one or two such convoys per month, transporting goods from Burkina Faso to Côte d'Ivoire.[26] Undoubtedly, the Korhogo traffickers use transporters in other southern Burkinabé towns with similar frequency.

In the three countries under study explosives are widely available on the black market that supplies artisanal and small-scale miners (ACET, 2017; Bansah, Yalley, and Dumakor-Dupey, 2016). These black-market explosives come from Ghana and Nigeria, and their conventional name among artisanal and small-scale miners is 'faraway', a deformation of the words 'fire' and 'away' that Ghanaian miners shout when firing the explosives (Slate Afrique, 2019).[27] In Burkina Faso the existence of such a black market is well known among the local population and widely tolerated by the authorities, despite the deteriorating security situation that results, because artisanal gold mining is a livelihood for hundreds of thousands of Burkinabé (Assemblée Nationale, 2017).

In 2014 and 2019 two illegal explosives warehouses blew up in Ouagadougou, while in 2018 a customs warehouse in Bobo Dioulasso accidentally blew up after the seizure of explosives, which had then been stored in the warehouse (RFI, 2014; Garda World, 2018; Xinhua, 2019). These events suggest that the trafficking of explosives from Ghana follows the usual 'ants trade' scheme described above, using motorcycles that cross the border in areas unpatrolled by customs officials, while explosives are sometimes concealed inside the legitimate cargo transported by cross-border passenger transports. Once inside Burkinabé territory, the organizers of the smuggling rings arrange the transfer of this materiel to Ouagadougou, or sometimes Bobo Dioulasso, for stockpiling before dispatching it to the intended end users, who are mostly artisanal and small-scale gold miners. Smuggled explosives are easily concealed in the large volumes of motorcycle, bus, and truck traffic that enter Ouagadougou and Bobo Dioulasso every day, which makes cargo inspections by the authorities virtually impossible.

The trafficking of explosives can have a more concerning aspect. An International Crisis Group report of late 2019 described the interest of terrorist groups active in Mali and Burkina Faso in the supply chains that provide explosives to artisanal and small-scale mining sites, as well as in the possibility of using these sites to train group members in the use of explosives (ICG, 2019).

Routes

There are three primary smuggling or trafficking axes in the tri-border area (see Map 4).

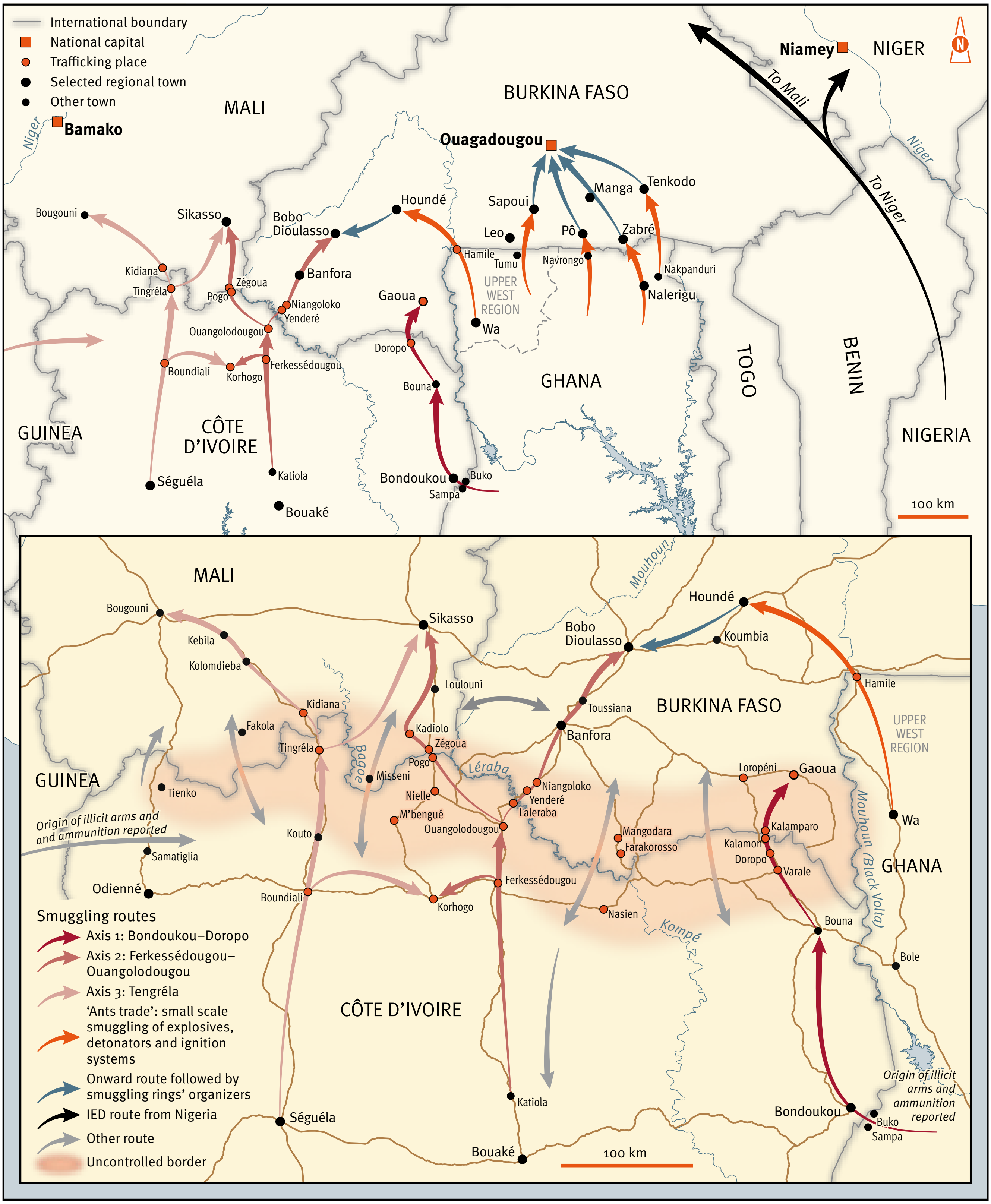
1) **Bondoukou–Bouna–Varale–Doropo route (Axis 1)**. There are reports of artisanal and small-scale mining gold from Bouana and Doropo being smuggled into Burkina Faso on this route (UNSC, 2015; 2016; Martin and Helbig de Balzac, 2017). Other smuggled items include drugs (including counterfeit medicines and narcotics), motorcycles, and household items (including appliances and utensils) from Ghana. This route lies in the east and, skirting the border crossing near Bondoukou, serves the south-eastern region of Burkina Faso, including its main city of Gaoua. Arms are trafficked and goods are smuggled from Ghana into Côte d'Ivoire along the same route.

   During the FN rebellion's occupation of northern Côte d'Ivoire, this axis was the main arms supply route for the north-east and the transit route for smuggling gold to Burkina Faso and cashew nuts to Ghana. In more recent times, the flow of arms has reverted from Côte d'Ivoire to Burkina Faso along the same axis, which also intersects with the smuggling of arms and IED components from Ghana's Upper West region.[28]

The main route to avoid border controls passes by the Ivorian town of Kalamon, a hub for gold smuggling, and enters Burkina Faso at Kalamparo. The only marking of the border along this route is a milestone dating from the time of French colonial rule, and only the Burkinabé side has a fixed gendarmerie post, which is positioned some 7 km from the actual border. The UN Group of Experts reported that vehicles belonging to notorious gold smugglers from Varale and Kalamon, with links to the extended families of Wattao and former Ivorian prime minister Guillaume Soro, are not checked when they pass through Kalamparo (UNSC, 2014b; 2015).

