

Firearms Trafficking in Honduras

By InSight Crime and the Asociación para una Sociedad Más Justa



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Executive Summary

Honduras has one of the highest homicide rates in the world, and some 75 percent of these homicides are committed using guns.¹ The world average is closer to 50 percent. Honduras is not alone in the region. Just over 60 percent of El Salvador's homicides and 81 percent of homicides in Guatemala -- Honduras' Northern Triangle neighbors -- involve firearms.²

The circulation of guns does not necessarily lead to high homicides in all cases. Nicaragua has an abundance of weapons in circulation,³ but a homicide rate that is just one-sixth that of Honduras. However, in a country where organized crime and gangs are rampant and security forces are regularly accused of corruption, the availability of weapons certainly facilitates violence.

This report attempts to track the sources of the weapons that are behind these homicides and that have made organized criminal groups and gangs such formidable forces in Honduras. It does this using various methods.

First, it draws from the best information available on gun seizures in the country. This gave us an understanding of what types of weapons are in circulation in the black market, where they come from, and who is circulating them.

Second, InSight Crime and our partner organization on this project, the Association for a More Just Society (Asociación para una Sociedad más Justa – ASJ) visited and interviewed representatives of the Honduran institutions responsible for procuring and selling weapons to the public, and managing the country's gun registry for civilians. This allowed us to assess the regulatory system and its ability to monitor the dynamics of the black market.

Third, InSight Crime and ASJ interviewed various people who have taken part in the movement of illegal weapons and munitions. The cases they describe are illustrative of larger trends with regards to the illegal weapons trade in Honduras and the Northern Triangle as a whole.

Fourth, InSight Crime and ASJ consulted with numerous Honduran and foreign officials, as well as civil society experts, who track the illegal weapons trade. These experts helped point us in the right direction in terms of trends and theories regarding the trade.

¹ Observatorio de la Violencia, "BOLETIN Enero - Diciembre 2016," no. 44, marzo 2017. Available at: <https://iudpas.unah.edu.hn/observatorio-de-la-violencia/boletines-del-observatorio-2/boletines-nacionales/>

² See "Homicide Monitor," which draws from United Nations' data, at: <http://homicide.igarape.org.br/>

³ Claudio Damian Rodriguez Santorum, et al., "Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean: A Threat Assessment," United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), p. 61. Available at: <http://www.unodc.org/toc/en/reports/TOCTACentralAmerica-Caribbean.html>

Fifth, InSight Crime and ASJ complemented this work by reviewing news reports and other non-governmental, governmental and multilateral research on arms trafficking, firearms legislation, organized crime and gang activities in Honduras and the region.

In sum, we have done a thorough review of the illegal arms trade in Honduras. It is, however, incomplete. That is because two of the main suspected sources of illegal firearms -- the police and the Honduran Armed Forces -- will not share information about their procurements, weapons sales, internal controls, and cases involving members of the security forces. Until that happens, we will have to rely on publicly available information regarding cases that involve the security forces, and will not have a clear picture of the extent of leakage of these weapons.

Notwithstanding that limitation, the illegal arms trade in Honduras does seem to follow some fairly clear and consistent patterns. It features both small, individual players and large, sometimes institutional actors. It benefits from a poorly regulated market and a contradictory legal framework. In the end, there are so many gaps in the system that those participating in the trade demonstrate the old adage: opportunity makes the thief.



AP Image / Edgard Garrido

Major Findings

The United States is the origin of close to half of the unregistered weapons seized in Honduras. The main methods are in passengers' luggage or hidden among legitimate imports. The latter is the preferred method for large criminal groups, who pay officials to allow the shipments through.

Honduras' illegal arms also come from neighboring countries. Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador are important sources of trafficked weapons, often relics of Cold War-era conflicts. There is a preponderance of testimonies and various cases linking military and police with weapons leakage.

There are serious shortcomings in the firearms registration system. There are large backlogs in collecting ballistics data from weapons, and inappropriate storage procedures have caused the loss of several years of ballistics data. The ballistics information that is collected is not used to track criminals or make cases against them.

