African Warrior Culture:
The Symbolism and Integration of the Avtomat Kalashnikova throughout Continental Africa

By
Kevin Andrew Laurell

Senior Thesis in History
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona
June 10, 2014

Grade:
Advisor: Dr. Amanda Podany
"I'm proud of my invention, but I'm sad that it is used by terrorists... I would prefer to have invented a machine that people could use and that would help farmers with their work - for example a lawnmower." - Mikhail Kalashnikov

The Automatic Kalashnikov is undoubtedly the most recognizable and iconic of all weapon systems over the past sixty-seven years. Commonly referred to as the AK or AK-47, the rifle is a symbol of both oppression and revolution in war-torn parts of the world today. Most major conflicts over the past forty years throughout Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and South America have been fought with Kalashnikov rifles. The global saturation of Kalashnikov weaponry finds its roots in the Cold War mentalities of both the Soviet Union and Western powers vying for ideological footholds and powerful spheres of influence. Oftentimes the fiercest Cold War conflicts took place in continental Africa, with both Moscow and Washington interfering with local politics and providing assistance to one group or another. While Communist-Socialist and Western Capitalist ideologies proved unsuccessful in many regions in Africa, the AK-47 remained the surviving victor. From what we know of the Cold War, millions of Automatic Kalashnikovs (as well as the patents to the weapons) were sent to countries that were willing to discourage the threat of Western influence. Further distribution of the rifles continued by the nations with Kalashnikov patents because they saw it would be profitable or in the best interests of Communist-Socialist ideology. However by the end of the Cold War profit was the primary motivator of all former Warsaw Pact nations as well as their allies. Further purchases of Chinese Automatic Kalashnikovs by the United States were sent to the Mujahidin in Afghanistan and created new stockpiles of rifles in the Middle East, these stockpiles had no
obligation to stay local once the conflict with Russia was over. At the end of the Cold War private arms dealers were quick to make backdoor deals to take the inventory of the now defunct armories and battalions. Together these widespread distributions provide the most complete explanation for the final destination of most Kalashnikov rifles today, the heart of Africa.

The significant availability of the AK in Africa lies in the impact of the Cold War proxy system. The United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics used African conflicts to combat each other indirectly. The longstanding view in the West is that African nations were pawns to be pitted against one another, and even internally among themselves to shift regional dominance between the US and USSR. Yet this was hardly ever the case, the nations that received AKs had their own agendas and more importantly their own regional clout and political influence.

With continental Africa flooded with millions of AKs (and with three African countries still producing them, Egypt, South Africa, Nigeria) the question remains: What does the prevalence of the Kalashnikov rifle mean to continental Africa? Each African nation was introduced to the rifle by different means; in Southern Africa the AK was given freely as a tool for liberation, in Northwestern Africa many of the rifles arrived from private sellers intending to make a profit on the potential conflicts, and in Northeastern Africa the rifle was both allowed to be manufactured as well as dispersed through varying methods. The methods by which the AKs entered a nation are indicative of how the weapon will be viewed, both ideologically and culturally. Countries in which the AK was directly supplied by Soviet allies to overthrow colonial governments typically view the weapon as a national and revolutionary icon. For countries that were introduced to the AK by private arms deals, the weapon is viewed as a plague that promotes murder and national destabilization. The final grouping of nations, primarily in
Northeastern Africa, have extremely diverse views of the rifle, where it is used for a multitude of reasons ranging from maintaining tribal autonomy to piracy.

**HISTORIOGRAPHY**

Histories of the AK-47 differ in both scope and intended content; most academic sources written during the Cold War follow the patterns of technical and military histories. It was not until the late 1980s that the written works about the AK-47 shifted in focus from technical specifications to an analysis of the global presence of the rifle and its relationship to Cold War ideology. One of the earliest authors to take this approach was Edward Ezell in his 1986 book titled *The AK47 Story: Evolution of the Kalashnikov Weapons* which included what was known about Mikhail Kalashnikov’s origins and weapons development by utilizing Russian sources. Ezell’s book is among the first to explain that the Soviet government had started development of a midsize rifle round, (7.62x39mm) to emulate the midsize German cartridges that the Red Army faced in World War II.¹ Ezell’s book addresses that the development of the cartridge before the approval of a rifle prototype design, suggests a desire by the Soviet Government to quickly revamp their military in an effort to match the developments in weaponry by other world powers.² Ezell also offers evidence to suggest that Kalashnikov might not have designed the gun from top to bottom; Ezell writes “Kalashnikov noted that his project was immensely aided by the people and resources assigned to his project. ‘This first-rate help speeded up my work… what had once been just lines in a drawing was now reality.’”³

---

³ Ezell, 1986, 111.
Other scholars have built upon Ezell’s work, most notably C.J. Chivers, Gordon Rottman, and Larry Kahaner. Kahaner’s 2007 book *AK-47: The Weapon that Changed the Face of War*, is often scrutinized by reviewers and AK enthusiasts as an anti-gun propaganda piece, rife with a lack of technical detail and specificity. Yet Kahaner’s book provides an example of the first split between AK-47 historians in the west; his book addresses why the rifle was and remains so prevalent. Kahaner argues that the simplicity of the weapon, as well as its rugged effectiveness, is explanation enough for the AK-47’s global presence. To Kahaner, the rifle’s inherent soundness is what provides victories and resulted in continued distribution of the weapon; he writes, “Even though the Soviet Union and Communist China chose different military tactics, they both benefited from the AK’s characteristics.”

Chivers and Rottman argue that the development of the AK-47 was a state-controlled endeavor and that “This process was driven not by entrepreneurship or by quirky Russian innovation and pluck, but by the internal desires and bureaucracy of the socialist state.” Chivers and Rottman agree that the AK-47 is mechanically sound and reliable, but the immense state aid and technical advising teams assigned to Mikhail Kalashnikov, as well as the secret competition between rifle designers to pick the new standard arm, suggest that the Soviet Government’s involvement was the catalyst to the development of the AK-47. Rottman expresses in his 2011 book *The AK-47: Kalashnikov-Series Assault Rifles*, that the Soviet military complex did not know of Mikhail Kalashnikov until two years after the secret competition started. Rottman writes, “The People’s Commissariat on Armaments announced the competition for a new rifle in the fall of 1943. Some 15 designers competed to design a weapon for the Red Army …Kalashnikov was not among them during the first two years.”

---

current stance of the western school follows in the belief that the development of the AK-47 was directly related to the desires of the Soviet Government.

Despite Mikhail Gorbachev's 1985 policies of *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness), Mikhail Kalashnikov was not completely free to write about his rifle until the early 2000s. In 2006 the English edition of Kalashnikov’s book *The Gun that Changed the World* (the original publication was written in French in 2003) was widely published throughout the United Kingdom and the United States. In the book, Kalashnikov claims most of the credit for the AK-47’s creation, but he does admit he had assistance. He writes “The most original component we wanted to include in our plan for this new weapon in fact came from that previous rifle…After weeks of unremitting labor…my future weapon started to appear.” The commonality between most Russian histories of the AK-47 is that the involvement by the Soviet state is downplayed. Kalashnikov provides evidence for this as he writes, “In my view, if the talent of a designer is going to be widely acknowledged, he needs the right conditions to be met. The most important is that he should freely choose the objective of his work.” After Mikhail Kalashnikov passed his late eighties, the AK-47 historical torch was taken up by his daughter Elena, whose 2011 book *Kalashnikov: The Inside Story of the Designer and His Weapons*, differed little from the given stories by her father. The only notable difference between her book and her father’s book, is that Elena utilized the same argument as Kahaner to explain the rifle’s global presence, she writes, “Having passed the test of time, it (AK-47) has demonstrated a high degree of design longevity, having remained a leader among many domestic and foreign counterparts for half a century.”

The primary difference between the Western and Eastern schools of AK-47 history is governed

---

8 Kalashnikov and Joly, 2006, 60.
by whether the rifle was a Soviet State creation, or if it was created on Kalashnikov’s sheer penchant for reliable arms design.

COLD WAR IDEOLOGY

The AK is believed to have a global presence of over 75 million; the closest runner up is the American M-16 of which, including all of its variants, only 8 million have been produced.\(^\text{10}\) The significant difference in weapons production is marked by the disagreement in satellite ideology between the Soviet Union and the United States. For both World Wars, severe shortages of weapons and equipment afflicted the Russian Army; accounts of soldiers reaching the front lines with neither boots nor a rifle resulted in great sense of shame that the Red Army refused to face again. As a Socialist state, the Soviet Military administration was able to redirect efforts to mass produce small arms, and with the AK-47 all small arm factories across the USSR were churning out thousands by the early 1950s. Chivers argues in his book *The Gun* that under this form of military controlled production, it was only a matter of time before the mass-produced Soviet rifle hit a surplus. Chivers writes,

> this economy’s potential for arms-making was harnessed again, this time to a mix of almost religious revolutionary ideology—socialism was, according to the party’s core teaching, to sweep the world in an irresistible advance—and to rational suspicion of the United States, with which it was compelled to compete.\(^\text{11}\)

Countries fight wars to their strengths, especially cold wars. The western nations utilized the economy as their strongest weapon against the USSR. The Soviets, in turn relied on their newfound greatest export, the AK-47. The USSR was more than willing to share patent information and weapons technology with those who supported Communism. The Soviets supplied arms not just throughout the Eastern Bloc but also to Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel

---

\(^\text{10}\) Rottman, 2011, 4.
\(^\text{11}\) Chivers, 2010, 153.
Nasser in 1955, and subsequently established weapons factories in 1956 in China and 1958 in North Korea. With the fervent pace at which Soviet arms production occurred at the start of the Cold War, there was little doubt that the AK-47 was going to be a global phenomenon.

THE AFRICAN VIEW

The predominant trap that writers fall into time and time again is making the assumption that there is one Africa. Regions become blurred together despite obvious differences in culture, religion, government, and standard of living. Classification also becomes problematic as many scholars have different opinions as to what constitutes Africa and Africans. Is Egyptian history African history? Are we to suggest that true African history is exclusively focused on black Africans? There are no simple answers here, for the proliferation of Kalashnikov rifles in the African continent is interdependent on the mobilization and distribution of arms and armed forces on a global scale. Therefore to create an accurate representation of how Africans view the AK, the entire continent of Africa must be included while regional differences are acknowledged.

The Kalashnikov culture is not shipped alongside the rifle, it develops once the arms have reached their destination. African regions hold significantly different views of the AK; Egypt and Mozambique have commonalities in their views of the rifle despite acquiring them in different ways. Algeria and Chad have a similar bleak reliance on the AK, but the Ethiopian Government sees the rifle completely differently from how it is viewed by the tribal groups that live within Ethiopia. South Africa had the same response to the rifle that Middle Eastern nation

---

Israel did. In this sense the only way to acquire a sensible African view of the AK, is to focus on the differences between how distinct groups integrate and utilize Kalashnikov weaponry.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

Two common themes in the Southern region of Africa after the mass production of the AK-47 were the rebellions against colonial governments and the overall scramble for Cold War satellites by Western powers and Soviet allies. The distribution of Kalashnikov weaponry throughout Southern Africa was largely sanctioned by the Soviet Government. Soviets supplied guerrilla fighters in Mozambique and Angola in an attempt to overthrow Portuguese influence and establish satellites in Southern Africa. The rebellion in Mozambique spread into former British colony Rhodesia (modern day Zimbabwe), and ultimately the last vestige of Western influence, the nation of South Africa, was surrounded by Soviet-backed guerillas and gradually faced internal reform to their Apartheid government structure.