2) **Ferkessédougou–Ouangolodougou route (Axis 2).** This route splits into two: the first part heads for Burkina Faso (Ferkessédougou–Ouangolodougou–Laleraba (Côte d'Ivoire)–Yendéré

Map 4 Main tri-border subregion smuggling/trafficking axes



International boundary
National capital
Trafficking place
Selected regional town
Other town
MALI
BURKINA FASO
NIGER
GHANA
TOGO
BENIN
NIGERIA
GUINEA
CÔTE D'IVOIRE
Niger
Bamako
Niamey
Ouagadougou
To Mali
To Niger
Bougouni
Sikasso
Bobo Dioulasso
Houndé
Sapoui
Manga
Tenkodo
Leo
Pô
Zabré
Hamile
Tumu
Navrongo
Nakpanduri
Nalerigu
UPPER WEST REGION
Wa
Gaoua
Doropo
Bouna
Bondoukou
Buko
Sampa
Kidiana
Tingréla
Zégoua
Pogo
Banfora
Niangoloko
Yendéré
Ouangolodougou
Ferkessédougou
Boundiali
Korhogo
Séguéla
Katiola
Bouaké
100 km
Kebila
Kolomdieba
Fakola
Loulouni
Kadiolo
Misseni
Nielle
M'bengué
Bagoé
Léraba
Toussiana
Laleraba
Koumbia
Tienko
Kouto
Samatiglia
Odienné
Mangodara
Farakorosso
Nasien
Kompé
Loropéni
Kalamparo
Kalamon
Varale
Mouhoun
Mouhoun (Black Volta)
Bole
Origin of illicit arms and ammunition reported
Smuggling routes
Axis 1: Bondoukou–Doropo
Axis 2: Ferkessédougou–Ouangolodougou
Axis 3: Tengréla
'Ants trade': small scale smuggling of explosives, detonators and ignition systems
Onward route followed by smuggling rings' organizers
IED route from Nigeria
Other route
Uncontrolled border

(Burkina Faso)–Niangoloko–Banfora); the second part goes to Mali (Ferkessédougou–Ouangolodougou–Pogo–Zégoua (Mali)–Kadiolo–Sikasso). Customs and other state authorities are present at Laleraba and Pogo in Côte d'Ivoire, at Yendéré in Burkina Faso, and at Zégoua in Mali. These locations are also fairly close to the actual state boundaries, and the posts there handle a considerable amount of goods and number of passengers daily. At these posts passengers undergo individual document checks, and occasionally bags are unloaded from buses or trucks and inspected. There is no systematic checking, however, because these posts are not equipped with scanners or other detection tools.[29]

To take advantage of this lack of systematic checks and scanner technology, smugglers regularly create concealed cavities in their vehicles to hide illicit goods (for an example, see photo 5). These cavities are almost never found, given the volume of traffic (both human and vehicular) that border authorities must clear daily. Indeed, these authorities will generally only inspect vehicles thoroughly when intelligence services direct them to do so.[30]

Other smugglers use bush tracks to circumvent border controls. For example, smuggling rings based in Korhogo, Côte d'Ivoire, avoid the crossing between Laleraba and Yendéré by using such bush tracks, including the locally well-known crossing at Kadarvogo, Côte d'Ivoire. And Leraba Creek, which marks the frontier between the two states, is also easily crossed: in the dry season it can be crossed on foot; during the rainy season local villagers operate dugout canoes to ferry goods and passengers whose identity and purpose they do not question. Burkinabé smugglers based in Niangoloko also use motorcycles to circumvent border controls.[31]

The Yendéré border post was attacked five times between early 2019 and early 2020 by unidentified attackers riding motorcycles and equipped with automatic rifles. The most recent attack was repulsed on 28 February 2020 and one attacker was killed (RFI, 2019c; Menastream, 2020b). These attacks have been treated as acts of banditry, not terrorism.

3) **The Tengréla routes (Axis 3)**. These routes cover the primary crossing area for illicit trafficking between Côte d'Ivoire and Mali. To the east of Tengréla, the Bagoe River marks the border. This river is easily passable by either foot or dugout canoe. To the west, the border follows some seasonal streams, but effectively there is no natural barrier to prevent border crossings. As a result, this area features at least 13 crossing points, of which only two are official: at Nigoni and Débeté (UNSC, 2016).

The Tengréla routes are used to smuggle artisanal and small-scale gold mined along the Bagoe River into Mali.[32] Additionally, in the aftermath of June 2015 Ansar al-Din attacks on the Malian villages of Misséni and Fakola (see below), in November Ivorian security forces discovered a weapons cache in Tengréla, presumably linked to the attacks. UN experts reported that networks have been trafficking weapons and ammunition in the area since at least 2012 (UNSC, 2012a; 2013a).

Aside from the three main axes described above, the Burkinabé town of Mangodara serves as part of a secondary smuggling route. The town, located about 26 km from the border, is regularly served by passenger bus service from Côte d'Ivoire. There are no customs or immigration authorities in Mangodara, however; border formalities are completed in Kouére, 81 km to the north-east. The border area around Mangodara is thus largely unregulated. The local gendarmerie conduct occasional patrols, but these suffer from a lack of sufficient fuel or vehicles, as well as from limited intelligence support.[33] This is supplemented by intelligence sometimes provided by the Dozo brotherhoods (hunters; see above) who patrol the forests along the border. This intelligence is only irregular, however, and is provided on the basis of goodwill or personal relationships and is not part of any formal agreement.[34]

As a result, smugglers and traffickers trading illicit goods between the two countries also use this area of the border. They bring goods over the borders and, avoiding mobile patrols, take them north-west to Banfora. Sources indicated that it was common for smugglers and traffickers to elude customs controls and mobile gendarmerie patrols and to intersect the main roads at Koutoura (to the west-north-west) or Kangounadeni (north-west) and proceed to Banfora.[35]

The Nigerien route is less used for the smuggling of explosives and seems to use Burkina Faso more as a transit corridor towards Mali and, to a lesser extent, western Niger. It passes through Benin and enters Burkina Faso at Fada-Ngourma. It then continues parallel to the border with Niger, through Dori, Djibo, and Gorom Gorom, to reach Mali and Niger.

The main smuggling route serving the local black market originates from Ghana and enters Burkina Faso at Pô and Zabré. On 2 April 2015 customs officials in Pô seized a vehicle coming from Ghana with a load of 250 kg of explosives, 200 pyrotechnic detonators, 350 metres of detonating cord, and five 50-litre jerry cans of cyanide (RTI, 2015; Burkina24, 2015). On that occasion members of the local population attacked the customs officers that had seized the truck, allowing the vehicle and its cargo to flee back to Ghana, where local officials retrieved it three weeks later (SIG, 2015). In 2016 police seized 100 kg of cannabis and 10,000 explosives charges in Pô that had come from Ghana (AIB, 2016). Several incidents involving explosives smuggling have occurred in Pô and Zabré, pushing the authorities of Ghana, Burkina Faso, Benin, and Togo to launch a joint operation in 2018 that resulted in the dismantling of a smuggling ring suspected of affiliation to terrorism that operated along the border area shared by the three countries in the twin cities of Cinkansé (Burkina Faso) and Cikassé (Togo) (AFP, 2018).

Flows

While tri-border trafficking rings are efficient, their reach is limited, extending from Bobo Dioulasso in south-western Burkina Faso to Bouaké in central Côte d'Ivoire (see Map 4). Generally, smuggled goods appear to be destined for domestic markets in the subregion. The limited reach does not translate to small amounts of such goods, however: the amount can be significant. For example, in one operation, Malian customs authorities interdicted a large shipment of marijuana believed to be en route from Ghana to local markets in Burkina Faso, Mali, or Senegal. It is thought that several hundred tonnes of cocoa, cashew nuts, and cotton are smuggled annually from Côte d'Ivoire to Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Mali.[36]

Drugs are often smuggled in the tri-border subregion. Malian officials described a large drug seizure in March 2018. Border patrols stopped a truck in Kadiana on its way from Tengréla, Côte d'Ivoire, to points further north.[37] Under a false floor at the bottom of the truck's cargo area officials found almost 5 tonnes of cannabis (see photo 5). According to the Malian customs officials, such concealment methods have been and continue to be used to smuggle a variety of goods, including arms and ammunition. This seizure seems likely to have resulted from an informant's tip-off, because otherwise these goods would have been difficult for customs agents to find. The driver escaped and the cargo's destination is unknown.[38]

Of particular concern to regional authorities is the trafficking of illicit weapons, which are often trafficked together with other smuggled goods such as gold or drugs. In Burkina Faso data reported by the Commission nationale de lutte contre la prolifération des armes légères shows that authorities mostly seized weapons together with drugs and with precious metals (UNODC, 2015, p. 137). Many of these weapons were Kalashnikov-pattern assault rifles.[39]