The legal framework on firearms control is contradictory and inconsistently applied. The duties of different institutions are not clearly set out, and some take advantage of these loopholes, or simply ignore the law. The laws on weapons possession have large gaps, including the failure to define key terms such as "firearms," and do not regulate ammunition purchases.

There is a large illicit domestic market in weapons and ammunition. By law, only the Armory can sell these items, but InSight Crime and ASJ found ammunition for sale in department stores and weapons in pawnshops in the country. Evidence from interviews and research by other organizations shows these were not isolated cases. InSight Crime and ASJ also found the Armory sold munitions for weapons that are illegal.

There is a lack of transparency in Honduras' weapons trade, as the military, police and private security companies do not release information on their holdings. This finding is particularly troubling, given the evidence that weapons seem to be leaking from

Honduran military and police stockpiles, and that some current and former military and police officials appear to be active in the firearms and ammunition black market.

There are shortcomings in the rules governing the Armory, the only authorized arms dealer in the country. According to officials, they are not obliged to carry out criminal record background checks on gun purchasers. The fact that its weapons and ammunition sales are a major source of financing for the military pension fund could create a problematic incentive for the Armory to sell as many weapons as possible.

Arms trafficking has been insufficiently tackled. Those arrested for trafficking rarely received prison sentences, while customs officials routinely allowed guns through points of entry and failed to search for weapons concealed in luggage or containers.

Honduran gun owners are pushed into the black market by inefficient processes, low barriers to entry and few repercussions. Expediency and impunity, as much as criminal intention, helps drive the black market.

The explosion in private security companies has opened a door for the black market weapons trade. These companies are insufficiently monitored, and many are suspected fronts for organized criminal groups. There is also confusion around the type of weapons these companies can legally possess.

There have been significant efforts to tackle arms trafficking in recent years, with some success. This includes increased vigilance at points of entry to the country, crackdowns on illegal crossing points, and proposals to tighten Honduras' gun laws.



AP Image / Fernando Antonio

Counting Firearms in Honduras

Estimates vary widely as to how many legal and illegal weapons are circulating in Honduras. There are many reasons for this. The government does not have a centralized database that tracks arms seizures, purchases, sales and other matters concerning arms possession, availability and merchandising. The laws surrounding guns also have numerous contradictions and place an unfair burden on often powerless and resource-strapped institutions. Inefficiency bolsters the black market. Rather than going through what can be an arduous, bureaucratic process, Hondurans often opt to obtain weaponry and munitions illegally.

To counter this, the government has held various amnesties that allow those with illegal weapons to register them with the authorities without facing sanctions. The latest ended in December 2015. These have resulted in a large number of weapons being entered into the National Firearms Registry (Registro Nacional de Armas - RNA). During the initial months of a 2013-14 firearms amnesty, a study by the Instituto Universitario en Democracia, Paz y Seguridad (IUDPAS) found that 25 percent more weapons were logged each day at the registry,⁴ some 80 percent of which had been purchased in private deals. However, the police cannot keep up with this high demand to register weapons. When InSight Crime and ASJ visited the office in May 2015, the head of the RNA was unable to produce an exact count, saying only that his office had registered “about 550,000” weapons.⁵ But when we asked again in May 2017, however, the Ministry of Security communications director said the government had registered just 325,000 weapons.⁶

The head of the RNA said this was due to delays in reporting from San Pedro Sula, the only other office that registers weapons, but the reality is that the database is

4 Yuri Vargas, “Incrementa Importación de Armas de Fuego en Honduras,” *Presencia Universitaria*, 13 August 2014. Available at: <https://presencia.unah.edu.hn/investigacion-cientifica/articulo/incrementa-importacion-de-armas-de-fuego-en-honduras>

5 InSight Crime and ASJ interview, head of the National Firearms Registry, Tegucigalpa, 20 May 2015.

6 InSight Crime and ASJ interview, Ministry of Security, Director of Communications, May 2017.

not a reliable measure. The system has had numerous hiccups since it began in 2004, including a dispute with a private contractor, which caused the RNA to stop registering weapons for over a year. Other problems included incorrectly registering the ballistics fingerprints of bullet samples, which cost them nearly eight years of data.⁷ During the time in which this investigation was done, the police had allowed the license for the sophisticated software used to manage these bullet samples -- known as the Integrated Ballistics Identification System (IBIS) -- to lapse. This means they frequently could not access the centralized database and upload the new microscopic images they had captured. We do not know if they have since renewed the license, as they did not respond to our request for this information.