Mozambique

One of the first Southern African regions to receive Soviet aid was Mozambique. Vying for independence, the native population of Mozambique appealed to the Soviet Union for arms and support. Initially, the Soviet supply of small arms was enough for the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) to overthrow the Portuguese colonizers and gain independence on June 25, 1975. Soon thereafter, Mozambique provided safe haven to a significant number of Rhodesian (modern day Zimbabwe) military groups attempting their own revolution. A newspaper article describing the conflict in 1977 states, “One intelligence source

Laurell 9

said that the number of guerillas in training, using Mozambique, Zambia, and Botswana as havens was 16,000 to 18,000.”

The Soviet Union continued to supply Mozambique and their revolutionary neighbors, much to the chagrin of South Africa and the Western powers. Decorated Soviet officials were unafraid to express their support; in 1982 General Aleksei Yepishev met with Mozambique’s Political Commissar Armando Guebeza and reportedly said “The Soviet Union will give every support to enable your country to reach the objectives for which it is struggling.” From the Western Cold War perspective, Mozambique was dependent on the Portuguese for stability, and Soviet arms represented instability. A newspaper article in 1976 stated, “‘Kalashnikov’s Law’ - the law of the gun- is driving out the Portuguese who keep this new Marxist nation’s faltering economy in operation.” For the West, Mozambique seemed to be an unappealing ally. Rhetoric at the time suggested that since South Africa was already anti-Soviet, Mozambique would prove to be nothing but a money sink. The prevailing belief in the United States was that whichever nation provided support to Mozambique was ultimately responsible for taking care of their failing infrastructure. A newspaper in 1987 relays this sentiment, “To such questions of ideology and governmental survival are added the immediate realities of famine… a third of Mozambique’s 14 million people will need food assistance this year.” Yet Mozambique survived a relatively stable revolution and a fourteen year civil war, and the AK-47 was so influential that it remains on

---

Mozambique’s national flag to this day.\(^{19}\) Efforts to change the flag and emblem of Mozambique went into review in 2005. The minority Renamo, Mozambican National Resistance (anti-communist guerilla group) supporters asked that all new flag designs be submitted sans rifle and Soviet star. The Majority FRELIMO (Pro-Soviet guerilla group) party wished for the Soviet icons to remain “Frelimo advocates say the critics are overreacting. The Kalashnikov, they say, is but a coincidentally Russian symbol of Mozambicans’ determination to defend their land; the star merely signifies solidarity with Africans.”\(^{20}\) The echo of Portuguese rule remains an audible memory, as Portuguese is still the most commonly spoken language in Mozambique. The difference now is that Mozambicans can freely choose their icons, be those Soviet relics or colonial languages, and fit them into their own unique cultural history.

Mozambique provided a Marxist foothold for the Soviets in Southern Africa, the 1977 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in Moscow, “provided more than $1 billion worth of arms to Mozambique. In return, Mozambique’s ruling FRELIMO Central Committee has allowed the U.S.S.R. to establish naval facilities at its ports on the Indian Ocean.”\(^{21}\) Soviet assistance and more specifically, the AK-47 provided the means for a self-governing Mozambique, at a time when the West saw this region as a liability.

Rhodesia (Zimbabwe)

The successful revolution in Mozambique, along with the Soviet arms, quickly spread into neighboring Rhodesia. Most of the source material from Western newspapers covering Rhodesia clearly describes a strong ethnic bias. One of the earliest newspapers to cover the


conflict described the situation as follows, “The soldiers and the whites of Umtali… (near Mozambique border) are nervously confident—almost stubbornly buoyant—in the face of the guerilla war that seeks to doom white domination in Rhodesia.”22 The Rhodesian military found the initial guerrilla fighters laughable. One soldier said “As soon as we start firing, these guys run, sometimes they even drop their AK’s and run… it shows how amateur they are. They’re not exactly the Vietcong.”23 The guerrillas continued to face failures while fighting the Rhodesian military until the Soviet government offered to aid the guerillas and provide direct support.

The Rhodesian military found themselves overwhelmed in a matter of months; the guerillas were fighting back with better training and greater numbers. The Soviets and Chinese were the change agents behind Rhodesia’s revolutionary force, “Nearly 1,250 guerillas have tied down the government troops, and it is thought here that there are about 9,000 more in training by the Chinese and Soviet instructors in Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia.”24 Supporting the Zimbabwe African People’s Union with arms to overthrow the vestiges of British rule, the Soviets and their iconic rifle finally captured the attention of the West. In July of 1976 a New York Times paper titled “Black Victory in Rhodesia: How Bloody will it be?” the author writes

The broadcasts from Mozambique, which call upon the young men to cross the border and join the guerillas in their camps, talk of the chimurenga. It is a word meaning strife or rebellion, and the warriors of the Mashona tribe used it when they took up their spears and pangas in 1896. The difference is that in the chimurenga of 1976, the blacks are using Kalashnikov AK-47 (sic) assault rifles, grenade launchers and 60-mm. mortars.25 Despite the obvious Soviet development, the AK came to be perceived in the West as an African rifle. By 1979 a biracial democracy was agreed upon, and for most of the black populace the

---

24 Weinraub, 1976.
choice was between United African National Council co-founder Abel Muzorewa, and the Zimbabwe African National Union founder Ndabaningi Sithole. Lacking in public infrastructure, Rhodesians employed the use of ex-military vehicles to transport voters, and former guerilla fighters were stationed to protect the polls. While many in the West feared that the Rhodesian government would devolve into a military dictatorship in 1979, the reality was as calm as the new government claimed it would be. One investigative reporter asked an ex-guerilla his opinion, “Mr. Chademwoyo, a former Mugabe guerilla…offered his own version (of events) ‘The gun is for killing the enemy, not for forcing the people to vote’ he said, cradling an AK-47 rifle with a Sithole sticker on the magazine.”26 Politics in the early biracial period of Rhodesia were relatively free from corruption. Despite the obvious loyalties of Rhodesian guerrilla groups, the people did not elect Sithole into office.

The Soviet Union established a diplomatic relationship with the newly renamed Zimbabwe in 1981. Difference in governmental structures aside, Zimbabwe (presidential republic) continues to have a relationship with Russia (federation where the president is head of state and the prime minister is head of government). The official website for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation states that as recently as 2009, Russia provided desperately needed aid during a drought: “Given the difficult socio-economic situation and the …food crisis in Zimbabwe, the Russian Government adopted a decision to provide urgent humanitarian assistance to the population of this country.”27 While Zimbabwe does not have the AK-47 emblazoned on its national flag as Mozambique does, the rifle is still displayed on

Zimbabwe’s coat of arms.28

In an article discussing the life of the AK-47 Chivers writes, “Group Captain Biltim Chingono, the defense attaché from Zimbabwe… sidestepped the rifle's checkered reputation, saying that in his country's civil war it had proved ‘to be the mightier and decisive freedom pen.’”29

Zimbabwe, like Mozambique, was able to defeat colonial authority and become self-governing. Ex-guerilla Robert Mugabe was elected as Prime Minister of Zimbabwe in 1980 and has been in power continuously since. Western nations have pleaded with Mugabe to allow a more fair and transparent democratic government. Ultimately, the pleas from the West fell upon deaf ears, the United States, Britain, and South Africa gave both supplies and weapons to Mugabe’s opponents. It is unclear what Zimbabwe’s relationship to Russia entails, but whatever government Zimbabwe has, it owes its origins to the Soviet Union and the AK-47.

Angola

The rebellion in Angola played out the same way as it had in Mozambique. The Portuguese fled the country expediently and power was handed over to the revolutionary forces in 1975. That is where the similarities end. Angola was then plagued by a twenty seven year civil war in which multiple foreign powers manipulated the multiple militia groups, and at the heart of

---

the conflict was the AK. A newspaper article titled “2 Rival Regimes set up in Angola” discusses the competing power structures that plagued Angola on the first day of independence from Portugal.\(^{30}\) The two governments in question held control over the diplomatic centers of Luanda and Huambo. The article states, “The Luanda government was promptly recognized by the Soviet Union, Cuba, Brazil, Mozambique, Congo, and Guinea.”\(^{31}\) Despite the Luanda government having popular sovereignty among the black Africans from the Soviet supported countries in Southern Africa, the United States did not recognize the new government; on the grounds that the rebels from the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) were backed by Soviet weaponry, and had eventually comprised the totality of the Luanda government.\(^{32}\) The other government set up in Huambo, the Democratic People’s Republic of Angola, was actually a composition of two former rival groups the National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA), and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). The FNLA was predominantly supplied by the People’s Republic of China until mid-1966, and by France, South Africa, Romania, and the United States of America after independence from Portugal.\(^{33}\) UNITA was predominantly supplied by the People’s Republic of China after 1966, along with the United States of America, and South Africa. The two outliers are China and the US: China switched sides mid conflict, and the US was supplying two rival groups simultaneously. The implications of the AK in this conflict are not apparent without further explanation. Of the three militia groups, the MLPA and UNITA were almost exclusively armed with AKs, and while the FNLA utilized a plethora of western weaponry, the AK was still commonplace in the FNLA as well.

---


\(^{31}\) Kaufman, 1979.

\(^{32}\) Kaufman, 1979.

The involvement of the United States was intentional, and the true impact of American diplomacy in Angola is largely unknown. A declassified document titled “US National Security Council Minutes: Angola” written in June 27, 1975, reveals the fear President Ford’s Administration had of more Soviet influence and weaponry in Southern Africa. In the document, former Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger addresses Soviet arms flooding into Angola. Kissinger states, “Soviet arms shipments have reversed the situation… If we appeal to the Soviets not to be active, it will be a sign of weakness; for us to police it (Angola) is next to

35 FNLA with Portuguese participant, image from privately owned website, http://ultramar.terraweb.biz/RMA/Imagens_RMA_Milhazes.htm
impossible, and we would be bound to do nothing.”37 When President Ford asked for options on
which action to take in Angola, Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger stated “The FNLA has a
weak capacity to enforce discipline and we should look to see whether the Congolese (Zairians)
can be used for instilling discipline. And then there’s the question of the degree to which we can
bring Roberto (Founder of FLNA) and Savimbi (Founder of UNITA) together.”38 It is unclear
whether it was because of US intervention or for other reasons, but the two factions merged to
fight the MPLA.

During the Angola civil war the MLPA offered bases inside Angola to Namibian
guerillas (who were also supported by Soviet allies) fighting against South Africa. By 1982
constant conflict between the MLPA and the unified FNLA and UNITA kept the Angolan Civil
War heated, but there was also a proxy war between Namibian guerillas and South Africa on
Angolan soil. A news article titled “S. African Troops Raid Angola Base; 201 Rebel Deaths
Claimed” written in 1982 describes both the prevalence of Soviet weaponry among the guerillas
and the tendency for the conflicts in Southern Africa to cross borders. The article states, “Capt.
Jan Hougaard… said his men caught the guerillas ‘totally with their pants down,’ and captured
tons of supplies, 90 Soviet made AK47 assault rifles and more than 1,000 grenades and land
mines.”39 The same article sheds some light on the process by which Soviet arms were able to
transcend regions and militant groups when Soviet clients gave surplus weapons and ammunition
to allied client states, “Hougaard said most of the ammunition was imported from the Soviet
Union in December via the Angolan port of Mocamedes and was being stockpiled for guerrilla

assaults on Namibia (South-West Africa).” The sheltering of outside guerilla forces in Angola was met with several tactical raids by South African forces.