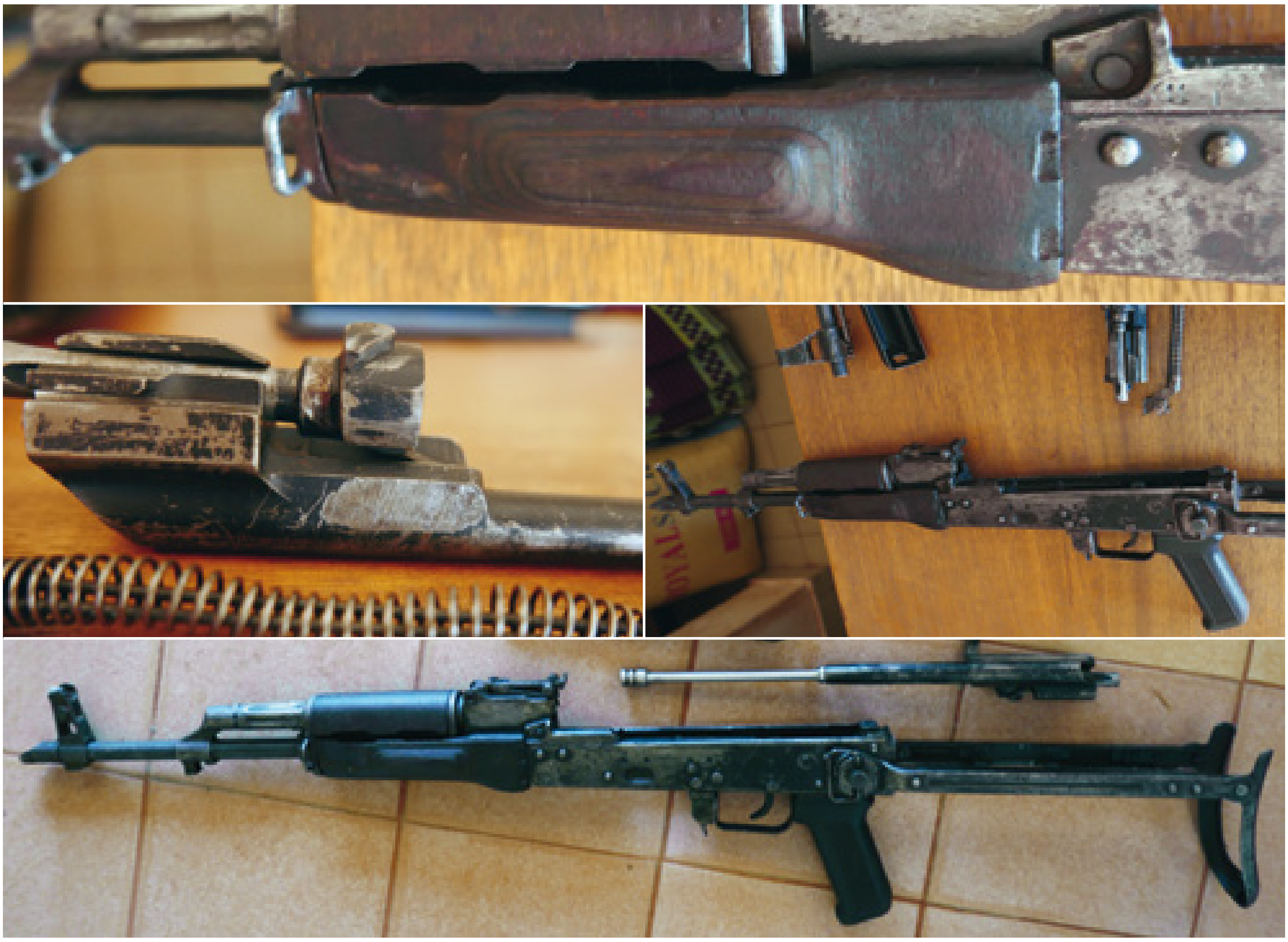
To a degree, informants confirm the linkages between arms trafficking and other forms of trafficking. They describe specific networks and individual trafficking ringleaders as specializing in certain goods: some networks smuggle commodities (sugar, coffee, or palm oil, for example), some specialize in medicines (genuine and counterfeit), while others smuggle drugs or guns.[40] It appears that the smuggled or trafficked goods are co-mingled at later stages of the trafficking routes and in trafficking hubs or regional

Box 1 Missing serial numbers: a sign of diversion?

The diversion of weapons from government stockpiles is a key issue in the wider region. Assault rifles circulating in Burkina Faso and Mali (for example, Type-56 or AKMS Kalashnikov-pattern rifles) have been found with erased serial numbers. The erasures appear to be both systematic and meant to obscure the weapons' origins: the serial numbers (usually visible on the receiver, receiver carrier, and bolt) are erased by machine, making tracing all but impossible (see photos 1–4). Rumours in Mali and Burkina Faso indicate that weapons with erased serial numbers are trafficked from Côte d'Ivoire, where specialized workshops reportedly erase numbers and markings in order to obscure their origin from government stocks. This is done because changes to Ivorian national policy resulted in improved marking of the country's stockpiles, allowing a particular weapon to be more easily traced back to the force that originally held it.[41]

Generally, the systematic erasure of serial numbers is indicative of diversion. Weapons stolen or recovered from defence and security forces during fighting would usually retain their serial numbers; there is no reason to obscure them, because the end users of the weapons would have no need to hide the source of a particular weapon.[42] In contrast, where a serial number could be used to identify the source of a weapon that was *not* lost in fighting, the removal of that serial number points to a desire to conceal its origin. Côte d'Ivoire's record of marking weapons with Economic Community of West African States markings, country ISO code, and specific units markings is notable. The careful, systematic, and complete erasure of serial numbers and identification marks indicates a degree of organization and awareness, lending credence to the rumours of Ivorian origins for such weapons. In addition, outside experts have verified cases of diversion from Ivorian stocks in the past (CAR, 2016). It seems clear that diversion from national stockpiles is occurring and likely to be ongoing, and is thus probably an important source of illicit weapons in the subregion.

Photos 1–4 A disassembled AKMS rifle with a folding stock*



* Note the partially visible 'circle-eleven' marking (top), hinting at Polish origin, and the visible marks where a machine has erased the serial number (top and bottom), suggesting diversion from government stockpiles (see Box 1). These photos were taken at the headquarters of the Service Régional de la Police Judiciaire, Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso.

Photo 5 Example of a concealed cavity used for smuggling*

* Here, authorities found 5 tonnes of cannabis hidden in the false flooring of a truck in Sikasso, Mali, in 2018.
Source: Provided to the authors by a confidential source, 2018

capitals. Security and law enforcement sources refer to a closer link between weapons trafficking and the smuggling of other goods. They report that items such as tobacco and counterfeit medicines overlap with weapons trafficking to a degree, because all these items originate from Ghana and Guinea. As noted above, authorities report that several drug seizures also involved the seizure of weapons, although it was unclear whether these weapons were part of smuggled cargo or were used to protect the cargo.[43]

Most trafficked weapons are transported using so-called 'ants trafficking' methods. Cargo is hidden in bags of charcoal, sugar, fabric, onions, etc. that are then transported in single bags on foot, by bicycle, or by motorcycle, or hidden inside luggage on bus trips. Burkinabé authorities reported finding a cargo of cannabis concealed in a larger cargo of charcoal, which they allegedly seized because of the distinctive smell of the drug.[44] Gendarmes also caught a trafficker with assault rifles hidden in bags of onions.[45] Weapons were also concealed in fuel barrels or fuel trucks, a method also observed in Nigeria.[46] Small-scale traffickers have even hidden weapons under their traditional robes (called '*boubou*'). One can disassemble a Russian-made Baïkal rifle into several parts, hide them under a *boubou*, and reassemble them into a fully functioning weapon once across the border, for example.[47]

In several instances, Dozo groups joined the efforts of local gendarmerie posts to curb trafficking activities, especially in cases when they saw these as a security threat. For example, in one instance several Dozo groups learned that armed bandits operating in areas under Dozo 'supervision' around Mangodara, Burkina Faso, were planning attacks. After the Dozo tipped off the authorities, gendarmes arrested the bandits, who were allegedly based in Kong, Côte d'Ivoire. Some 100 Kalashnikov-pattern rifles and three 25 kg bags of 7.62 ammunition were seized from a ringleader who was stockpiling weapons and ammunition for armed robbers.[48]

Cross-border smuggling: a case study

The process of smuggling in the tri-border subregion seems a straightforward one. A transporter described a typical run to smuggle sugar from Burkina Faso to Côte d'Ivoire to avoid taxation. The process began with a telephone call from a 'patron' or '*comerçant*'. The contact asked for help in unloading the sugar from a truck at a specified location, giving pertinent details: the overall weight of the cargo, the number of boxes or other containers, the date and time of the pick-up, the location of the delivery, etc.