Nonetheless, if the information provided by the RNA is accurate, and 344,755 arms have now been registered under the amnesty it would signal an increase in registered firearms since reports just a few years ago. In 2013, the Violence Observatory at the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH) said there were about 250,000 registered guns.⁸ However, in 2014, a congressional commission said there were some 400,000 legally registered weapons.⁹

Trying to determine the number of unregistered weapons is even more difficult. The Small Arms Survey estimated that there were 420,000 unregistered weapons circulating in the country. The UNAH estimated in 2013 that there were about 650,000 unregistered guns in circulation. Congress said that there were more than 700,000. La Tribuna said there were 1.2 million. And the Armory, or La Armeria -- the military body that is the only entity legally permitted to import and sell weapons and munitions in Honduras -- said there were well over a million weapons circulating in the country, only a small portion of which it had sold.¹⁰

The size of the illegal market has become apparent during the country's various gun amnesties.¹¹ The amnesties encourage people to come forward and register weapons that lack a receipt from the Armory or a registration slip from the RNA. According to an August 2014 report by Proceso, the police gun tracing office said that hundreds of people had come forward to register their weapons. Over 50 percent -- or some 240,000 guns -- had lacked receipts or been illegal, the report said. The head of the RNA told InSight Crime and ASJ that this trend continues, and that police were registering 60 to 80 guns a day in Tegucigalpa alone.

7 InSight Crime and ASJ interview, police technicians, Tegucigalpa, 22 May 2015.

8 IUDPAS -UNAH, "Investigacion sobre el Control de Armas en Honduras," 12 July 2013.

9 Hector Calix, "Mas de un millón de armas en Honduras," El Heraldo, 31 July 2014. Available at: <http://www.elheraldo.hn/inicio/733971-364/m%C3%A1s-de-un-mill%C3%B3n-de-armas-en-honduras>

10 InSight Crime and ASJ interview, Armory Director of Communications Alex Santos, Tegucigalpa, 21 May 2015.

11 Yuri Vargas, "Incrementa Importación De Armas De Fuego En Honduras," Presencia Universitaria, 13 August 2014. Available at: <https://presencia.unah.edu.hn/investigacion-cientifica/articulo/incrementa-importacion-de-armas-de-fuego-en-honduras>

FLAWED REGULATORY SYSTEMS

There are many reasons why it is hard to get a handle on the number of weapons circulating in Honduras. To begin with, there is the lack of a centralized database to track weapons that enter the country, those issued to security forces, seized, held in military stockpiles, registered to civilians and military personnel, or sold to the

According to the Honduran Constitution, the Defense Ministry controls the manufacture, sale, distribution and export of all weapons.

public. The various institutions tracking the movement of weapons include the armed forces,¹² the Armory, the police (seizures at crime scenes and the RNA), customs and airport security (at points of entry), and the Finance Ministry (for taxes). But coordination and communication between them is poor, and there seems to be a problem of trust between the various institutions, a lack of professionalism, and accusations of corruption that hinder the work of consolidating the information.

In some ways, the problem starts with the confusing legal framework. While there is a hierarchy in terms of control and distribution, contradictions exist between the laws and the constitutional powers granted to the designated authorities. Meanwhile, other authorities take advantage of loopholes in the system to do whatever they want, or to simply ignore the laws altogether.

According to the Honduran Constitution, the Defense Ministry controls the manufacture, sale, distribution and export of all weapons.¹³ The military also control storage, transportation and all purchase requirements.¹⁴ Those sales are managed through the Armory, which is part of the Military Pension Institute (Instituto de Provision Militar - IPM). The IPM is technically independent from the armed forces, but the reality is that it is under de facto control of the military.¹⁵ The Defense Ministry also has jurisdiction over explosives.¹⁶

For their part, the police, and specifically the National Directorate of Preventive Police (Dirección Nacional de la Policía Preventiva - DNPP), is responsible for implementing the laws concerning possession and carrying of firearms. The National Investigative Unit (Dirección Policial de Investigaciones - DPI) controls the National Firearms Registry, which is responsible for registering all guns in Honduras.