The most likely reason why the AK became a somber memory in Angola is because multiple fronts of combat, outside raids by opposition forces, and Soviet restructuring led to a form of self-imposed attrition of the Angolan economy and military age men. In 1986 a Canadian news correspondent, Michael Valpy, reported, “In the days of colonialism, it (Angola) was the jewel of the Portuguese empire. After 11 years of independence under the heel of an East Bloc-advised Marxist Government, it is an economic wreck.” After a while the Angolan government came to depend on foreign food imports due to the tactics taken by UNITA. Valpy writes “It (MLPA government) does what it can to encourage peasants to return to their land when they have been driven off by UNITA attacks. Angola … has 600,000 deslocados, internal refugees- 80 percent of them peasant victims of UNITA attacks.” By the 1990’s Angola was facing a different internal problem, military manpower, and after 15 years of continued civil war most of the combat age men were either already enlisted in a military faction or they were otherwise assigned to vital positions to keep the country stable. With manpower stretched thin for long periods, nations in turmoil tend to incorporate a different source of might, training children to fight. In 1999 Washington Post correspondent Vivienne Walt visited Angola to interview child soldiers. She writes, “Antonio began his military life at age 13. Forced to join…the rebel force known as UNITA—he was assigned to stand guard in the maize fields, his Kalashnikov at the ready. ‘My job was to wait for people to come into the fields to get food, and

40 Ibid.
42 Valpy, 1986.
I would shoot them.”43 The civil war raged on for a total of 27 years from 1975 to 2002. The AK’s life expectancy far outstripped the revolutionary mentality in Angola. The war efforts in Angola led to a literal bleeding of the population as Walt mentions in her article: “since life expectancy in Angola is only about 45 years, the great majority of Angolans have known nothing but war.”44

South Africa

The apartheid government structure in South Africa viewed the AK as an encroaching predator that threatened to undo the stability of the region. For much of the time of Cold War revolutions and conflict in the Southern African region, the apartheid government of South Africa found support in the United States, Great Britain, and the former regime of Rhodesia. The main internal opposition force to the South African government was the predominantly black African National Congress. The Head of the ANC in the mid-80s was a man named Oliver Tambo, who negotiated with Soviet nations for armed assistance. In William Eaton’s 1986 article titled “Soviets to Send Aid, S. Africa Rebel Leader Says,” the Cold War blending of politics and armed support is described in detail. The reason Tambo appealed to the Soviets is because the ANC was demonized in the west, Eaton writes “Tambo had little good to say about the United States. President Reagan personally condemned the ANC as a terrorist organization with Communist leanings, although other U.S. officials…indicated a willingness to meet with its spokesperson.”45 Since South Africa was the last remaining pro-west satellite in the Southern African region, the Soviets were willing to back the ANC until the bitter end. Eaton writes, “Tambo said he had met with Soviet Leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev and was given assurances of

44 Walt, 1999.
support in the struggle to topple the South African government.”46 The Soviets were ready to arm the ANC with AKs, landmines, and anti-aircraft weaponry, even as the Cold War was near its dissolution.

Years of conflict between South Africa and various guerilla forces in Angola and Zimbabwe, along with internal struggles within South Africa, prompted the South African government to get creative. Facing a flood of Kalashnikovs, the South African Vektor Arms company modified the Israeli made rifle called the Galil and circulated the newly created Vektor R4 to South African armed forces in 1980. The Galil interestingly enough was engineered based on the internal parts and structure of the AK-47. The Galil and Vektor R4 are so similar that the independent research watchdog Small Arms Survey distinguishes the rifles as follows: “Only small visual differences differentiate the Vektor series from the Galil, including the presence or absence of carry handles and bipods and the design of the gas block.”47

(South African Vektor R4 with 50 round magazine48) South Africa modified more than one popular weapon to fight against the Eastern Bloc backed nations, aside from the Vektor R4 the most famous South African adaptation was the G-5 artillery unit. John Fullerton’s article titled “S. Africa’s 155-Milimeter Weapon Scores Top Marks From Experts,” gives further background information. Fullerton

48 Stock image, located from informational website, R4 http://tonnel-ufo.ru/eanglish/weapon/automatic-assault-rifle-vektor-r4-r5-r6.php
writes “For South Africa’s generals, the G-5 evolved from a need to match the firepower of Angolan forces… Armscor (manufacturer) took a sophisticated approach, welding together the best designs available in Europe, North America, and Israel, along with its own modifications, to produce the G-5.”

In some cases South Africa even benefitted from the AK. It was common for South Africa to receive AKs alongside oil as payment for delivering G-5s to Iran and Iraq during their eight year war. Those AK’s came in handy when white politics proved ineffective. Fullerton writes, “Some analysts believe that South Africa may have received rocket propelled grenades and Kalashnikov rifles in part payment, in turn the Soviet-designed weapons and ammunition may have been supplied to… guerillas opposing government forces in Angola and Mozambique, they believe.”

The potential for conflict was worse than the actual conflict that ensued. Change in government assured a fairer and more representative system for natives of South Africa. While the ANC had clear communist ties, the ANC shifted from a militant organization to a purely political organization, trade and economic ties were still almost exclusive to Western nations. Years later South African gun enthusiasts both black and white have a fond appreciation for the AK-47. Those who used it remember its symbolic shape as the embodiment of change; those who faced it on the other side of the barrel still appreciate the inherent reliability of the AK. In a tongue-in-cheek news article written by Hugh Dellios, a South African gun convention gets a visit by none other than Mikhail Kalashnikov in 1997. Dellios Writes “The two Afrikaners seemed in awe of the man who not long ago would have been as welcome as the devil in this

---

51 Hugh Dellios, “This Big Shot has Stopping Power” Chicago Tribune, November 19, 1997.
South Africa changed its policies in the early 1990s and became more tolerant, Dellios writes, “As recently as four years ago, one could have been arrested in South Africa for owning a Russian-made weapon, even as a collector’s item.” The end of the Cold War allowed various former rivals to reach across the aisle and understand each other, sometimes even appreciate each other. As Dellios explains “The gun dealer who invited Kalashnikov, Fred Tatos, had fought against AK-47 equipped guerillas in Rhodesia in the 1970s.” South Africa was able to evolve its government from within and maintain a capitalist economic system, unlike the surrounding nations that initially shifted the colonial governments to socialist states.

The AK-47 is still embodied in South Africa by the Vektor arms company, even while new designs show drastically different looking weapons, on the inside they are Kalashnikovs. A 2001 comparative rifle article states “The South African Vektor 5.56 mm Cr 21, a much-modified AKM (Automatic Kalashnikov Modernized), also has yet to enter full scale production although development is complete.” The Vektor Cr 21 remains a prototype, as the R4 remains reliable and mechanically sound. Many South Africans that faced AKs admired the reliability and stark appearance of the stubby rifle enough to embrace it as an African icon.

NORTHWESTERN AFRICA

The Northwestern region of Africa is where the AK is most often portrayed as the leading cause of death and destruction. In some nations it is near impossible to argue that the rifle is anything but death incarnate. Yet there are groups in the Northwestern region that use the rifle

---

52 Dellios, 1997.
54 Dellios, 1997.
more or less in a responsible manner. Much of the negative press for this region stemmed from
the civil wars and conflicts within Liberia and Sierra Leone. The televised brutality and conflicts,
including the visible usage of child soldiers throughout the 1990s, was enough to depict the AK
as a causal agent in Northwestern African conflict. The Northwestern region of Africa has vast
expanses of desert that cross through several borders and prove to make arms trafficking hard to
police. Algeria is a prime example of the ineffective policing of vast expanses of desert, as
stockpiles of former Libyan leader Gadhafi’s AKs are still being found throughout Algeria and
neighboring countries. There is also a regional AK producer in the region, Nigeria. While
Nigeria struggles with internal government corruption and various nonaligned groups entering
and leaving the nation at will, they are militarily well structured and benefit from their own AK
the OBJ-006.

Liberia and Sierra Leone

The sole reason why Liberia and Sierra Leone are grouped as a section is because the AK
achieved a noticeable presence in both nations during the first Liberian civil war. In 1980 Samuel
Doe became president of Liberia during a popular coup that ousted former president William
Tolbert. Opposition forces largely led by warlord Charles Taylor sought to oust Doe in 1989 and
seize control of the country. What ensued were two wars in Liberia; the first spanned the years
war in Liberia crossed into Sierra Leone and an eleven year civil war in Sierra Leone lasted from
1991 to 2002. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 meant that the AK-producing nations in
the Eastern Bloc had thousands of stockpiled rifles and no oversight from Moscow. Some
individuals sensed the opportunity to benefit from the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone.
Private arms dealers flocked to Liberia and Sierra Leone and supplied Charles Taylor the ultimate tool for warfare, the AK.

In 1989 a rebel faction spearheaded by Charles Taylor and Prince Johnson, called the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), began attacking government forces and controlling territories in Liberia. A 1990 St. Petersburg Times article states, “Rebels trying to overthrow President Samuel Doe attacked Monrovia Monday in a two-prong offensive, cutting all major land routes out of the Liberian capital.” Doe made attempts to end the conflict but Taylor demanded nothing short of Doe stepping down from office. The article states, “Taylor has repeatedly demanded that Doe resign before he and the rebels will stop their advance… Doe… re-broadcast his June 25 offer to form a national unity government including the rebel National Patriotic Front and all political parties, but rebel leader Charles Taylor rejected the proposal.”

A third entity complicated the situation as Johnson split off from Taylor’s group and established the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia in early 1990. A Chicago Tribune article at the time states, “the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL)—one of two rebel groups in Liberia—now controls most of Monrovia.” Amidst the chaos, all factions in Liberia resorted to extreme violence and terror of civilians. By some accounts the government forces were the most brutal. The article states,

They (civilians) have good reason to fear the AFL (Armed Forces of Liberia). Between July and September, as INPFL troops led by Prince Johnson closed in from the west and forces belonging to Charles Taylor’s National Patriotic Front of Liberia closed in from the east, the AFL went on a rampage of killing, looting and rape that terrorized the population of Monrovia.

---

57 Ibid.
The conflict had little chance of ending peacefully as AFL forces continued to fight the rebel groups without a leader (Doe). In September of 1990 President Doe was captured by Johnson’s forces, and his torture, mutilation, and eventual death were captured on film while Johnson was present at the event and drinking a Budweiser.\(^{60}\)

The conflict in Liberia spread into Sierra Leone in 1991, and the main force opposing the Sierra Leonian government called themselves the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). A 1995 article published in The Economist explains that the RUF was supported and backed by Charles Taylor. The article states, “The RUF grew out of the civil war in neighbouring Liberia. At first it seems to have been set up by freebooters from Liberia and Burkina Faso supported by the Liberian rebel leader Charles Taylor.”\(^{61}\) The article continues, “It (RUF) invaded Sierra Leone in 1991 as a diversionary front to punish that county’s government for allowing the Nigerian airforce to use airbases in Sierra Leone for bombing raids on Taylor’s troops.”\(^{62}\) In March of 1995 the Sierra Leonian government hired the South African mercenary company Executive Outcomes to help them push out the RUF fighters. Executive outcomes approached Sierra Leone’s head of state Valentine Strasser earlier in 1995 and made an offer. A 1995 article from The Guardian written by Philip Van Niekerk states, “Executive Outcomes went to Strasser’s government with an offer it couldn’t refuse. ‘We said: ‘You’re in deep shit.’ They said they couldn’t pay. We said they could pay us when they could afford it.’”\(^{63}\) Executive Outcomes were so efficient Strasser publically spoke of the successes, Strasser states, “We’ve had a number of successes…They were so close to the capital- but now the security situation is improving.”\(^{64}\)

---

\(^{60}\) Section of Doe’s execution video http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yALSzjfyUlA While this video does not show the actual execution, the full video can be found on the web.