The transporter explained that, depending on the size of the cargo, more than one transporter may be engaged or the original transporter may be required to ask a sufficient number of his friends or colleagues to help make the delivery. In this case, the entire truckload of sugar required about 80 motorcycles to transport it. After receiving the initial call, the transporter organized sufficient numbers of friends, colleagues, other drivers, or even teams of drivers he knew to be both trustworthy and skilled enough to complete the job.

At the appointed time the crew of transporters arrived at the specified location in small groups, to avoid arousing suspicion. The crew then unloaded the truckload of sugar, breaking it into manageable portions. Each driver loaded two 150 kg bags of sugar onto his motorcycle, dispersing the 24 tonnes of sugar into 80 loads of 300 kg for transport through the bush.

From the truck, the transporters travelled various routes across the flat savannah, using dried out river beds and other natural camouflage, until they were able to safely use more formal routes. But before they drove onto formal routes they would split up into smaller groups, again to avoid detection. These smaller groups drove slowly along the main roads to Bouaké, in Côte d'Ivoire, where they delivered the sugar to its intended recipient.

The transporter who organized the trip declined to give an exact figure for what he had been paid for the trip. He did say that, as was common, he had drawn up a budget for the *comerçant* to cover fuel, food, and bribes for the transport of the sugar. Each driver received XOF 25,000 (USD 42) in advance of the trip to cover his individual costs. The remainder of the fee was then paid to the transporters upon their arrival at the destination in Bouaké.

This trip was a typical one, according to the transporters interviewed for this Briefing Paper (see Box 2). The same modus operandi is used for smuggling sugar, textiles, and counterfeit medicines, and for arms trafficking. The only difference in transporting ammunition or hunting rifles as compared to sugar was the identity of the *comerçant* who employed the traffickers.

Drivers of arms trafficking

There is steady demand for arms and ammunition in the region. Arms trafficking for local consumption related to hunting, self-defence, status, and local demand from criminals is important. Dozo, customary police, bandits ('*coupeurs de route*' in French), terrorist groups, and gold miners all demand weapons. Terrorist groups reportedly active in Burkina Faso and Mali (JNIM, IS-WAP, Ansaroul Islam) use heavy weapons, technicals (four-wheel-drive vehicles on which fully automatic firearms are mounted), and other modern weapons, while community-based militias such as Dozo or Koglweogo mostly use artisanal arms such as the 12-gauge hunting rifle based on Russian Baïkal and

Saiga designs (Mangan and Nowak, 2018). Some of these weapons are locally sourced; others are provided through small-scale trafficking networks and reportedly originate, among other sources, in neighbouring Ghana and Guinea. Ammunition is a key expendable and 12-gauge shells are frequently smuggled across the borders in the areas surveyed.

Overall demand for arms and ammunition is increasing, and a number of factors are causing this increase, which are discussed below.

Banditry

Bandits (*coupeurs de route*) are armed robbers who target either commercial or private vehicles along regional roads. Roads in Côte d'Ivoire (for example, between Ferkessédougou and Ouangolodougou), Burkina Faso (along the route from Mangodara via Kouére and Loropéni to Gaoua), and Mali (between Misséni and Sikasso) are all known to be the hunting grounds of highway bandits.

Robbers are often heavily armed and have attacked security forces in attempts to obtain assault rifles and ammunition.[52] These armed robbers play a role in driving demand for arms trafficking in the subregion, partly for their own use, and partly for the self-defence of the travellers they target. They tend to carry a mixture of assault rifles, shotguns, and craft-produced weapons. The tracing of the weapons recovered from captured bandits indicates that their weaponry appears to come primarily from Côte d'Ivoire[53] (see also Box 1).

In Burkina Faso members of Dozo hunting brotherhoods report that gangs of highway bandits operate along and across the subregion's borders. They claim that these gangs are managed by ringleaders who protect them and store their weapons and ammunition when they are not required.[54] The trafficking and stockpiling of weapons and ammunition feeding this form of banditry are likely to negatively impact the security of subregional communities. They also damage the subregional economy, preventing some forms of trade and seriously increasing costs for others.[55]

Self-defence groups and traditional hunters

Hunters and self-defence groups are other drivers of demand for illicit weapons. In interviews defence and security forces members frequently mentioned the issue of trafficking linked to hunting or the activities of traditional non-state security providers such as the Dozo. This *confrérie* (brotherhood) has deep traditions and members are present across the entire border region surveyed for this paper. Leaders of the brotherhood have ties and direct contact with their peers in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali. Cross-border meetings are frequently held, and both hunters and Dozo move freely across the bush and uncontrolled border areas. Although the role of the Dozo is to provide security, their and hunters' demand for rifles and ammunition feed into the trafficking of such items.[56]

Photo 6 Hunting rifles—likely 12-gauge shotguns—seized by Malian authorities*

* This photo was taken during interviews with gendarmerie members, Sikasso, Mali, May 2018.

Box 2 Three lessons learnt from the Korhogo smuggling ring

Lesson 1: Use whatever works

The organizers of cross-border smuggling from Korhogo, Côte d'Ivoire, to Burkina Faso rely on several ways to transport goods across the border. While motorcycle-based ants trade remains the most widely used method, Burkinabé authorities have on multiple occasions seized arms, explosives, and chemical precursors hidden in regular passenger transport (minivans) or trucks in 2019.[49] Using different smuggling channels is a strategy to minimize losses in case of interception by the authorities.

Lesson 2: Specialization

Members of the ants trade transport whatever is required, but the trade is organized according to the type of commodity being transported (fuel, counterfeit drugs, artisanal arms, illicit arms, cash, gold, explosives).[50] In practical terms, specialization means that the financiers of drug smuggling will not deal with gold; likewise, dealers in artisanal arms such as those demanded by hunters and bandits will not be a significant source of the type of modern, factory-produced arms required by terrorist groups, while arms dealers supplying modern weapons will not bother to deal in artisanal arms. Traffic is centred in state capitals or major cities, from which goods are then dispatched to the intended end users. The only commodity smuggled by the Korhogo ring that is sold directly at points of entry into another country to satisfy local demand is fuel.

Lesson 3: Structure

Trafficking from coastal areas across borders to Burkina Faso and Mali is easy and thus run by a plethora of smuggling rings. This diversifies the transporters and limits losses if a ring is disrupted. Likewise, ringleaders can easily adapt to a change in government controls or the security situation that disrupts smuggling patterns (as seen in lesson 1, above).[51] Financiers in major centres need to be more organized and their operations better structured in order to manage the distribution channels and deal with challenges such as increased controls and the need to pay bribes to avoid them. Ants trade smuggling rings operating from coastal areas to Burkina Faso and Mali are thus at this stage replaced by more organized crime cartels; likewise, the crossing of borders from the Sahel to the Sahara desert and up to the Mediterranean requires a further degree of organization and structure, which only well-established transnational criminal networks can offer (OECD, 2018).

