

STRENGTHENING SECURITY IN MALI WITH WEAPONS AND AMMUNITION MANAGEMENT

by Marlène Dupouy [United Nations Mine Action Service]



Figure 1. Map of Mali.
All graphics courtesy of UNMAS Mali.

When insurgent groups in Mali initiated a rebellion for independence in late 2011, the National Guard and the Malian Defense and Security Forces (MDSF) in Gao were at the forefront of hostilities, which included the pillaging of weapons from government stores. Concurrently, the demise of the Gaddafi regime in Libya triggered an influx of small arms and light weapons (SA/LW) across the Sahel region and the return of fighters from Libya, making northern Mali their base. That challenge was quickly seized upon by jihadists and opportunists aiming to further destabilize Mali and enlarge their bases and activities throughout the Sahel region.

Often referred to as the real weapons of mass destruction, SA/LW play a critical role in the perpetuation and the spread of armed conflicts. Cheap, durable, and easily concealed, SA/LW remain the primary weapons of inter-community tensions, armed insurrections, armed rebel activities, or terrorism. The illicit proliferation, accentuated by the porous nature of borders in the region, has had a devastating effect on development, governance, and the everyday life of communities.

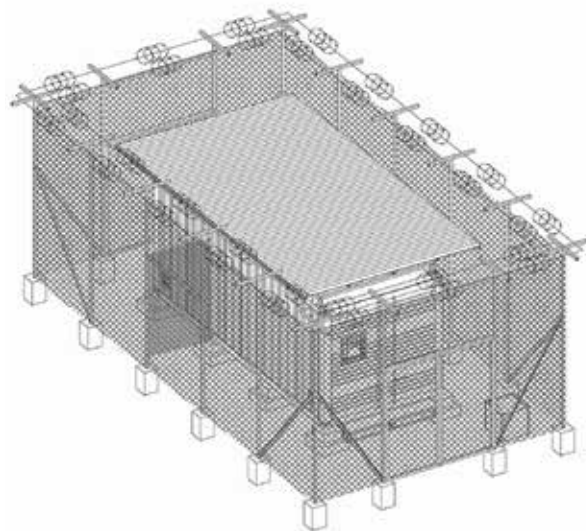
Since 2013, the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), as part of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), has been mandated by Security Council resolution 2364 “to assist the Malian authorities with the removal and destruction of mines and other explosive devices and weapons and ammunition management.”¹ The resolution also “calls upon the Malian authorities, with the assistance of MINUSMA ... and international partners, to address the issue of the proliferation and illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons.”¹

The UNMAS contribution to weapons and ammunition management (WAM) has been innovative and holistic by combining practical, safe storage solutions and tailor-made, on-site facility management training, complemented by in-depth trainings. Lessons learned from working in Mali as well as input from other UNMAS WAM programs, including Côte d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, led to the development of a technical guide to improve standardization. More recently, the importance of WAM as a preventive measure against stockpile diversion has been further strengthened by Security Council resolution 2370.²

Implementing Innovative Solutions

Mali is a vast, landlocked country of more than 1.2 million sq km (nearly .5 million sq mi). The roads connecting the south and north are in a poor state of repair and are often targeted by armed terrorist groups in an effort to disrupt supply chains. Furthermore, the loss of state control in northern regions for years combined with the latest crisis has exacerbated the poor infrastructure situation.

To respond to the priorities of the MDSF in such a complex operational context, UNMAS had to develop the most flexible, fit-for-purpose, and cost-effective solutions for weapons storage in remote areas. To reinforce the safety and security of government-owned SA/LW, UNMAS has proposed standardized solutions for the construction of temporary storage facilities. These armories consist of a 20 ft (6.1 m) container and offer a range of capacities from 100 to 220 weapons. Most include a separate compartment for small arms



Example of armory kit provided by UNMAS Mali Programme, 2015.