\(^{62}\) Ibid.


\(^{64}\) Niekerk, 1995.
Despite the various successes of Executive Outcomes, the United Nations pressured the Sierra Leonian government to cancel the contract with the mercenary company. In 1996, a peace agreement, called the Abidjan Peace Accord, was chartered and sent to the United Nations.\textsuperscript{65} Article 12 of the accord directly deals with Executive outcomes,

\begin{quote}
The Executive Outcomes shall be withdrawn five weeks after the deployment of the Neutral Monitoring Group…Government shall use all its endeavours, consistent with its treaty obligations, to repatriate other foreign troops no later than three months after the deployment of the Neutral Monitoring Group or six months after the signing of the Peace Agreement, whichever is earlier.\textsuperscript{66}
\end{quote}

The RUF held out, and refused full cooperation with the accord until the Executive Outcomes contract was terminated and conflict resumed again. Sierra Leone faced a government coup in 1997, and continued conflict until a final treaty in May 2001, and combined British and UN forces (mostly Nigerians and Guineans) in January of 2002 to eliminate the dwindling hostilities.\textsuperscript{67}

Mercenaries and Private Arms Dealers

The employment of Executive Outcomes in Sierra Leone was (and is) undoubtedly a controversial issue. The destabilization of Liberia and Sierra Leone created a system in which young men had little opportunity to take care of themselves and their families. Harkening back to Niekerk’s article, “The rebels recruit from an ever-expanding pool of jobless young people with no stake in the system, defiant of crumbling traditional authority, whose only route to fortune is what they can loot using an AK-47.”\textsuperscript{68} Yet, akin to the views of the UN, few world powers would endorse the use of mercenaries. The narrative of Executive Outcomes in Sierra Leone


\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{68} Niekerk, 1995.
brings up a legitimate question: Does the UN have the authority to disband an inter-African military contractor? The Western view of Executive Outcomes is one akin to the old Apartheid regime, the typical ‘intervention’ of white military forces to provide ‘liberation’ of a black conflict. However with Executive Outcomes this was not the case, Niekerk’s article states, “And when speaking to them, there is no doubt that Executive Outcomes’ black soldiers- about 70 per cent of the mercenary force- have been engaged in combat.” Neikerk, 1995. Some of the black mercenaries in EO were former Angolan rebels as well as former South Africa Defense Force combatants. The fact remains that many Sierra Leonians wanted EO’s presence in the country. In an article by Elizabeth Rubin, the issue of liberation is discussed. Rubin writes,

Colonel Roelf (EO commander) was an Afrikaner who as a soldier and trained assassin spent his adult life suppressing black African liberation movements for the apartheid-era South African defense forces. Yet when I met him in the spring of 1996 in Sierra Leone, the black African civilians whose homes he had liberated… said they regarded him as their savior. In fact, former deputy defense minister for Sierra Leone, Sam Norma, said, “Our people have died, lost their limbs, lost their eyes and their properties for these elections. If we employ a service to protect our hard-won democracy, why should it be viewed negatively?” While there is essentially no correct answer for the usage of mercenaries in national conflicts, Norma’s question raises questions about the employment of security forces for national defense.

The AK’s presence in Liberia and Sierra Leone largely falls under the actions of three men, Viktor Bout, and Slobodan Tesic, and Charles Taylor. In a briefing paper sponsored by Oxfam (nonprofit global issues advocate) author Colby Goodman writes,

70 Neikerk, 1995.
72 Rubin.
Several arms brokers were regularly mentioned, especially Viktor Bout in connection with Angola and Liberia/Sierra Leone. Interestingly, it was small arms and light weapons (SALW) – assault rifles, mortars, grenades, and surface-to-air missiles – that were most often being transferred and used to fuel conflicts, and kill and maim innocent civilians.73

Bout supplied arms wherever there was conflict and, while he was never convicted for his transactions in Liberia and Sierra Leone, the US government tried to end his practice. During Bout’s trial for arms trafficking in 2011, the following was written about his actions, “Since the 1990s, Bout has been an international weapons trafficker. As a result of his weapons trafficking activities in Liberia, the U.S. office of Foreign Assets Control…placed him on the Specially Designated Nationals list in 2004.”74 The list was an asset freeze but did not carry the capability to bring him under charges, but his sentencing in 2011 was for attempting to sell “hundreds of surface-to-air missiles and over 20,000 AK-47s to the Fuerzaz Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, a designated foreign terrorist organization based in Columbia.”75 AK trafficking to Liberia and Sierra Leone was made more complicated by the involvement of a second seller, Slobodan Tesic. Tesic worked directly with Charles Taylor, and Tesic’s high status at the Temex production factory enabled easy shipments of AK’s. Goodman writes,

According to the UN panel of experts investigating violations of the UN arms embargo on Liberia, a Belgrade-based company, Temex, run by Slobodan Tesic, helped broker six shipments of Serbian arms to Liberia between June and August 2002, in violation of the UN arms embargo…The former Liberian dictator Charles Taylor had ordered the arms, including thousands of assault rifles and machine guns, millions of rounds of ammunition, thousands of mines, and hundreds of missile launchers.76

Tesic’s involvement in providing arms had been known by the United Nations since December of 2002. An article addressing the UN response (that proved they know of Tesic’s involvement)

75 Ibid.
76 Goodman, 2011, Pg. 7.
Laurell 28
to the shipment of arms to Liberia UN’s report states, “Temex, the Yugoslav company making the sale claimed it considered the deals legal because the company believed that it had legitimate contracts with Nigeria’s Ministry of Defense.” The report also stated that Temex had falsified delivery documents, therefore it was likely Tesic knew these transactions were illegal. Bout and Tesic were the inspiration behind the character Yuri Orlov in the 2005 film Lord of War, the writers combined the actions of both men to create fictional Yuri Orlov as the world’s biggest arms dealer. Charles Taylor was also the inspiration for a character in the film as well, under the name Andre Baptiste Sr.

(Orlov with Baptiste, played by Nicolas Cage and Eamonn Walker respectively)

The conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone displayed the brutality of warfare and the devastation that can be wrought with military technology. For many in the US the words Liberia and Sierra Leone are synonymous with child soldiers holding AKs. There is no realistic way to claim the shipments of AKs to Liberia and Sierra Leone did anything positive for the local population. However, based on how the rifles entered these nations the resulting terror comes as little surprise. Third party entities wilfully sold AKs to a warlord who sought to destabilize and

78 Ibid.
control the territory. On April 26 of 2012 Taylor was convicted for crimes of war and crimes against humanity; he was sentenced for fifty years.

Algeria

The Algerian military purchased AKs directly from the USSR in the mid to late 1970s. While there are articles that describe the conflict in the earlier Algerian war for independence (1954-1962) there is no mention of the AK because it was not used in this conflict. Unverified sources claim that the Algerians almost exclusively received their military equipment from France. Houari Boumediene, President of Algeria in the 60s and 70s, implemented socialist reform such as farming collectivization, and sought closer ties to the USSR. But the real dilemma of the AK in Algeria started in the Algerian civil war (1992-1999) when militant groups used smuggled AK’s and terror tactics to destabilize the Algerian military. Smuggling remains an issue for Algeria and its nearby neighbors as small-time arms dealers and terrorist groups sneak past indefensible borders.

Initially, coverage of the Algerian civil war was minimal in the Western media until a plane was hijacked in 1994. The hijacking was intended to shift world opinion against Algeria’s military government. In a 1994 USA Today article, Jack Kelley writes, “The drama began Saturday when the plane was commandeered in Algeria- a wrenching act in the three-year war against that nation’s military-backed government.”80 The interesting development in reporting the hijacking (aside from the ever-present AK), was the discovery that the hijackers were young extremists. Kelley writes, “The hijackers- the oldest was reportedly 20- armed with two AK-47s

and two handguns, forced the jet to fly to Marseille after killing three hostages and freeing about
60.”81 If getting the attention of global news organizations was the intended goal of the hijackers, despite their death at French commandos, the extremists proved successful.

Western media did increase their focus on the Algerian civil war in years following the hijacking. However that focus mainly fixated on the heinous actions taken by Islamic extremist groups and the prevalence of the AK among the terrorists. Control of Algeria had been split between more factions, aside from the government and religious groups. In 1997 an article from US News & World Report states, “In Algiers…the control of the Doula (means The Power, a private security force) is absolute. At Place Maurice Audin, a busy downtown plaza where one charred tree stands as a lonely remnant of a January bomb that killed more than 40 people, guards armed with AK-47s watch students rush to class at nearby University of Algiers.”82 The main issue prolonging the war was ultimately high unemployment. Combatants did not truly need to follow the doctrine of one group or another, the common underlying theme was a desire for change. The US News & World Report article states,

In a country where unemployment hovers at 70 percent, where 70 percent of the population is under 25, armed gangs have no shortage of new recruits. To the underprivileged, known in Algeria as the hittistes, the enemies are the men in power. Although the FIS (Islamic Salvation Front) in 1992 vowed to turn Algeria into a strict Islamist state, it was the party’s pledge to “overturn the system” that appealed to millions of Algerian hittistes.83

Terrorism still exists in Algeria, there are still parties that are dissatisfied with the state of the Algerian government. Around 2005, the president of Algeria, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, chartered a plan for reconciliation and forgiveness of the minor to moderate participants of rebel factions.

But some Algerians believed that the president’s referendum was a way to forget the war, A BBC article states, “They (the Algerian people) want an accounting for the thousands of people who simply disappeared during the conflict, and they also accuse the government of using the referendum to sweep the past under the carpet.”

Even though the Algerian civil war has been over for more than a decade, the focus of Western media in Algeria has remained fixed on terrorism.

The terrorists are only one factor for AK usage in Algeria; the other, surprisingly enough, was the downfall of Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi. Libya’s arms scattered after Gadhafi’s death and many fell into the hands of local gunrunners. A News RT article states

It is reported, though, that information of the contraband came from Libyan arms smugglers whose business was stopped last year by Algerian forces. As part of a security plan initiated jointly with Niger and Mali, Algerian authorities succeeded in blocking about thirty infiltration routes used by traffickers and terrorists. In 2011, the security services had arrested 87 Libyans who smuggled weapons from their country into Algeria.”

The consequences of rogue Libyans spreading arms throughout Northwestern Africa are felt not only in Algeria but the neighboring nations as well. The News RT article explains,

“Algeria is not the only country that sounded an alarm about intensive arms trafficking on its borders. The black market for arms has inundated many other African states with munitions from Libya,” says Russia’s special envoy to Africa Mikhail Margelov. “I recently visited Nigeria, Mali, Mauritania and Morocco, and for these four countries what is happening in the desert is a real nightmare,” he told RT in January. “One of the tribal leaders said to me, what happened in Libya undermined the market. I asked, ‘What market?’ He said, ‘Today, a Soviet or Chinese-made MANPAD [man-portable surface-to-air missile] costs the price of two Kalashnikovs.' It’s a real problem, because arms trafficking can end up somewhere in the south of Africa or somewhere in the south of Europe.”

86 Ibid.
For many nations in the Northwestern region of Africa, the inability to police borders poses a threat to internal security within these nations. What had been expressed in the previous quote, is that terrorist groups and weapons can quickly mobilize and disappear within these fluid border zones altering economies and crime rates wherever and whenever these groups pass through.

The AK in Algeria receives a somewhat mixed reception. There are those who mistrust the government and the armed forces in Algeria, but for the most part the current military structure appears to be responsible for their own weapon stockpiles. The outside groups that traverse the barely policed border areas with intent to distribute or sell weapons are the less predictable entities. Algeria is arguably among the top three military spenders in Africa. Trading Economics states, “Military expenditure (current LCU) in Algeria was last measured at $723,000,000,000 in 2012, according to the World Bank.”87 For a nation with such a large military budget and required service, Algeria’s military is comparatively docile within the Northwestern African region.