Dozo are not the only community groups that may be driving demand. Koglweogo ('guardians of the forest' in the Mooré language) in Burkina Faso are another model of community security providers that were mentioned during field interviews. These groups have operated in Burkina Faso since the beginning of 1990s and were originally mainly composed of local farmers. Dozo, police, and the gendarmerie in southern Burkina Faso do not endorse the Koglweogo model of community vigilantism, however, because they consider its members to be too violent, and to have too many links with criminals and jihadists.[57]

Notwithstanding, after the escalation of the terrorist threat in Burkina Faso in 2016 the Koglweogo became a centrepiece of a parallel security system to help strained Burkinabé regular forces fight banditry and terrorism, and to date there are no less than 4,400 Koglweogo groups (each with at least 21 members) active throughout Burkina Faso (van Vyve, 2018).

Artisanal and small-scale gold mining

Artisanal and small-scale gold miners, locally called '*orpailleurs*', create a demand for weapons for self-defence and protection from possible attacks.[58]

The wealth generated by gold mining, its easy transportability, and the availability of weapons tends to make the communities around the mines insecure, due to the multiplicity of armed actors that congregate seeking to engage in either mining, criminality, or the protection of mines. Criminals seek weapons to prey on the miners, and the miners themselves seek weapons to protect themselves and the gold they have mined, both of which increase demand for illicit weapons. And miners themselves may turn to robbery when their income from mining declines, which also fuels demand for arms. The towns of Kadiolo (Mali) and Kadiana (Burkina Faso) are key areas of gold exploitation that are considered hubs of insecurity and banditry. Local gendarmerie posts are notified of at least one security incident per day in areas where illegal artisanal and small-scale mining is taking place. Patrolling these areas remains challenging for authorities, given their lack of personnel or other necessary resources.[59]

Impacts of arms trafficking

The relationship between communities, security providers, and traffickers is complex, particularly because ties among communities reach across borders.[60] Police and gendarmes are often from the villages they patrol and rely on community information networks to investigate crime and patrol areas safely. Similarly, traffickers and transporters rely on their own community networks for the protection of their business and activities. In such communities, armed men in uniforms can impress or scare community members.

Like the police, arms traffickers are often resident in the communities they 'serve'. Their relationship with the community is based on either passive or active collaboration. Although members of the population can be aware of an arms trafficker's illicit business and the potential negative impact of the trafficked weapons, they often do nothing; at worst, community members may aid the traffickers. Either choice is based on the preservation of the community, whether its relationships or its economy, or both. Most border communities commonly accept that trafficking and smuggling occur and that members of their own communities are involved. Burkinabé judicial police believe that the traffickers have a network of informants ('*passeurs*') they rely on to assist them in their movements with illicit goods (warning of a police presence, for example).[61]

Traffickers and criminals also generally have trans-border ties with families and friends. Such ties make collaboration easy and more frequent, hampering the enforcement work of defence and security forces. At least two incidents in the tri-border region confirm this assumption and illustrate the challenges posed by the circulation of weapons and ammunition across borders in the studied region.

In 2015, the town of Samorogouan in Burkina Faso was attacked by a group of approximately 50 jihadists from Mali who killed three Burkinabé gendarmes (Nsaibia, 2019).[62] Police believe that, rather than coming directly from Mali to carry out the attack, the assailants had lived among villagers in the area for a month before the assault, and that the villagers' collaboration was not coerced.[63]

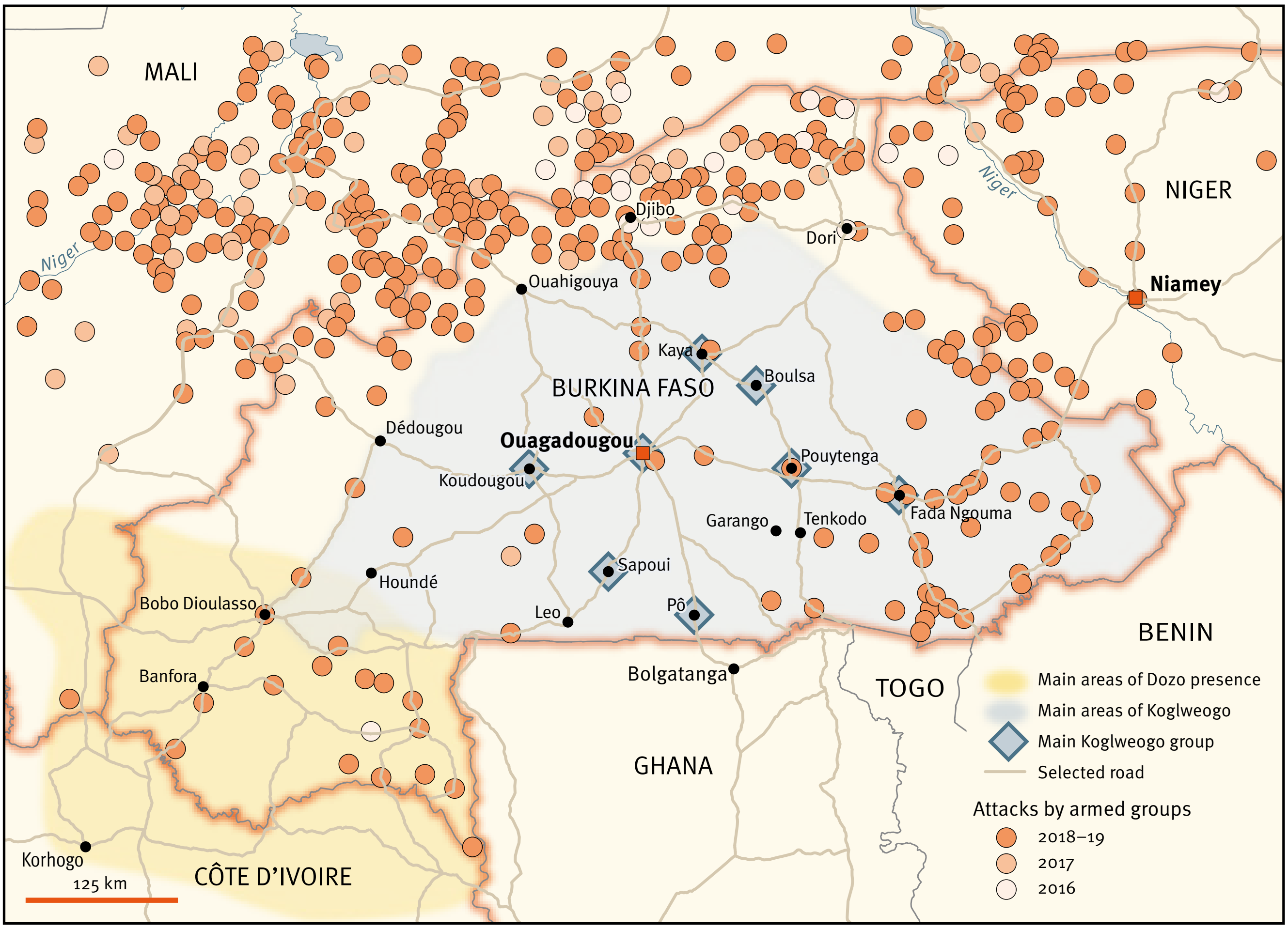
Also in 2015, jihadists belonging to Ansar al-Din attacked the two villages of Misséni and Fakola in Mali, along the border with Côte d'Ivoire. Here the link between the weapons used in these attacks and trafficked weapons is clearer. Analysis and evidence gathered by the UN Group of Experts tentatively indicated that between the two attacks the perpetrators sought shelter in the region of Tengréla in Côte d'Ivoire, and this hospitality was not coerced either (UNSC, 2016). Furthermore, the UN Group of Experts concluded that some of the ammunition used during the attacks had previously been found in Côte d'Ivoire and that the arms used in the attacks were recovered by Ivorian police in a cache in Tengréla, Côte d'Ivoire, and at least one weapon had certainly been diverted from Ivorian stockpiles and had been marked for destruction under the national DDR programme.