¹² The Honduran armed forces imported their own weapons until January 2014, when the Armory began to import, log and become the country's sole importer of all weapons, be they for commercial, individual or government usage.

¹³ Constitución de la Republica, Decreto No. 131, Artículo 292.

¹⁴ Ley Constitutiva de las Fuerzas Armadas, Decreto No. 39-2001, Artículo 26.

¹⁵ InSight Crime and ASJ interview, Armory Director of Communications Alex Santos, Tegucigalpa, 21 May 2015. See also: William Godnick and Helena Vasquez, "Small Arms Control in Central America," International Alert, June 2003, p. 27.

¹⁶ Ley de Control de Armas de Fuego, Municiones, Explosivos y Otros Similares, Decreto No. 30-2000.

The law states that civilians can own up to five firearms at one time, and they can apply for a permit (which lasts four years) to carry the following weapons:

- Short arms (revolvers or pistols) up to .45 caliber or 11 mm.
- Rifles and bolt-action or semi-automatic carbines up to .308-inch caliber.
- Bolt-action or semi-automatic shotguns that are 10 mm, 12 mm, 16 mm, or 20 mm; .410 caliber, if the barrel is not more 46 centimeters or 18 inches long.

However, the possession laws leave gaps for malfeasance and abuse. The firearms law, for instance, does not provide a definition of firearm, ammunition or receivers; and the law categorizes explosives in terms of their action and use, not their type. There are also no rules concerning the purchase and possession of ammunition. Although technically the Armory is the only licensed dealer of weapons and ammunition, our researchers found ammunition for sale in department stores and weapons in pawnshops in the country.

Businesses take advantage of these loopholes in various ways. For example, InSight Crime and ASJ's investigator found in one store that Hondurans can legally purchase a receiver that converts a handgun into an automatic weapon prohibited by law. The receiver costs about \$950 (21,100 lempiras). They are apparently very popular: the store attendant said they had received six in the two weeks prior to our visit and had already sold five of them.¹⁷



A receiver that turns handguns into automatic weapons. (Photo credit: Steven Dudley)

The law does not specify how long civilians have to register their weapons with the RNA after purchase, but the limited number of RNA offices -- since the early 2000s, it has gone from seven offices to two (in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula) -- has hindered the ability to keep up with demand, especially during amnesty periods. There are plans to open three more offices, officials said, without specifying when they would be opened. Police register weapons by appointment only. When InSight

¹⁷ InSight Crime and ASJ interview, store attendant who wished to remain anonymous, Tegucigalpa, 7 April 2015.

Crime and ASJ visited in May 2015, police said the first available appointment was not until September. In a subsequent visit in 2017, the office said that wait time was down to a month.

The amnesty process is costly, resource-intensive, and slow. It involves the following: entering personal information into the database; checking criminal records; taking fingerprints; taking a picture of the person; taking a picture of the weapon; shooting four bullets into a water tank to register the gun's ballistic fingerprint; processing and printing a weapon ID card that, in addition to the photo and personal information of the person, has an electronic chip and a photo of the weapon on it. What's more, owners must have one ID card per weapon, the head of the RNA told InSight Crime and ASJ.

But that is only stage one. This information is then placed in manila folders within cardboard boxes where it awaits the second part of this process: entering the ballistics fingerprint into the IBIS digital database. IBIS is normally used as a way to identify weapons employed in multiple crime scenes, among other investigation techniques. In this case, however, it is the country's principal ballistics fingerprint registry. This is an incredibly slow, time-consuming, resource-intensive process. And to date, despite assurances from the RNA that the government had ballistics fingerprints of nearly all the weapons in the registry, the reality is that the government in 2015, when we visited, officials had only entered some 25,000 ballistics fingerprints into the registry, or about one in every 20 weapons it has registered in stage one of the process. A 2011 report by the US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) on small arms in Honduras, obtained by InSight Crime and ASJ,¹⁸ says this amounts to an eight- to ten-year backlog on digitalizing these records.