Nigeria

The history of the AK in Nigeria largely started with the Nigerian civil war. In 1966 the first prime minister of Nigeria, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, was assassinated in a military coup led by Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna, and Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu. Unable to establish state control, a counter coup led by Lt Colonel Yakubu Gowon seized control of the government and Gowon was placed in control as head of state. Ethnic tensions erupted between the northern and eastern portions of Nigeria marking the start of the 1967 Nigerian civil war. The northern and western zones comprised Nigeria and the eastern zone became the Biafran territory. A 1969 New

York Times article titled “Biafran Gains Costly as War Becomes a Major Conflict”, describes how the Nigerians received military equipment from both Britain and the Soviet Union to combat the secessionists. As an unintended consequence the Biafran soldiers were able to capture those Nigerian weapon stockpiles given by the Soviet Union and use them against the Nigerian military. The same article states, “Biafran strength was also bolstered by the capture of large quantities of equipment at Owerri. Many Biafran officers and sergeants are fighting with the latest Soviet-made AK-40 (sic) automatic rifle, which is rapidly becoming the standard weapon in the federal infantry.” The AK became a Nigerian military fixture even before the nation was re-unified.

One year after the war ended, Nigeria’s economy and infrastructure started to rebuild. This was mainly because in 1971 Nigeria joined Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). A 1986 journal article in the Journal of Business Ethics states, “From available data, Nigeria is known to occupy a very prominent position as an oil producing country. And with her 2 million barrels per day production in the mid 1970’s she ranked as the world’s fifth largest oil exporter… and the petroleum giant of Sub-Saharan Africa.” After the war, the Biafran zone became incorporated as one of three Nigerian zones subdivided into twelve states each. While Biafran autonomy was lost, the largest ethnic group, the Ibo, expressed relief in the return to secure government structure and most importantly in the conflict being over. A 1973 Los Angeles Times article states, “The towns that were once datelines for headlines—Owerri, Umuahia, and Aba—are quiet. And the locals are planning to turn the last bunker of the

---

89 Garrison, 1969.
Biafran leader, Col. C.O. Ojukwu, into a tourist attraction. (A local stated) ‘Though we are not happy with the results of war...we are happy that the war is over.’\textsuperscript{92} The article expresses that along with the return to relative normality, the people affected by war were seeing improvements, “In Onitsha, perhaps the hardest hit of the cities, a lawyer named G.O. Agbu sips a bottle of locally brewed beer and says: ‘Everything is all right now...I can eat, practice my profession, discuss my opinions and go about unmolested.’\textsuperscript{93} Even though the 1970s were not a perfect time for equality among Nigerians, efforts were made from the top down to accommodate the diverse groups within Nigeria.

Oil became a prominent factor in both Nigerian politics and Nigerian military building. A 1982 New York Times article describes the new role of Nigerian oil officials in the world market despite the lack of stable government infrastructure. The article states,

\begin{quote}
The official, educated at the best British and American universities, is explaining petroleum policy to a visitor...He speaks the language of the International Monetary Fund. His rendering of finance is cool and able. Yet surrounding him, in turbulent Lagos, are signs of the chaos that has come from the uninhibited infusion of oil revenues into a corruption-prone society.\textsuperscript{94}
\end{quote}

By the early 1990s the world’s arms producers sought to increase business ties with Nigeria and sold weapons and patents to Nigeria’s military.\textsuperscript{95} The US and UK supplied manufactured weaponry directly, while patents from mainly Belgium and China (with or without approval from Russia) were sold to Nigeria for local manufacturing. Supplying Nigeria’s military was akin to the tale of Emperor Vespasian’s public lavatory tax, “When Titus (Vespasian’s son) found fault with him for contriving a tax upon public conveniences, he held a piece of money from the first payment to his son's nose, asking whether its odour was offensive

\textsuperscript{92} Tuohy, 1973.
\textsuperscript{93} Tuohy, 1973.
\textsuperscript{95} Defense Industries Corporation of Nigeria, \url{http://www.dicon.gov.ng/military1.html}
to him. When Titus said "No," he replied, "Yet it comes from urine."96 The analogy reflects that weapons sales to Nigeria proved profitable in the short term, but could cause major issues down the line. The prime motivator for world powers to modernize the Nigerian army was profit. After 1991 there was no Cold War to rally behind, and certainly no arms race to continue. Nigeria’s oil revenue was spent on military while government reform was largely ignored.

Nigeria’s oil and arms dichotomy altered the inner workings of the nation from the late 1990s to mid-2000s. In 2006 Chinese-owned Xinhua News Agency wrote an article describing Nigeria’s new capabilities to produce AKs. The article states, “Speaking at the ceremony to present Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo a Nigerian-type AK-47 in Kano, a leading industrial city in north Nigeria, (General N.C.) Maduegbunam said the rifle project was conceived by the corporation some years ago.”97 One goal for the Nigerian military was to control the means and cost of military equipment. The article reflects the cost efficiency by stating, “He (Maduegbunam) said that with the mass-production of OBJ006 (the Nigerian AK), Nigeria would save huge sums of money normally spent on importation of rifles.”98 It is interesting to note that the news agency that covered the development of the OBJ006 was a Chinese agency, as the particular patent that the OBJ006 is derived from came from the Chinese Type 56 AK. Yet despite (Nigerian OBJ006)99 Nigeria’s slow progress in manufacturing AKs of their own, a Chicago Tribune article titled “‘AK-47 Rules’ in Oil-Rich Region of Nigeria,” written just

98 Ibid.
seven days after the Xinhua article describes the violent presence of the AK already within Nigeria’s borders. The article states, “Even by the standards of Nigeria’s oil-rich southern delta region, it was a bloody week. ‘There is no rule of law here. The AK-47 rules,’ said Anyakwe Nsirimovu, a human-rights lawyer based in Rivers state which has been hit hardest by the violence.” According to the article, rampant corruption within Nigeria was seen as the leading explanation for the thriving criminal element, “Few believe last week’s attacks… are coordinated or the work of just one group…they are the result of general lawlessness, bred by a government that buys off potential threats but has done almost nothing to develop a poverty-stricken region filled with simmering resentment.” Nigeria’s government focused on oil profits instead of internal security and corruption was abundant in multiple layers of the governing body.

As of 2014 little has changed with the issue of AKs and militant groups crossing through Nigeria. The same issue of unsecured boundaries that affect most of the Northwestern region is no different in Nigeria. In a 2013 Daily Trust article, the problem of gun trafficking in modern Nigeria is addressed. In the article a former Nigerian military administrator states,

“Our borders are too porous thus making the country susceptible to all forms of things. In our borders along Niger and Chad republics guns are openly displayed for sale. They display the guns like basket of tomatoes. AK-47 with 20 round of ammunition goes for as low as N10,000 (roughly $64 US). With this how can we have peace.” Undesirable elements establishing footholds in Nigeria has only become more of a problem. The notorious Muslim extremist group Boko Haram has been a constant threat to security in Nigeria since 2002. While Boko Haram became globally notorious for kidnapping over 200 Nigerian schoolgirls on April 14 of this year,

---

their tactics have brutalized Nigerians over the past six years. A debate has erupted in the reporting sphere as to where Boko Haram receives their equipment from. An article from AP.org states “At the same time the leader of the Boko Haram terrorist network threatened more assaults ‘soon’ using heavy weapons he said were seized in battles against the Nigerian military.” The article then continues, “A video in which Akubakar Shekau delivers his message ends with a display of rocket-propelled grenades, anti-aircraft guns and piles of AK-47 rifles and ammunition. The Nigerian army does not use AK-47s.” Some portions of the Nigerian army do use AKs. (Figure A) But the fears of a corrupt government still lead some in Nigeria to believe that some government agencies are covering for Boko Haram. (Figure B) 

With how unregulated the borders are in the Northwest region of Africa, criminal and terrorist organizations are able to hide between border areas and evade capture. However, it is a safe bet that the Nigerian government is not supplying arms to Boko Haram. Regardless of possible corruption within the Nigerian government, the fact remains that

---


105 Political Cartoon, image from Nigerian forum nairaland. [http://www.nairaland.com/attachments/1722361_Boko-Haram-Cartoon_gif70e02fd630e386f874eaacc10d40e86](http://www.nairaland.com/attachments/1722361_Boko-Haram-Cartoon_gif70e02fd630e386f874eaacc10d40e86).
Nigeria’s military contractor, Defense Industries Corporation of Nigeria, still does not have the capabilities to mass produce AKs on a significant scale or, more importantly, the ammunition the rifle fires. According to the current goals section of the DICON website, “DICON is planning to establish a new production line for the manufacture of 7.62mm x 39 ammunition which is the preferred ammunition by the Security Services. This informed the Corporation’s current effort to develop and mass produce a Nigerian version of AK47, which uses the same 7.62mm x 39mm ammo.”

It is simply more likely that Boko Haram is buying their weaponry through various arms traders at the Nigerian borders. According to the current goals section of the DICON website, “DICON is planning to establish a new production line for the manufacture of 7.62mm x 39 ammunition which is the preferred ammunition by the Security Services. This informed the Corporation’s current effort to develop and mass produce a Nigerian version of AK47, which uses the same 7.62mm x 39mm ammo.”

NORTHEASTERN AFRICA

Northeastern Africa certainly has the widest array of Kalashnikov cultures of any region in Africa and possibly also of any region in the world. Ethiopia, Kenya, and parts of Northern and Southern Sudan all have a dual view of the rifle. Ethiopia and Kenya both use the AK-47 in their militaries as the standard rifle, but the tribal groups within those nations utilize the rifle as a means for self-sovereignty. Egypt continues to produce its version of the AK-47 from the Maadi

---

factory; Maadi rifles have been known to circulate throughout the whole Northeastern region, as well as to be supplied to Egyptian armed forces\textsuperscript{108}

(Egyptian Maadi AK with thumbhole stock\textsuperscript{109}) (Egyptian Maadi AK with crutch stock\textsuperscript{110})

Somalia is a prime example of a Kalashnikov economy; both government and pirate forces use the AK-47, and in the case of Somalia the weapon’s pervasiveness can be directly linked to the AK-47’s durability and longevity.

Egypt

Egypt was an ideal Cold War satellite location for several reasons; the Suez Canal provides easy access from the Mediterranean to the Eastern coast of Africa, Egypt’s location at the southern coast of the Mediterranean provides an integral refueling and supply drop-point, and perhaps most importantly during the Cold War, Egypt’s economy was among the strongest in Africa and the Middle East. Despite various efforts at intervention in Egyptian politics by

\textsuperscript{108} Asif Efrat, “Toward Internationally Regulated Goods: Controlling the Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons” \textit{International Organization}, Vol. 64, No. 1 (Winter 2010), pp. 97-131 (p. 119). In the journal article Efrat describes that Egypt is an arms producing nation with strong internal gun laws, but extremely loose export laws. On pages 126-128, Efrat explains that in Africa the loose control over arms trade has allowed regional weapons manufacturers to distribute arms relatively easily until more controls have been put in place in recent years, (his sources are mid-1990s to mid-2000s.)

\textsuperscript{109} Thumbhole stock, image from a privately listed advertisement selling the rifle pictured above, \texttt{http://www.armslist.com/posts/2650564/oklahoma-city-oklahoma-rifles-for-sale-trade---1993-import--maadi-rml-ak-47-unmolested-}

\textsuperscript{110} Crutch stock, image from a privately owned blog, depicts an Iraqi soldier with the crutch stock AK from the Maadi factory. \texttt{http://25.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_m7bzy6PaA11qdrno0o1_500.jpg}
Washington and Moscow, Egypt played the Cold War game and in turn walked away with an arsenal from Moscow, and trade deals with Washington.