At least partly in response to these attacks and to a general rise in tensions in the tri-border area and particularly those further north, on 21 January 2020 the Burkinabé Parliament authorized the recruitment of civilian volunteers under the authority of the Ministry of Defence to assist regular troops in the fight against armed groups. The volunteers will undergo a 14-day period of training covering armaments, basic tactics (ambushes, observation posts, etc.), civic and moral education, rules of discipline, arms use, and respect for human rights (Zongo, 2020). The law stipulates that the volunteers must not belong to political organizations and will undergo vetting to ensure that they are not linked to terrorist groups. The law is silent, however, about the affiliation of volunteers to self-defence groups such as the Koglweogo, Dozo, 'security and defence committees', or other less structured ones, which in practice will be a prerequisite, given the short training provided by the Ministry of Defence. This law thus spurs a concrete risk of giving official credit to paramilitary groups, which will inevitably increase instances of intercommunal violence in the long term, a risk also highlighted by authoritative national press reports in 2019 (L'Observateur Paalga, 2019). Any rise in violence of this kind will inevitably result in greater demand for illicit weapons, thus increasing weapons-trafficking activities.

Map 5 shows the degree of overlap of areas where Dozo and Koglweogo groups are active and sites of attacks by armed groups, suggesting that such attacks likely encourage increased Dozo and Koglweogo activity, and therefore increase demand for arms, whether licit or illicit.

To some degree these local groups (whether newly organized, like the self-defence committees in Burkina Faso, or more traditional, like the Dozo and Tomboloma)[64] will increase the risk of human rights violations as they carry out their 'duties'. Officially, none of the groups has a law enforcement role. At most, they are formally tasked only with providing intelligence that would allow police or gendarmes to perform their duties. They might also be called upon to help law enforcement by guiding officials in territory that they (the local groups) are more familiar with. But there are many instances where these local groups confront, arrest, and even punish 'offenders'. Although their procedures in doing so

Map 5 Areas of activity of Dozo and Koglweogo and attacks by armed groups



Sources: Da Cunha Dupuy and Quidelleur (2018); ACLED (2019); Mangan and Nowak (2018); updated by the authors

may conform to traditional rules and laws, the guarantees of due process, the prohibition on harsh punishments, and limitations on the use of force that bind police and gendarmes are not present. In the worst cases, this has resulted in deaths (Jezequel, 2019). Since these groups (whether newly organized or traditional) perform surrogate law enforcement activities, their role in relation to arms trafficking in their areas of operation becomes highly problematic, since, on the evidence given above, many of them will either be involved in arms trafficking themselves, be aware of arms-trafficking activities, or be actively or passively sympathetic to arms traffickers.

In another attack in January 2019, Koglweogo targeted members of the nearby Fulani herder community in reprisal for jihadists' killing of the village chief and six other notables in Yirgou the previous day. The residents of Yirgou 'blamed the herders for sheltering the men who attacked them the day before' (Al Jazeera, 2019). The attacks on the Fulani continued undisturbed for three days, killing dozens of people and displacing more than 6,000 (RFI, 2019a; 2019b; ACLED, 2019; Traoré, 2019).[65] Although intracommunal massacres between Fulani nomadic herders and settled communities are relatively common in neighbouring Mali,[66] Yirgou was the first such clash in Burkina Faso, followed in March by other such attacks against Fulani villages, which left populations deeply affected (Jeune Afrique, 2019). Again, direct links between arms trafficking and this kind of violence are difficult to trace precisely. Notwithstanding, the widespread availability of arms and ammunitions in a situation where citizens' perception of state-provided security services has dwindled increases the risk of the violent settlement of community tensions. This scenario risks fuelling a vicious circle where the availability of arms sparks insecurity, which in turn pressures communities to seek more firepower for the purposes of self-defence or retaliation.

Community collaboration with arms traffickers, among other things, may also engender tensions with security and defence forces, and sometimes even confrontations. Where authorities suspect collaboration, they may stigmatize the community as a whole, rather than only those actively aiding the traffickers. In such cases, the possibility of harsh, collective punishments, unwarranted or arbitrary detention, or the use of excessive force is heightened. Leaders of Fulani-dominated areas have voiced this concern publicly in the three countries examined. Although to date no direct evidence has been identified to justify this concern, given the undoubted and probably growing presence of arms traffickers in the tri-border subregion, the possibilities of these kinds of incidents and the lack of trust of some communities in law enforcement officers or security forces have a potential negative impact that should not be neglected.

Conclusion

Smuggling and trafficking remain constants in the tri-border subregion. Both smuggling and trafficking activities generate revenue for local communities. Community members do not even have to be smugglers themselves: they can act as informants, providers of storage, and subcontractors for the repair of motorcycles, etc. Smuggling and trafficking are not guaranteed economic drivers, however: they also provide incentives for road bandits (who rob smugglers or 'tax' their cargoes), and unscrupulous authorities (who extract bribes, etc.), among others. And as the economic and security trends in the subregion change in response to changing circumstances—gold mining, the rising jihadist presence, continued political instability, etc.—the likelihood grows that the routes and abilities once dedicated to more 'benign' smuggling might be bent towards more damaging forms of smuggling or arms trafficking.

In contrast to northern Mali and Niger, the tri-border subregion currently has low levels of arms and ammunition trafficking, with limited quantities of small arms, artisanal weapons, and their ammunition moving through the area. The level of organization and violence that smugglers and traffickers use is also lower than that further north, but this will not necessarily remain the case. As armed groups are pushed from their traditional bases or look to expand south, the tri-border region will present an increasingly tempting and potentially fertile ground for such expansion.

The area lying between the regions of Sikasso (Mali), Korhogo (Côte d'Ivoire), and Bobo Dioulasso (Burkina Faso) has an economic potential for cotton growing, livestock rearing, and gold mining, all sectors that generate predictable revenues, which armed or terrorist groups would be interested in controlling. Furthermore, on multiple occasions terrorist groups have demonstrated their ability to strike well south of their traditional areas of established influence.[67] Thus far, these have been sporadic acts that do not suggest a general desire to establish a presence in the southern border areas.

The impact of arms trafficking on communities is significant, as greater demand for arms and ammunition translates into a greater availability. In turn, this can mean that local conflict escalates, and armed violence replaces more traditional (and peaceful) forms of dispute resolution. Communities are thus central to the fight against arms trafficking. Community members are most familiar with the areas in which they live, including both the physical landscape and its inhabitants. As such, they are most likely to know if and when something is about to happen. Several initiatives in Burkina Faso and Mali seek to include communities more actively and more formally in assisting authorities with security provision. These efforts range from enlisting traditional hunters (Dozo) or tribal-based groups (for example, Tomboloma in Mali) in special 'brigades' of hunters (between five and ten in each brigade) that provide support such as information and intelligence to the regular forces, to more formal initiatives such as the 'Police de proximité' in Burkina Faso.[68]

In an area such as the tri-border subregion, with its many axes of smuggling and illicit trade, increased demand for arms and ammunition represents a real danger. Authorities have recognized this danger and are working to counter it.[69] But merely arming more community groups or increasing government patrols is unlikely to solve the looming problems. Instead, it is necessary to engage with the smuggler and transporter communities to limit their cooperation and interaction with those trafficking weapons, drugs, etc. Governments must educate smugglers and transporters on the dangers of arms trafficking to both the participants and their communities. And any enforcement activity undertaken in the subregion needs to be carefully balanced against the possibility of disrupting income streams to already poor border communities, lest the knock-on effects push some actors deeper into the criminal economy to make a living. At a minimum, enforcement activity must be combined with initiatives to restore community security.

There are clear security and human rights risks in leaving subregional governments to tackle and 'solve' these problems on their own. International and regional efforts to curb arms trafficking and restore community security should include the subregion in their thinking and planning. Interested parties can build on existing capacity, provide education and training to support existing institutions, and help strengthen national and community-level actors to deal with these complex issues in sustainable and context-sensitive ways.