Armory provided by UNMAS Mali Programme, 2015.

ammunition storage, with a capacity of approximately 2 metric tons (2.2 US tons). This ready-made solution can be implemented in one month with minimal supervision on site, thereby mitigating the risk of failure by local contractors. Containers are prepared in Bamako or other main cities before being transported and assembled on-site, thus limiting the risk of exposure of both local contractors and UNMAS personnel. This temporary and mobile solution allows the MDSF to move their storage facilities if need be. These turn-key rehabilitation projects are easily duplicable at a relatively low cost (USD\$10,000 per unit).

To date, 22 such facilities have been constructed or rehabilitated in northern Mali, including remote locations such as Diré, Niafunké, Goundam, and Ménaka. Additionally, to support the MDSF while on operational deployment, armory kit solutions were developed. The kits are composed of a container, metallic base-ment, mobile roof, ventilations, mobile solar panels, gun racks, un-loading bays, etc., and are mobile, easily transportable, and fast to assemble in the field with minimal skills. They are intended to ease deployment and provide safer storage for both SA/LW and their ammunition. They can be installed with minimal technical knowl-edge, skills, and means.

The team in Mali pioneered a “Technical Booklet for tempo-rary armouries” that serves as a tool for learning and improving the quality of design and construction of weapons storage faci-lities across UNMAS field programs. Following this successful ini-tiative, the focus of the team shifted to efforts at standardizing ammunition storage solutions. These turn-key solutions are easily applicable by the United Nations, NGOs, or private operators that constitute the WAM community.

Aiming to ensure sustainability through national ownership, Malian personnel in charge of newly rehabilitated armories also benefit from tailor-made WAM induction training. This three-day training package is delivered on-site and is aimed at supporting the operationalization of the armory and enhancing the capacity of the MDSF to operate safely. The training is conducted in parallel to other qualifying WAM training in Bamako. Complementing these safe storage initiatives, explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) training, mentorship, and specialized equipment were provided to support a national capacity to conduct bulk demolitions.

Contributing to Stabilization Efforts

Improved WAM contributed to stabilization and redeployment efforts by enabling the MDSF to access safe SA/LW and ammunition stockpiles in areas of operation, as well as by impeding the pil-laging of weapons and ammunition stocks and their deployment during hostilities in Mali. All uniformed services deployed in re-mote areas—namely the MDSF, the Water and Forestry units, the



Example of armory kit provided by UNMAS Mali Programme, 2015.

Customs and the Penitentiary Administration—have benefited from such support. Among them, the National Guard is the most decentralized service and often targeted by terrorist attacks across the country. The National Guard plays a critical role in the rede-ployment of state authority in the most remote areas with direct contact with local populations. The rehabilitation of weapons and ammunition storage areas in central and northern Mali, as well as the provision of trainings, contribute to the return of state authority in these areas by strengthening the capacity of state institutions— in this case Malian Defense and Security Forces to securely store their weaponry. In addition, it helps to foster the conditions that are necessary for the redeployment of MDSF in central and northern Mali. UNMAS has supported this security force with the rehabili-tation of armories in Gao, Ménaka, and soon-to-be Gossi, as well as with the delivery of various WAM induction trainings that enable the National Guard to be operational and to prevent looting of na-tional stockpiles.

When interviewed on 7 August 2017, the commanding officer of the National Guard in Gao highlighted that UNMAS assistance helped to support stabilization efforts and that a positive impact was noticed on the ground. He emphasized that the WAM trainings contribute to raising awareness of personnel on the importance of applying best practices in order to avoid stockpile diversion and ac-cidents. Moreover, he stressed the significant impact of implement-ing rehabilitation projects in rural areas as a positive signal for local administrations and populations and a significant contribution to stabilization efforts in Mali. ©

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1. “Security Council Extends Mandate of Mission in Mali, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2364 (2017).” United Nations. 29 June 2017. <http://bit.ly/2xiGxEI>. Accessed 5 October 2017.
2. S/RES/2370 (2017) adopted on 2nd August 2017, on “Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts - Preventing terrorists from acquiring weapons.”