Egypt has the longest running relationship with the AK-47 of any African nation; the rifle was first given to Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1955 by Nikita Khrushchev.\textsuperscript{111} C.J. Chivers explains that, after 1955, the Soviets actively spread the weapons patents outside the Warsaw Pact nations. Chivers writes, “Under Khrushchev, the Kremlin also distributed arms and arms technology beyond its European vassals. There were two principal types of arrangements: first, direct transfers of finished goods, and later the transfer of licenses and technical specifications to produce them.”\textsuperscript{112} Nasser continued to rely on the Soviets for military technologies and industrialization techniques until his death in September of 1970.

In October of the same year, Nasser’s successor Anwar Sadat stepped into the Cold War arena and assumed the responsibility of balancing Soviet expectations of Egypt while maintaining Egyptian sovereignty. Sadat faced a reality of Soviet influence; the factory at Maadi churned out AK rifles by the thousands, Egypt now also had Soviet-supplied MiG jets and tanks, and the Egyptian military was trained by the best Soviet Cadres available. Yet more overt pressure from the USSR was also present: the Soviets had ships near Alexandria and Soviet aircraft landed regularly carrying more Soviet officials. For all intents and purposes Sadat was co-president of Egypt alongside Soviet president Leonid Brezhnev. By late 1971 and early 1972, Sadat felt the Soviets were overstepping their tolerated presence and so Sadat sent the Cadres back to the USSR.\textsuperscript{113} A New York Times article titled “Egypt and Soviet Seek Better Tie,” explains the ensuing back and forth of the USSR attempting to retain Sadat’s support. In the

\textsuperscript{111} Chivers, 2011, 216.
\textsuperscript{112} Chivers, 2011, 216.
article author Henry Tanner states, “Egypt and the Soviet Union have started to work toward improved relations on a new basis, without any Soviet military presence on Egyptian soil but with friendly cooperation in economic and other fields.”114 The political sense in Egypt at the time was that removing the Soviet Cadres could anger the Soviet Union and could cause a permanent rift between the two powers. While Egypt had the complete manufacture process for small arms, the parts for tanks, planes, and missile launchers came directly from the USSR. Tanner writes, “Egypt remains heavily dependent on such supplies since practically all of her military equipment is from the Soviet bloc.”115 Sadat and the USSR pushed back and forth for another two years while maintaining the same agreement; namely, the Soviets can use Egyptian water space as long as they kept supplying needed vehicle parts and kept their military off of Egyptian soil.

The Egyptian- Soviet exclusivity arrangement hit a roadblock by 1974: Moscow was demanding more of a presence in Egypt, otherwise the parts and ammunition shipments would cease. It is unclear whether Sadat was trying to bluff the Soviet Union or if he was actively looking for external sources of support, but regardless of his motives, Sadat solicited help from the Western nations. In an enthusiastic article titled “Superpower Games in Egypt,” author C.L. Sulzberger describes Egypt as he saw it in 1974. Sulzberger writes, “The helicopter that brought me to Egypt’s Third Army was a Russian MI-8. The major artillery pieces are Russian 112- and 155- millimeter guns. The standard armor comprises Russian T-55 and T-62 tanks. The infantry’s principle automatic weapon is the Russian Kalashnikov.”116 Yet, despite being surrounded by Soviet weapons technology, Sulzberger saw the importance of Sadat’s plea:

114 Tanner, 1972.
115 Tanner, 1972.
“When glimpsing these facts firsthand one appreciates what a momentous decision it was for President Anwar el-Sadat to announce that Egypt would no longer depend for military equipment on the Soviet Union alone… Slowly the United States will be asked to move in as the main substitute supplier.”¹¹⁷ The stakes had never been more costly for the USSR. The Soviet Union was the only power that actively supplied the Arab nations waging war on Israel. The Soviet Union spent billions modernizing Egypt’s military, and now it appeared that Sadat was willing to cut and run without returning the investment. Sulzberger reports on the suspected losses to the Soviet Union in an enthusiastic fashion. He writes, “Egypt wishes to end a situation forcing it to depend on Soviet military supplies for its survival but thereby giving Moscow a leverage on Egyptian policy. For its part, the Kremlin, having spent billions in this critically important land, has no intention of yielding the advantages of its investment without a contest. That contest is apparently now on.”¹¹⁸ For the rest of the Cold War Egypt had multiple avenues by which it could advance its military; the Soviets had been played.

In 1975 the Soviet Union made Egypt a standing offer: it would send advanced jets to rival the Israelis on the condition that Soviet advisors could return to Egypt.¹¹⁹ Addressing the offer, but mainly focusing on the implications of the Soviet deal, Drew Middleton’s 1975 article “Soviet Said to Base Arms Aid for Egypt on Return of Advisers,” explains the possible revival of Soviet influence in the region. Middleton writes, “Soviet military presence in Syria and a possibility that Egypt’s need of modern fighters will lead to a re-establishment of a Soviet military presence there are important elements in the military balance.”¹²⁰ Egypt was not the only piece on the Soviet chessboard; the Soviets had also been supplying arms to Libya. It is still

¹¹⁷ Sulzberger, 1974.
¹¹⁸ Sulzberger, 1974.
¹²⁰ Middleton, 1975.
unknown whether the Libyans crossed into Egypt’s border in 1977 under pressure from the USSR or whether it was Libya’s leader Moammar Khadafy wishing to flex his might. In either event Egypt’s reaction was intense; Sadat kicked all journalists out of the border region between Libya and Egypt. In an appropriately named Los Angeles Times article titled “Egyptians Seal Off a Third of Nation in Security Move,” correspondent Don Schanche writes, “Most sources agreed that Sadat had embarked on a carefully drafted plan at least to intimidate Khadafy and perhaps to topple him from power, either by supporting a coup attempt or by an outright invasion.” Despite the belief by both the US and the USSR that Egypt was their exclusive friend, Egypt denied both powers access to the information as to what occurred on the Libya—Egyptian border. Schanche describes the Egyptian blockade of US and Soviet ships, “Egyptian Naval forces also were reported to be maneuvering in the Gulf of Salum, effectively blocking the border area from seaborne observation by either the Soviet or American fleet. But no foreign observer actually has seen the ground or naval units allegedly in place.” The border reaction between Libya and Egypt showed the US, and especially the Soviet Union, that Egypt may use your weapons, but in no way does that grant either power a say in what happens within Egypt.

Egypt had one final maneuver to pull off on the Soviet Union. The USSR’s invasion into Afghanistan appeared to Egypt as a sign of aggression against the Arab world, and as such the Egyptians sided with the power that could provide aid to Afghanistan. In 1981 that power was the United States. In an article titled “Sadat says U.S. Buys Soviet Arms in Egypt for Afghan Rebels,” the extent of weapons shipments is laid out clearly. The article states that, in an interview in Cairo, Sadat expressed a desire to help the Americans arm the Mujahidin in Afghanistan. “Mr. Sadat said he was approached by United States authorities ‘the first moment’

Soviet forces moved into Afghanistan… ‘I opened my stores to them,’ (Sadat to the Americans) Mr. Sadat said. The weapons, the exact nature of which was not specified, were flown from Cairo in American aircraft.”¹²³ The implications of both sides using Soviet weaponry in the Soviet war in Afghanistan were obvious to the press observers covering the event. Even in the same article the anonymous author mentions the Afghans using the AK-47, “In last night’s interview, Mr. Sadat said the arms shipments would continue ‘until Afghanis get rid of the Soviets.’ Egypt acquired the weapons during the years when, [it was] an ally of the Soviet Union… Included were Kalashnikov automatic rifles, a standard infantry weapon in the Soviet bloc.”¹²⁴

Sadat played the Soviets and walked away with a modern army, for which Egypt monetarily paid nothing. Yet after utilizing the Soviet weapons for years to combat Israel, the irony is that when Sadat finally acknowledged Israel’s sovereignty as a nation, he was murdered with an AK-47. Chivers describes the scene of Sadat’s death,

While a ceremonial convoy passed the reviewing stand, a lieutenant ran toward the dignitaries standing for the pass and review. The officer with the Kalashnikov seemed part of the performance… He started firing. At the same time, more soldiers on a troop transport opened fire on the bleachers. Sadat and eleven other people were killed. Egypt passed under martial law.¹²⁵

The AK-47 came into Egypt as a military tool, and to this day most of them are still under the control of the military. The Egyptian military still employs several variations of the AK-47 (mix of both wood/steel and polymer/steel), and are not in the process of changing their standard arm. However the AK-47 is eternally honored on the Sinai Peninsula, where the Egyptians erected a giant AK-47 barrel with a bayonet pointed towards the sky.

¹²⁴ Ibid.
¹²⁵ Chivers, 2010, 358.
Ethiopia

Ethiopia, South Sudan, Kenya, and parts of Somalia have several regions where African tribal sovereignty is practiced, or at the very least tolerated by use of legal protections and tribal zones (Ethiopia has no legal protections for tribal groups). The Ethiopian Government faces issues of poaching (though more of an issue in Kenya and Uganda), warring tribal groups, and Somali war bands crossing into Ethiopian territory. At the heart of all three of these issues is the ever present AK-47. Ethiopia first saw the rifle in the hands of the Somali military. During the period 1974- 1991, Ethiopia was under a communist government structure and the Soviets saw fit to give Ethiopians AKs of their own. Before the communist era in Ethiopia, the nation had an emperor. After a general discontent among the Ethiopian people over a failed military venture in Eritrea in 1962 and the civil opposition over the oil crisis in 1973, Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown by a Soviet backed group headed by Mengistu Haile Marim.

The pro-communist group in Ethiopia doubled as a popular movement that restructured the government system within Ethiopia while ensuring ties with the Soviet Union. The coup headed by Mengistu Haile Mariam immediately removed the old guard from power. In a New

---

York Times article titled “3 Top Generals in Ethiopia Reported Arrested by Army,” it is explained that the army arrested officers connected to Selassie’s reign. The article states “They (three generals) were detained by units of the Fourth Division and taken to divisional headquarters in the city center where 20 former ministers and other officials widely accused of corruption are being held, the sources added.”

The pro-communist faction had grassroots splinter groups, one such group, known as the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party, was popular among young scholars. In one incident some members of the EPRP made their dislike of the West known, a New York Times article titled “Ethiopian Students Attack U.S. and British Centers,” states, “About 50 demonstrators, described by witnesses as being of high-school age, threw three firebombs at the ground floor of the United States Information Service building.”

For those attached to the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (main communist affiliate) the West was synonymous with the ousted emperor.

In early 1977 Ethiopia was granted official aid by major Soviet allies. Formerly in support of Somalia’s claim to the Ogaden region, the USSR shifted support to the surer bet, Ethiopia. In late February and early March, the USSR requested that Cuban Cadres train the Ethiopian military. In a New York Times article, correspondent Graham Hovey explains that Cuban presence was noticed by the U.S. State Department. Hovey writes, “The State Department estimated today that 250 Cuban and Soviet military advisers were assisting Ethiopia’s armed forces, which are trying to put down the insurrections in the province of Eritre and the Ogaden region.”

The article also describes the fears by the State Department of more Soviet influence in the region, “Some 150 are reported to be Cubans. This would represent a threefold increase.