Furthermore, the three countries of the tri-border region are all heading for potential changes to their current governing power structures. In Côte d'Ivoire, incumbent president Alassane Ouattara is running for a third term in October, an act whose validity is contested by all other political parties. In the event of low voter turnout and possible ballot-related violence (as was the case in the election of 2015), the legitimacy of the Ivorian governing elite could be severely weakened. Burkina Faso will also have presidential elections in the fall. The current security situation in the north and east of the country could severely jeopardize voter participation, thus calling into question the legitimacy of the result. This is not to mention the potential impact that the situation in Côte d'Ivoire could have on the Burkinabé elections: with a large number of Burkinabé citizens living and voting in Côte d'Ivoire, that potential is real. Finally, in Mali, the current transitional government (put in place after the coup), facing a climate of mistrust between its constituent civilian and military components, will need to successfully negotiate with ECOWAS to lift the post-coup sanctions that body imposed. Any or all of these uncertainties may adversely affect the individual and collective ability of the three governments to 'control' the tri-border area. ●

Abbreviations and acronyms

CNLPAL Commission nationale de lutte contre la prolifération des armes légères

DDR Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration

FDS Forces de Défense et Sécurité

FN Forces Nouvelles

FRCI Forces Républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire

IED Improvised explosive device

IS Islamic State

IS-WAP Islamic State—West Africa Province

JNIM Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin

MINUSMA Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

XOF West African CFA franc(s)

USD United States dollar(s)

Notes

1 See 'Eighth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat', at S/2019/103, para. 78).

2 For the purposes of this Briefing Paper, the tri-border subregion is defined as the area encompassing the north of Côte d'Ivoire, the southern portion of Mali (roughly below Route Nationale No. 7), and south-western Burkina Faso. See Map 1 for an overview of the region.

3 They are often described by the umbrella term '*dioula*' or 'trader' in the Mandé language common to these groups. See also the section on 'Methodology and terminology', below.

4 The Forces Républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire (FRCI) is the army that President Alassane Ouattara created at the height of the post-electoral crisis in 2011. It comprised former FN members and elements of the former national army, the Forces de Défense et Sécurité (FDS), that sided with President-elect Ouattara. Former FDS general and FN military commander Soumaila Bakayoko was appointed FRCI chief of staff.

5 UNSC (2012a; 2012b; 2012c; 2013a; 2013c; 2014a; 2014b; 2015; 2016).

6 On 3 September 2019 Gen. Gilbert Diendéré, chief of the Régiment de Sécurité Présidentielle, and Gen. Djibril Bassolé, chief of staff of the gendarmerie, were sentenced to 20 and ten years in jail, respectively,

as masterminds of the failed 2015 coup d’état (*Le Monde*, 2019). There are widespread reports indicating the involvement of Ivorian political figures in providing materiel, intelligence, and logistics to plotters of the coup.

7 In particular, after the killing of 24 Burkinabé troops in Koutougou (Soum province) on 19 August 2019, troops protested vehemently in Ouagadougou’s Camp Guillaume against what they considered as poor leadership and engagement from their officers. Numbers of reports do suggest that intelligence on a likely attack targeting armed forces was gathered at least a day before the attack, but ignored. Another element causing resentment among the troop was the fact that the bodies of casualties were only collected several hours after the incident, which is unacceptable to Islamic moral and burial customs (author interviews with security experts and members of Burkina Faso’s armed forces, Ouagadougou, August 2019).

8 JNIM (Group for the Defence of Islam and Muslims) is an umbrella coalition of al-Qaeda-aligned groups (Ansar al-Din, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, al-Mourabitoun, and Katibat Macina), headed by Ansar al-Din leader Iyad Ag Ghali. JNIM announced its existence in March 2017 in a video release featuring the leaders of its component parts, who stated their joint aim of driving foreign (especially French and UN) forces out of Mali, and imposing JNIM’s version of Islamic law.

9 Since May 2019 IS’s official communication channels Amaq and Al-Naba began to attribute insurgent activities in the Liptako–Gourma region (the tri-border region between Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger), to IS-WAP. This announcement constituted a major development in the terrorist group’s organization, because Liptako–Gourma is very far from IS-WAP’s area of operations in the Lake Chad basin (Postings, 2019).

10 JNIM, Ansaroul Islam, and IS-WAP fighters are typically armed with heavy weapons, ‘technicals’ (four-wheel-drive vehicles on which fully automatic firearms are mounted), or materiel from Libya (Assanvo et al., 2019).

11 On 24 and 25 March 2016 violence erupted in Bouna, the major city of north-eastern Côte d’Ivoire, and neighbouring villages opposing Lobi farmers to Peul herders, which caused 17 deaths and 30 wounded and displaced more than 2,000 people. Yirgou is a village mostly populated by members of the Mossi ethnic group, in Sanmatenga province of Centre-Nord region, 200 km north of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, where reprisals against Peul over the killing of village notables spread over three full days, resulting in the killing of at least 49 people and forcing 6,000 to flee their villages.

12 Author interviews with customs officers, Banfora, Bobo Dioulasso (Burkina Faso), and Sikasso (Mali), May 2018.

13 Author interviews with customs officers in Mali and Burkina Faso, MINUSMA officers in Mali, and embassy sources in Côte d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso, 2018.

14 Wattao died on 6 January 2020 in New York, supposedly of advanced, untreated diabetes (Mieu and Duhem, 2020). The financial aspects of gold smuggling have probably been taken over by his father, who has always managed Wattao’s business in Doropo. Control of the armed elements in Doropo might have been taken over by Wattao’s brother, Morou Ouattara, also known as ‘Commando Atchengué’. However, the loyalty of the bulk of Wattao’s strongmen in Séguéla and Abidjan is at present unknown.

15 The pre-financing of artisanal and small-scale mining operations by a financier (called a ‘patron’, ‘pit owner’, ‘sponsor’, or ‘*businessaire*’ in the area under study) is a widely diffused model to overcome the inability of informal miners to access formal credit to finance their operations. The lender will thus bind informal miners to his service for an undetermined time until the loans are repaid. These loans, however, are structured in a way that effectively makes repayment impossible: for example, the lender will take into account the allowances given to artisanal and small-scale miners such as food, fuel for pumps, and other hidden fees and retain part of the mining yield as compensation for these allowances; this in turn leaves little for the miners to sell (which they can only do at prices imposed by the financiers that represent 65–70 per cent of market value), and they thus need to borrow more money to continue mining.

16 Author interviews with key informants on the Burkina Faso–Côte d’Ivoire–Mali border, May 2018. See also Mangan and Nowak (2018).

17 In contrast, the hubs for trafficking heading from Africa to Europe (via Algeria to Spain or via Libya to Italy) originate in the Sahara–Sahel region in Niger (Agadez) and Mali (Tessalit). These smuggling axes are controlled by established smugglers with well-established networks. Well-known jihadists are among the most prominent smugglers, including:

- Mokhtar Belmokhtar, the former leader of al-Mourabitoun, one of the forerunners of JNIM (see above). Belmokhtar is also known as the ‘ Mr Marlboro’ for his cigarette smuggling or ‘One-eyed’ for his appearance. He was rumoured to have been killed by an air strike in either 2015 or 2016, although his death has not been confirmed;
- Iyad ag Ghali, the current leader of JNIM and Belmokhtar’s former deputy; and
- Amahdou Koufa, a prominent member of JNIM and former leader of the Macina Liberation Front (another precursor group of JNIM).

These three men have all been involved in well-known terror attacks, including the In Amenas attack (Algeria, 2013) and the Grand Bassam attack (Côte d’Ivoire, 2016).

18 Author interviews with gendarmes, border agency personnel, and traffickers, Banfora, Bobo Dioulasso, and Mangodara, Burkina Faso, May 2018.

19 Northern and eastern Burkina Faso lie on two major trafficking corridors: the trafficking axis from coastal countries in the Gulf of Guinea to the Mediterranean, and a Niger-to-Mali corridor in the north coveted by terrorist groups to facilitate their operations (see Map 3). Criminal networks responsible for illicit trafficking from the Gulf of Guinea to the Mediterranean in the 1990s and early years of the first decade of the 21st century are the likely precursors of current jihadist movements that operate in Mali and Burkina Faso. For example, before being jihadists, Mokhtar Belmokhtar (see note 17) was a well-known international trafficker (*BBC News*, 2015) and Iyad ag Ghali (see note 16) served as an intermediary in the release of Western hostages held by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb’s precursor group (US State Department, 2013). During Blaise Compaoré’s regime, international organized criminal groups were left free to transit through Burkina Faso’s abovementioned eastern and northern traffic corridors to reach their intended primary destinations in Niger and Mali, and eventually Libya and Algeria. Interviews by the authors over a 14-month period, the literature, and UN reports suggest that current terrorist movements active in Burkina Faso are not interested in establishing a caliphate in the country. These groups are most likely trying to reassert their control over trafficking corridors that the Compaoré regime left free for their use.