To confuse matters, the Attorney General's Office has its own IBIS database. In operation since June 2013, that database has ballistic fingerprints of weapons and munitions seized or found in crime scenes. Prosecutors can cross this data with that of the police's IBIS, and the ballistics unit of the Attorney General's Office said that, as of mid-May 2015, it had about 230 hits. In theory, the ballistics unit should have been able to use the data the police were entering into its IBIS since 2010, to cross it with many more cases. However, the head of the ballistics unit said the data the police entered into IBIS from crime scenes was poorly or incorrectly handled, rendering it unusable in most cases.¹⁹

18 US Department of Justice, "Honduras Small Arms Assessment 2011," Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Office of Field Operations, International Affairs Office, 2011.

19 InSight Crime and ASJ interview, member of the ballistics unit at the forensic medicine division of the Attorney General's Office, Tegucigalpa, 21 May 2015.



The IBIS computer rendition of a bullet's fingerprint at the Attorney General's Ballistic Unit office. (Photo credit: Steven Dudley)

'DISSONANCE' IN THE LAWS

The ATF report found that the law and the constitution contradict one another in important ways regarding who should regulate gun sales, possession and explosives, and how these processes should be regulated. In the broadest terms, regulation of explosives is split between the Security Ministry and the Defense Ministry. And at certain junctures, customs and tax authorities are required to step into enforcement, regulatory and tax collection roles, but the distinctions are not always clear. The ATF report described these contradictions as a “dissonance.”

“A conspicuous dissonance was observed amongst constitutional, statutory and operational activities of the various institutions (i.e., military and public security entities) involved in regulatory oversight relating to commerce in firearms, explosives and ammunition, wherein promulgated constitutional and statutory requirements either conflict with one another, and or are not in sync with the actual operational state of affairs,” the report reads.

How this dissonance plays out in practice is worth noting. Technically, for example, the Army is supposed to do a ballistics test for each of the weapons it imports before selling them. But the ballistics testing centers are in the hands of the police, and the Army simply says that it will not pass its weapons through this arduous and time-consuming process, in effect ignoring the law.²⁰

²⁰ InSight Crime and ASJ interview, Armory Director of Communications Alex Santos, Tegucigalpa, 21 May 2015.

The Armory's antagonistic relationship with the police plays out in other ways as well. The Armory, for instance, says that it still registers the weapons that enter the country, as well taking other personal information from those purchasing the weapons, which it says is not required by law. But, according to a representative of the institution, it does not share this information with the police or other authorities unless they specifically request it. Even worse, as we shall see in later sections, the Armory does not give the police information about sales to civilians, to the military or to private security companies.²¹ Each purchaser must willingly give this information to the police.

Other elements of this dissonance seem to be a result of a lack of attention to detail and could be easily fixed through reform of the law. There is, for example, no stated age requirement for weapon owners (although the de facto recognized age is 21 and over). And there is no information regarding which government entity keeps insurance records, records of private firearms transactions, or reports about stolen weapons. Regarding private transactions, there are no stated criteria for who can purchase a weapon. For example, the law does not require those making a private sale to inquire about the buyer's criminal record, though the Armory also says it does this without being required to by law.

“Arrests for firearms trafficking crimes and/or mere possession very rarely get prison time...only fines.”

In addition, the costs of possessing an illegal weapon are “assuaged” by petty sanctions, the ATF report says -- mostly fines ranging from one to ten times the highest monthly salary in the place where the weapon or weapons have been seized. Those who illegally manufacture, import, export, sell, use or traffic military-type firearms, explosives and ammunition can get between eight- and ten-year sentences, and those who do the same with commercial weapons can get between two and five years. But those caught trafficking weapons rarely face stiff penalties.

“Arrests for firearms trafficking crimes and/or mere possession very rarely get prison time...only fines,” the ATF notes.²²

In addition, until recently, there was little understanding of the legal requirements for importing weapons into Honduras. Customs officials routinely allowed guns through airports and ports, numerous officials and experts told InSight Crime and ASJ, usually provided the carrier promised to register the weapon with the RNA. And the Armory routinely ignored US and international rules regarding arms imports. According to a 2003 US State Department cable, the Armory “continues to exhibit difficulties in complying with State Department guidance regarding the importation of commercial firearms” especially as it relates to “contracts of sale or purchase orders.”²³

²¹ Note: This contradicts information the Armory gave to the ATF in 2010. See: US Department of Justice, “Honduras Small Arms Assessment 2011,” Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Office of Field Operations, International Affairs Office, 2011.