---

since May, when the department expressed concern at reports that 50 Cuban military advisers had arrived in Addis Ababa.\textsuperscript{131} Yet the most important aspect of Hovey’s article is that Ethiopia rejected the standing arms deal from the United States, and instead received a ludicrous amount of aid from Moscow; “Ethiopia’s military rulers scrapped the country’s longstanding military assistance agreement with the United States earlier this year and negotiated an arms aid package worth an estimated $500-million with Moscow.”\textsuperscript{132} The United States officials saw the presence of Russian and Cuban Cadres in Ethiopia as a persistent spark that continued to ignite the conflict between Ethiopians and Somalis. One Los Angeles Times article in 1978 states, “The Soviet Union signaled Sunday that it would not agree to withdrawal of its own and Cuban forces from Ethiopia, as urged by the United States, in return for the departure of Somali forces from the Ogaden desert.”\textsuperscript{133} Under advice from the Soviet Union, Ethiopia rejected any deal from the United States to cease fighting in the Ogaden region; “The report said Ethiopia ‘is resolutely rejecting the attempts by the U.S. government and its allies to interfere in the solution of matters which fall within Ethiopia’s sovereignty.’”\textsuperscript{134} Under Soviet and Cuban guidance, Ethiopia had little to fear from either Somalia or the Western allied nations.

Conflict in the Ogaden region did not die down. In fact heavy fighting continued through the late 1980s when under Gorbachev’s policies of Perestroika and Glasnost, the USSR massively scaled back on foreign support. Yet before the final stoppage of Soviet support, the USSR had spent an inordinate amount of money on Ethiopia’s military. A 1980 Boston Globe article states, “The Soviet Union has provided Ethiopia with more than $1.5 billion in arms,

\textsuperscript{131} Hovey, 1977.
\textsuperscript{132} Hovey, 1977. 500 million dollars’ worth of arms to Ethiopia in 1977 was an unbelievable sum for the time, the oldest available gross domestic product report for Ethiopia was 1990, and in the report Ethiopia’s GDP was only 233 million. http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=SNAAMA&f=grID%3A101%3BcurrID%3AUSD%3BpcFlag%3A1 (United Nations database)
\textsuperscript{133} “Russ Hint They Won't Pull Own of Cuban Troops Out of Ethiopia,” Los Angeles Times, March 13, 1978.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
including MIG21, and 23 fighter-bombers, MI-24 helicopter gunships, T54 tanks and an assortment of armored cars and long-range artillery to oppose this and other armed nationalist movements throughout the fragile Northeast African empire."\textsuperscript{135} Yet the inhabitants of the Ogaden region are not the typical Somalis the Ethiopian forces had previously fought, these were the remnants of former guerilla forces as well as the locals that had always lived in the Ogaden region. The same Boston Globe article describes the difference between this guerilla force and its predecessor, “The guerillas at that time were also receiving training in North Korea, Iraq and Syria. But today they only get a small trickle of arms from Iran, Iraq and Egypt (hence how pastoral groups in this region received the AK-47) and they train their own fighters inside Ogaden.”\textsuperscript{136} These combatants were not Somali regular infantry, and their lifestyle was similarly seen among various groups within Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, North and South Sudan, and several other regions. The article states “The inhabitants are nomadic pastoralists who wander back and forth across the Ethio-Somali border with their sheep, goats, cattle and camels as if the arbitrary political boundary had never existed.”\textsuperscript{137} This specific group and others like it had different motives and, more importantly, little official support from either nearby nations or the USSR.

Ethiopia-Tribal Autonomy

Tribal and pastoral autonomy is a controversial issue, one which becomes increasingly more controversial when combined with the presence of the AK. Many journals and newspaper articles describe that because of modern weaponry tribal warfare is more devastating. One such article from The Times in 2006 states, “The Boran tribesmen, waving AK47 assault rifles,
separated the Gabra men from their women, children and animals, before forcing them to lie on the ground but not before two men had been shot dead in the confusion. They warned the Kenyans to stay out of Ethiopia and said they were confiscating their animals, before disappearing back into the night.”138 In these articles the culprit is typically the omnipresence of the AK, “In recent years the raids have taken on a more violent nature, fueled by an influx of guns from civil wars in Southern Sudan, Uganda, and Somalia.”139 The inherent question is; how can governments prevent arms from reaching tribal groups in a region awash with surplus rifles? The simple answer is that they cannot, as the article above discussed, and what the whole failure of the Ogaden war symbolized, these borders are fluid and hard to police. Instead of investigating how the rifles keep proliferating in tribal zones; the historical focus should be reflective of what the AK means to the tribal groups that utilize it.

All African tribes are different. Even when focusing primarily on Ethiopian tribes, the levels of traditional culture are higher in some groups than in others. But one common correlation between AK-using tribes is that the rifle allows a sense of self-governance. In a Daily Mail article by Ruth Styles, she analyzes the culture of the Hamar (or Hamer both are accepted) in southern Ethiopia. Her article is interesting because her narrative is based on pictures taken by photographer Eric Lafforgue, and her goal is to discuss the various practices of the Hamar and the toughness of Hamar women. In the article this image (Figure C) is presented with a caption that reads “Tough girl: Like their men, Hamar women are expected to play a role

138 Rob Crilly, “Tribal Rustlers Turn to Dealing in Death as the Drought Ends,” The Times, April 21, 2006.
139 Crilly, 2006.
in protecting the family cattle from rustlers and predatory wildlife” In the article Styles explains photographer Lafforgue’s reasoning for visiting the tribe. She writes

Lafforgue travelled to Ethiopia after spotting pictures of the Hamar in a vintage book and hopes his photos will provide a record of a culture under threat from encroaching modernity. His striking images reveal the beauty of Hamar women in their orange ochre make-up and bright beads, their skin scarred into intricate patterns using thorns, resilient as they live a life that’s precarious at best and brutal at worst.

On the surface Styles’s article is about the sub-roles of women within the Hamar tribe, but it alludes to the greater sense of Hamar autonomy (and to the fact that, with the AK, some tribes no longer rely on a strictly male warrior class to defend against rustlers). Even among the Hamar the AK is not viewed universally the same way. Some images depict the rifle with no adornment even when carried by people in traditional tribal attire (as seen in the image above), but other Hamar decorate the rifle with their tribal style. Hamar have a split culture both inspired by traditional pastoralist religion and Islam.

(Images of Hamar with various tribal adornments and decorated Kalashnikovs)

Another tribe that utilizes the AK is the Afar.

As with the Hamar, the Afar are predominantly Muslim. However, unlike the Hamar, the Afar

140 Ruth Styles “Are these the world's toughest women? Incredible photos shed light on Ethiopia's Hamar tribe females who are beaten with canes and scarred with thorns to prove their strength” Femail, Daily Mail, October 11, 2013.
141 Styles 2013.
142 Hamar religion statistics from http://www.gateway-africa.com/tribe/Hamar_tribe.html, “The Hamer-Banna are 90% Sunni Muslim. They observe the five basic teachings of Islam, which include acknowledging that Allah is the only god, praying, fasting, giving alms to the poor, and making a pilgrimage to Mecca. However, many elements of their traditional religion are still practiced. For instance, they believe that natural objects (rocks, trees, etc.) have spirits. They also believe in jinnis, or spirits that are capable of assuming human or animal form and exercising supernatural influence over people.”
143 Hamar, images from photographer David Schweitzer.
144 http://www.gateway-africa.com/tribe/Afar_tribe.html
people have been viewed as having a warrior culture (despite also raising cattle). Also, the Afar have different customs from those of the Hamar, the men will grow out their hair during adulthood, and carry Jile, curved knives that are a hybrid of Middle-Eastern and African influence, and some men even file their teeth to points. (Afar with Jile)

Addressing arguments of AKs and cross tribal brutality, the Hamar and Afar provide a good dynamic for comparison. The Hamar and Afar are both Muslim pastoral cattle raisers, who utilize AKs. So why are the Afar labeled as warrior like? The answer lies in tactics chosen by particular tribes. The Afar for example have used violence to protect their sovereignty. A 2013 news article from The Horn Times Newsletter, notes that even when the Afar participate in peaceful protest, opposing parties are fearful of violence. The article states,

After rumors spread like wild fire that the minority junta of Ethiopia was amassing troops near the key desert town of Semera, the principal center of Islamic learning and propagation, to arrest Afar’s most venerated religious leader, the honorable sheik Mohammed Awal Hayytan, the battle hardened traditional Afar warriors blocked the high way between the port of Djibouti and Ethiopia in peaceful protest on Tuesday afternoon 12 March 2013 and again on Wednesday, triggering panic in Addis Ababa and other parts of Ethiopia.

145 http://www.gateway-africa.com/tribe/Afar_tribe.html, “(the Afar) Are an ethnic group in the Horn of Africa, mainly in Eritrea, Djibouti and the Afar Region in Ethiopia, Africa. They are sometimes called Danakil. The Afar has acquired a reputation as a warrior tribe through the various conflicts in their region during the past century.”
While the incident between Mohammad Awal Hayytan and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (leading political party and military force in Ethiopia) has thus far seen no bloodshed (at the time the article was written), the Afar are not afraid of conflict. In the article, a cleric under Hayytan named Ali said, “He will never leave his people and his people will never allow TPLF forces to go in and arrest an innocent man at gun point.” Even when displaying peaceful opposition, the Afar can rely on the threat of violent tactics to protect their way of life.

The two tribes discussed, the Hamar and the Afar, have their various similarities and differences. Yet these tribes are just two examples of the wide variety of tribal groups in the Northeast region of Africa. For comparison purposes the Mursi and Dinka tribes also have large populations within Ethiopia, both tribes use AKs but are Animist not Muslim. The Mursi have been known to wear lip plates and practice body scarification, while the Dinka also practice scarification but do not wear lip plates, there are no preset indicators of violent AK usage. The only uniform thing between these tribal groups is the use and cultural integration of the AK for tribal autonomy.

(Mursi with lip plates and shell adornments\textsuperscript{150}) (Dinka with facial scarification\textsuperscript{151})

\textsuperscript{149} Bekele, 2013.
\textsuperscript{150} Mursi, image from Africletic online magazine, \url{http://africletic.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Africa-AK-47-africletic.jpeg}.
Somalia

Somalia gained independence from Britain and Italy on July 1, 1960 (British Somaliland gained independence on June 26, 1960), and formed the Somali Republic. Somalia’s first Prime Minister, Abdirashid Ali Shermarke led the newly formed nation along with President Aden Abdullah Osman Daar, and Shermarke was elected president himself in 1967. Shermarke’s presidency was short lived as he was assassinated by a bodyguard on October 15, 1969. What ensued was a bloodless military takeover in which the commander of the Somali army, Mohamed Siad Barre seized control of the country.

Barre did not have to wait long before the Soviet Union approached him with an offer to strengthen ties between the Soviets and Somalis. The Soviets were already assisting Somalia behind the backs of the British and other European powers A New York Times article states, “The Soviet Union has been providing economic aid to this nation just south of the Red Sea since 1960.” Yet this new relationship was different; the Soviets had an opportunity to appeal to a military leader who could appreciate the opportunity for modernization of the Somali military. The article states, “After congratulating Gen. Mohamed Siad Barre for his successful coup d’état on October 21, the Soviet Union promised more aid. A 14-man team arrived last night for the preliminary discussions.” Barre did not hesitate to accept the Soviet offer; the friendship between the USSR and Somalia insured regular shipments of arms and supplies. The US Library of Congress study of foreign military assistance in Somalia states,

---

153 Ibid.
154 Ibid.
Until Siad Barre seized power in 1969, Somalia's Western orientation and small amounts of United States and West German aid to the Somali police force limited the impact of Soviet military assistance. After the coup, however, Siad Barre embraced scientific socialism and the Soviet Union became Somalia's major supplier of military matériel.\textsuperscript{155} Barre’s newfound friendship with the Soviets ensured that Western powers would have to wait their turn for open access to Somalia.