20 Apprentices learn about the transporter business while assisting the owner or main driver of the vehicle. The ultimate goal is to be able to drive buses or trucks themselves at a later stage.

21 The term ‘Dozo’ refers to a brotherhood (in French: *confrérie*) of hunters who provide sustenance to their communities. These Dozo often play an informal role of providing community security and guarding markets, homes, or businesses. They also man security roadblocks and conduct patrols to fight crime and violence affecting their communities (Hellweg, 2009, p. 38).

22 Author interview with chief Dozo, Mangodara, Burkina Faso, 9 May 2018.

23 One young person interviewed for this report claimed to have been a former FN fighter who had served under Comzone Losseni Fofana (called ‘Loss’) in Duekoué during the conflict (author interviews with two transporters, Niangoloko, Burkina Faso, 13 May 2018).

24 Author interview with two transporters, Niangoloko, Burkina Faso, 13 May 2018.

25 Author interview with two transporters, Niangoloko, Burkina Faso, 13 May 2018.

26 Author interview with two transporters, Niangoloko, Burkina Faso, 13 May 2018.

27 Author interviews with artisanal and small-scale miners, Ouagadougou, August 2019.

28 The authors undertook a series of phone interviews with sources familiar with the area to update the findings on axes 1 and 3. These interviews suggest that the patterns of trafficking and smuggling identified in this paper continue unabated and that the previously identified perpetrators are still operating. It is nonetheless recommended that a field visit should be made to the areas in question to verify the situation there.

29 Malian customs officials do have a truck scanner located at their post in Sikasso, some 100 km from the Zégoua border post.

30 Author interviews with members of the Korhogo smuggling ring, Niangoloko, Burkina Faso, May 2018.

31 Author interviews with two transporters, Niangoloko, Burkina Faso, 13 May 2018. It is estimated that between 20 and 30 motorcycles operate from Niangoloko.

32 Gold is present and mined on both sides of the Côte d'Ivoire–Mali border. Perseus Mining, an Australian company, operates an industrial gold-mining project in Sissengué employing some artisanal miners from the area. Perseus security managers are aware of the trafficking and other issues, including terrorist threats and radicalism in the area.

33 Author interviews with gendarmerie officers, Mangodara, Burkina Faso, May 2018.

34 Author interviews with gendarmerie officers and a Dozo, Mangodara, Burkina Faso, May 2018.

35 Author interviews with gendarmerie officers and a Dozo, Mangodara, Burkina Faso, May 2018.

36 See, for example UNSC (2009a; 2009b; 2016). It should be noted that discussions over smuggling from Côte d'Ivoire to Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Mali are found in most UN Group of Experts on Côte d'Ivoire reports issued between 2009 and 2016, so these examples are by no means the only ones.

37 Author interview with customs officials, Sikasso, Mali, 15 May 2018.

38 Author interview with customs officials, Sikasso, Mali, 15 May 2018. The destination of the cannabis cargo was unknown at the time of this interview.

39 The UNODC firearms study of 2015 put the figure at 40 per cent of weapons seized annually (UNODC, 2015, p. 17).

40 Author interviews with a group of transporters, Niangoloko, Burkina Faso, 8 May 2018.

41 Author interview with Service Régional de la Police Judiciaire personnel, Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso, 11 May 2018.

42 Author interview with Eaux et Forêts personnel, Sikasso, Mali, 14 May 2018.

43 Author interviews with gendarmerie officers, Banfora and Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso, and Sikasso, Mali, May 2018.

44 Author interview with gendarmerie officers, Banfora, Burkina Faso, 8 May 2018.

45 The number of assault rifles seized is unknown (author interview with a police officer, Mangodara, Burkina Faso, 9 May 2018).

46 Author interview with gendarmerie officers, Banfora, Burkina Faso, 8 May 2018.

47 Author interview with a police officer, Mangodara, Burkina Faso, 9 May 2018.

48 Author interview with a Dozo, Mangodara, Burkina Faso, 9 May 2018.

49 Author interviews with Office Burkinabé des Chargeurs and Interpol Ouagadougou personnel, August 2019.

50 Author interview with members of the Korhogo smuggling ring, Niangoloko, Burkina Faso, May 2018.

51 Author interview with gendarmerie officers and a Dozo, Mangodara, Burkina Faso, and with customs officers, Sikasso, Mali, May 2018.

52 Author interview with gendarmerie officers, Banfora, Burkina Faso, May 2018.

53 Author interview with a police officer, Mangodara, Burkina Faso, 9 May 2018.

54 Author interview with a Dozo, Mangodara, Burkina Faso, 9 May 2018.

55 For example, during a research trip for the project from which this Briefing Paper was derived, the research team was unable to visit Gaoua, Burkina Faso, by road using the road from Mangodara that passes through Kouére and Loropéni. The road is a well-known haunt of road bandits and all traffic along that route is subject to attack and robbery, thus preventing goods and people from safely using it. The only alternatives add substantial time, distance, and cost to the route (see Map 4).

56 Key informant interviews with gendarmes, Banfora, Mangodara, and Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso, May 2018.

57 Key informant interviews with gendarmes, police, and Dozo, Mangodara, Banfora, and Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso, May 2018.

58 Artisanal and small-scale miners reportedly prefer handguns, especially 9 mm semi-automatic weapons commonly referred to as 'PAs' (for '*pistolet automatique*'; French for 'automatic pistol'). The work of these miners also creates demand for detonators and explosives, and there are reports that such items are among the things now smuggled to gold-mining areas together with weapons and ammunition (author interview with a police officer, Mangodara, Burkina Faso, 9 May 2018).

59 Author interview with gendarmerie officers, Sikasso, Mali, 15 May 2018.

60 Author interview with gendarmerie officers, Sikasso, Mali, 15 May 2018.

61 Author interview with Service Régional de la Police Judiciaire personnel, Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso, 11 May 2018.

62 Initially, Burkinabé officials thought that participants in the failed 2015 coup against the new Burkinabé authorities carried out the attack (AFP, 2015; Reuters, 2015).

63 Author interview with police officers, Banfora, Burkina Faso, 10 May 2018.

64 Tomboloma are custodians of traditional law in Mali. In some informal mining areas they also serve as mine 'managers', often working in conjunction with Dozo, who provide security for the mines.

65 The number of casualties of the Yirgou massacres is still debated. Official government communiqués stated that there were 49 victims; the Union nationale des Rugga du Burkina (an association of herders) announced that it had identified 110 victims (Douce, 2019); while another association, the Collectif contre l'impunité et la stigmatisation des communautés, claimed that there were 210 victims (Barry, 2020). On 12 January participants in a march against intercommunal violence that took place in Ouagadougou put the death toll at 72 victims (Jeune Afrique and AFP, 2019).

66 On the same day as the attack on Yirgou, a group of Dozo attacked the Peul village of Koulogon in Mali, killing 36 people and burning down 173 shacks and 59 of the 61 granaries (UN News, 2019).

67 See, for example, the attacks in Grand Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire (2015), Fakola and Misséni, Mali (2015), and in Nazinga and 'W' national parks, southern Burkina Faso (2019).

68 The 'Police de proximité' were established in Burkina Faso by presidential decree as a way for communities to be involved in informal information gathering and thus help increase their security. The establishing document charges members of this 'unit' with taking care of the safety and security of their communities through intelligence gathering and actual intervention in clear cases of law breaking. Police de proximité units are visited by Burkinabé police monthly for discussions about the current security status of the community in question and possible issues that need more attention (author interview with police members, Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso, May 2018).

69 One example of these efforts was the high-level meeting that inaugurated the Sikasso–Korhogo–Bobo Dioulasso special economic zone (ZES SIKOBO) in May 2018, which the authors were fortunate to attend. While the stated objective of the ZES SIKOBO is to contribute to social stability through the creation of an integrated West African megalopolis with a modern, competitive, and diversified economy based mainly on agroforestry, it also addresses ways to curb trafficking and improve security in the tri-border subregion (Maliweb.net, 2018a; 2018b).

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