²² Ibid, p. 30.

²³ US State Department, “Defense Trade Controls in Honduras; Problems with La Armeria,” released by WikiLeaks, 11 April 2003. Available at: <https://wikileaks.org/cable/2003/04/03TEGUCIGALPA885.html>

What's more, customs and border controls have few of the tools needed to detect these weapons, few incentives to do so, and are subject to bribes and other forms of corruption. In 2010, there was only one X-ray machine among the 17 ports of entry, according to the ATF (this situation has improved, as noted below). The 600 personnel assigned to these ports did not actively check for smuggled firearms. The results were evident in the statistics: in 2009, Honduran officials told ATF that they had seized between six and nine weapons all year, and those were seized by "accident, when they were checking containers believed to have misrepresented merchandise (i.e., new merchandise being declared as used or under different Customs codes)."²⁴

The onerous requirements needed to obtain and register a weapon also make off-the-books transactions more appealing, especially given the wide availability of unregistered weapons and the low risk of being penalized for possessing one. One restaurant owner, who sought a weapon for the majordomo of his family farm, told InSight Crime and ASJ he would have create a not-for-profit private security company in order to do this.²⁵ It would involve a large amount of paperwork. In the end, he said it was too much hassle, and that he would simply go to the black market.

²⁴ US Department of Justice, "Honduras Small Arms Assessment 2011," Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Office of Field Operations, International Affairs Office, 2011, p. 21.

²⁵ InSight Crime and ASJ interview, restaurant owner who wished to remain anonymous, Tegucigalpa, 25 May 2015.

TYPE, CALIBER AND BRAND OF FIREARMS IN HONDURAS

Honduran government statistics do not provide the origin of the weapons seized, but a sizeable sample²⁶ of seizure statistics provided to InSight Crime and ASJ by various government officials illustrate similar trends across a long period of time in the types of weapons, their caliber and brand.

The most common weapon found in Honduras is the handgun. Honduran officials note two types: “pistol” and “revolver.” Of the 2,912 guns registered in the ballistic unit’s IBIS crime-scene database as of February 2015, 2,352 were pistols or revolvers, making up 81 percent of the total. The caliber of these weapons is also consistent over time. Of these 2,352 weapons, 1,001 were 9 mm, and 634 were .38 caliber. The make varies widely. Amongst the 9 mm, the Beretta, Taurus, Smith & Wesson and Glock are the most popular; “Czechoslovakia” -- presumably a reference to the Czech company Ceska zbrojovka -- is also well represented in the logs. On the .38, over half of the guns entered into the database were Smith & Wesson. The Philippine company Armscor is also well represented. However, the sample sizes for all of these brands is too small to draw broad conclusions.

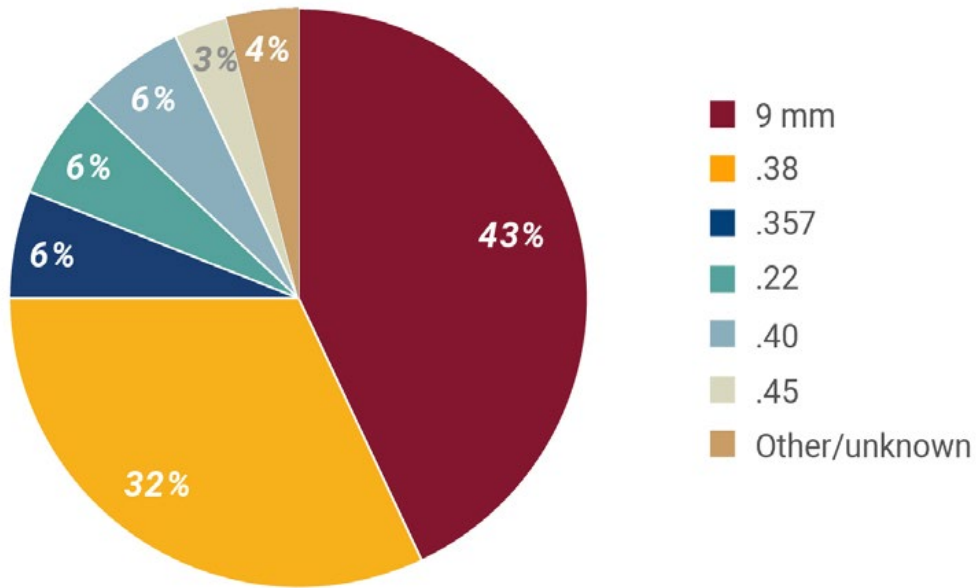
The IBIS database had 321 long guns, representing 11 percent of the total. More than half of these weapons were 5.56 mm or 7.62 mm weapons. These included AK-47, AR-15, M-16 and Galil. The rest were of a variety such as 12-gauge shotguns. The most popular brands for the AK-47 were marked “Russian” and “Chinese.” The most common brand for the 5.56 mm weapons was Colt. These long guns are technically illegal and were presumably registered to private security companies. (See section entitled, “Private Security Companies,” below)