For the Soviet Union, supplying tanks, mortars, and Kalashnikov rifles was a cheap price to pay for regional dominance. The Library of Congress study explains, “Access to Berbera (port in Somalia) gave the Soviet Union a presence in the strategically important Indian Ocean-Persian Gulf region to counter United States military activities in the area. Berbera acquired additional importance when Egypt expelled all Soviet advisers in July 1972.”\textsuperscript{156} Access to the Somali port of Berbera enabled the Soviet Union to keep a foothold in Northeastern Africa after the relationship between the Soviet Union and Egypt fell apart. Yet Barre had his own agenda; perhaps inspired by Sadat’s foreign policies in Egypt, Barre opened his country to Western economic opportunity. A Los Angeles Times article titled, “Somalia Offers Fueling Facilities for U.S. Warships,” provides a sense of how the US and the USSR both worked with Barre. The article addresses Barre’s relative neutrality by stating, “Siad (Barre) said in an interview, “(a silo in Berbera) is not a Soviet base and no Soviet equipment is under the control of the Russians in my country. We condemn all kinds of bases and believe that a piece of sovereignty is sacrificed when rights to a base are given.”\textsuperscript{157} Barre’s comments indicated that he wished to keep “an equal

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.
distance between the two blocs”\textsuperscript{158} and for a while Somalia had an open shop between the US and USSR.

In 1977 Somalia started to mistrust the Soviet Union, mainly because of the budding friendship between the USSR and Ethiopia. Western media was acutely aware of the motives of Ethiopia, Somalia, and the Soviet Union. A 1975 Los Angeles Times article states, “Ethiopia became a Soviet ally after the fall of the late Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974 and the rise of a Marxist military administration. Somalia already had links with Moscow and was receiving Soviet arms.”\textsuperscript{159} The contested Ogaden desert territory was (and remains) a heated issue between Ethiopia and Somalia after the borders were reformed after World War II. Again, as was the case in Angola, both the Ethiopians and the Somalis were both ‘supported’ by the Soviets and in open war with both sides using Kalashnikov rifles. After open USSR support for Ethiopia was known by Barre, Somalia started to withdraw from the USSR’s umbrella. The article states, “Somalia blasted recent statements of Soviet support for Ethiopia in the escalating conflict in the Horn of Africa, hinting at a possible break in relations with the Kremlin.”\textsuperscript{160} By either intentional or loosely scrutinized foreign policy, the Soviets lost the support of their last ally on the Horn of Africa.

Barre, having distanced himself from the Soviet Union (though not completely separated), looked to Western nations for support. Seeing an opportunity to increase Western influence in Eastern Africa, the major Western military powers offered support; “On July 26, 1977, the Department of State announced that the United States, Britain, and France were

\begin{footnotes}
\item[158] Ibid.
\item[160] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
prepared to provide arms to Somalia.”161 In a newspaper article titled “How to Steal the Pot: Somali President Plays Sharp Diplomatic Poker,” correspondent David Lamb alludes to the reality that were Somalia not a prime location for a Cold War satellite, there would be no valid reason to provide aid. Lamb writes “Barre’s cards are seldom strong. He runs one of Africa’s most backward, isolated, and impoverished nations. It has few mineral resources and much desert. More than 60% of the people are nomads… Yet Barre is courted by the Russians and the Americans.”162 By November of 1977 Barre followed in Sadat’s example and expelled the Soviets from Somalia. A Los Angeles Times article states, “Somalia, once one of Moscow’s closest friends in Africa, expelled all Russian advisors Sunday, terminated Soviet use of air and naval facilities at two Somali ports and broke relations with Cuba, the government announced.”163 The final break with the USSR was brought about by Cuban involvement on behalf of the Ethiopians, “Sunday’s moves followed Somali claims that Cuban troops are fighting alongside Ethiopian forces battling Somali-backed insurgents in Ethiopia’s eastern Ogaden region.”164

Somalia became less important as a Cold War satellite during the 1980s. Barre’s failures during the Ogaden War, alongside his strict governing policies within Somalia, led to a general sense of discontent with the Somali population. Barre’s repeated military action in the Ogaden region, as well as his controlling government structure caused world powers to be hesitant to stand by the Barre regime. In 1991 Barre was ousted and Somalia broke out in civil war. After removing Barre from power, General Muhammad Farrah Aidid assumed the role of president and unsuccessfullly attempted to establish his own government. The problem was that rival

---

164 Ibid.
warlords (mainly in Southern Somalia) recruited small armies and armed them with the abundant AKs both from Barre’s old stockpiles, and through black market channels from Sudan, Ethiopia, and Kenya. In a 1995 The Times (London) article titled, “Feuding Warlords Plunge Somalia into New Bloodshed,” the role of these warriors fighting under any specific warlord is seen to be complicated. The article states,

“Little Ears” (a Somali militant) says that like many others, he is war-weary and wants nothing more than to buy some farmland and settle down with his wife and three children. But if the warlords call on his help he will not deny them, “I do not want to kill my brothers, but I may have no choice…Aidid is the right leader for the Somali people, and I want to do what is best for the country.”

Somalia is still hotly contested; the semi-legitimate government (the government in place is not recognized by world powers) in the Northern portion of the country is constantly facing threats from various warlords in Southern Somalia.

The consequences of the unstable government in Somalia are harshest on the young men and women growing up in what is essentially a national warzone. Various warlords promise stability and material reward for armed service. (Armed Somali teens) Because there is not an agreed upon set of rules for militants, young men are often recruited into war bands and given AKs, cigarettes, alcohol, and qat (local narcotic chewed in leaf form). The teens are allowed free reign and in turn contribute to the instability of Somalia. With limited government and stockpiles of AK-47s available, industrious men turn to illegal industries like black market sales of weapons and narcotics, and to piracy. The AK-47 has proven its mettle in piracy; other weapons (including the American M-16 given to Somalia during the Ogaden War) stop functioning when exposed to moderate quantities of grime, dirt, sea spray, and salt corrosion. Displayed in Gordon Rottman’s book and mentioned in the historiography is this image of a captured pirate’s Kalashnikov (Figure D), the caption reads, “Soldier-proof and even pirate-proof. This totally saltwater-rust-
encrusted Chinese Type 56 (AKM) was captured from Somalian pirates and by right should be inoperational, but it still fired."173  While piracy was (and still is) a persistent problem in Somalia, the practice was largely unknown to the Western media until April 12 of 2009. During an incident known as the Maersk Alabama hijacking, four Somali pirates boarded a cargo ship and eventually took the Captain hostage, (the pirates were between the ages of 17 and 19 years old). A newspaper article addressing the Maersk Alabama hijacking explains both the ease and lucrativeness of piracy, “There has been no confirmation of the reported $2 million ransom demand from the pirates… Had the pirates been allowed to reach the shore, Captain Phillips would have joined the more than 285 hostages already being held, along with 15 captured vessels.”174 Four teens were able to board a commercial vessel and almost succeeded in kidnapping a cargo ship captain.

It would be hard to claim that the AK-47 has done good things for the Somali people. Perhaps during the early parts of Barre’s reign the rifle provided a semblance of security from hostilities with Ethiopia. The rifle is an industry in Somalia; the AK’s inherent durability makes it the number one choice for pirates and untrained child soldiers fighting in war bands. Although the concept of modern day piracy is a brutal reality of the Cold War aftermath, few reminders of this practice are seen in western media. The most recent reminder was a 2013 film starring Tom Hanks casted as Captain Phillips of the Maersk Alabama ship.

173 Rottman, 2011, 18.
CONCLUSION

Just as Africa is not homogenous in its cultural practices and standards of living, neither is the Kalashnikov culture the same throughout continental Africa. The AK was able to become a revolutionary symbol for several Southern African nations because of the success by anti-colonial fighters in acquiring and using the weapon. In Northwestern Africa the AK is largely viewed by the populace as an unwelcome sickness that spreads like a plague, which was reflected in the way that the rifle entered into the region. In Northeastern Africa the Kalashnikov is a Rorschach test, many groups in this region see the rifle differently than the groups around them, with a common underlying theme of autonomy via Kalashnikov.

The Cold War was a motivator for the global distribution of arms and, unfortunately for regions with an underdeveloped infrastructure, having military grade weaponry dispersed throughout a nation usually leads to abuses and violations of human rights. But for nations that have a relatively strong infrastructure, military grade weaponry is an asset to modern army


\[176\] Inkblot test that was commonly used throughout the 1960s, where an inkblot would be shown and the patient would then decipher what they believe the image to be.
building and state sovereignty. Yet there is an issue of greater importance reflected in the African adoption of the AK; for far too long in the West the State Department has viewed African nation states as merely the pawns to either U.S. or Soviet desires during the Cold War. As reflected in this thesis, some African nations were able to flex their own political influence regardless of what the US or USSR requested of them.

The harsh reality is that the rifles are already in Africa; sometimes the weapons are so ingrained within the subculture that they become synonymous with the greater culture itself. Many accounts whether written by scholars or by media or news correspondents that discuss African issues, and talk about the AK, typically demonize the weapon as the purveyor of all sins. The AK falls into many hands, some into the hands of warlords and some into the hands of responsible militaries and cattle ranchers. To simply attribute all of Africa’s problems to a nine pound Soviet construct of wood and steel is largely inaccurate. In some places, the abuses of power by a few men have skewed the image for the entire region, but the skewed image is not exactly the reality. How African nations view the AK differs by country and region immensely; the views are reflected by the purpose the weapon was supposed to serve during and after the Cold War. The biggest inherent problem of oversaturation of AKs in Africa is that the rifles were built to last decades; yet the continued government sponsored destruction of AKs by several African Nations provide the sense that the weapon, in time, will fall under responsible control.

“Of all the weapons in the vast soviet arsenal, nothing was more profitable than Avtomat Kalashnikova model of 1947. More commonly known as the AK-47, or Kalashnikov. It's the world's most popular assault rifle. A weapon all fighters love. An elegantly simple 9 pound amalgamation of forged steel and plywood. It doesn't break, jam, or overheat. It'll shoot whether it's covered in mud or filled with sand. It's so easy, even a child can use it; and they do. The Soviets put the gun on a coin. Mozambique put it on their flag. Since the end of the Cold War, the Kalashnikov has become the Russian people's greatest export. After that comes vodka, caviar, and suicidal novelists. One thing is for sure, no one was lining up to buy their cars.” - Yuri Orlov played by Nicolas Cage (Lord of War, 2005)
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary


“Galil & Close Derivatives,” *Small Arms Survey*;


Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Official Website, Humanitarian assistance to Zimbabwe; http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/ns-rafr.nsf/89414576079db559432569d8002421fc/432569a400373407c325756a003b9e87!OpenDocument


Small Arms Survey “Weapons Identification Sheet Galil & Close Derivatives”

B/SAS_weapons-assault-rifles-Galil.pdf


Styles, Ruth. “Are these the world's toughest women? Incredible photos shed light on Ethiopia's Hamar tribe females who are beaten with canes and scarred with thorns to prove their strength” Femail, *Daily Mail*, October 11, 2013.


Trading Economics; Military Expenditure for Algeria.


Tranquillus, C. Suetonius. *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, chapter 23 section 3:

http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Suetonius/12Caesars/Vespasian*.html


http://www.armscontrol.org/node/2989

United Nations Treaty Archive,


United Nations Treaty Archive,


http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB67/gleijeses6.pdf


Secondary