A police database²⁷ consulted by InSight Crime and ASJ shows similar trends. Of the 7,853 firearms seized by police between 1996 and 2010, 7,143 were pistols or revolvers, or 91 percent of the total. Of these, 1,003 were 9 mm, and 2,926 were .38 caliber. The police database had 710 long guns, representing 9 percent of the total. Of these weapons, only 53 were .223 caliber, 5.56mm or 7.62mm weapons -- i.e. the calibers used in the AK-47, AR-15 and M-16. The makes of these weapons varied widely and were poorly categorized, making it a useless exercise to try to determine origin.

²⁶ The ballistics unit gave InSight Crime and ASJ data from its entries of weapons into the IBIS system, which included 2,944 weapons seized at crime scenes between 17 July 2013 and 17 February 2015. Investigators said about two-thirds of the seizures were related to illegal weapons charges; the other third were related to homicides.

²⁷ The database is a list of all weapons seized by the police between 1996 and 2010.

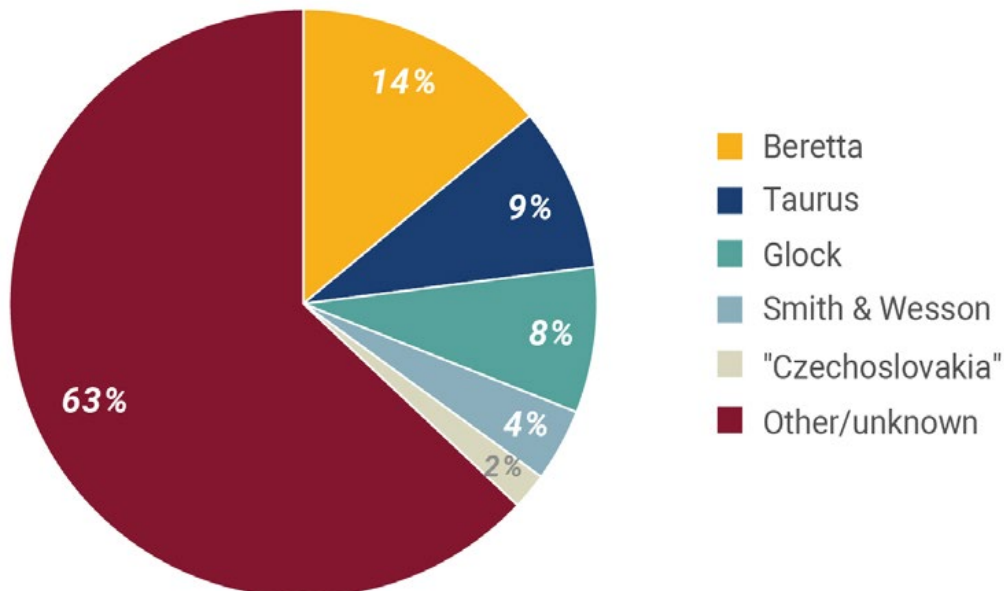
Seized Handguns by Caliber



Source: IBIS Crime Scene Database

insightcrime.org

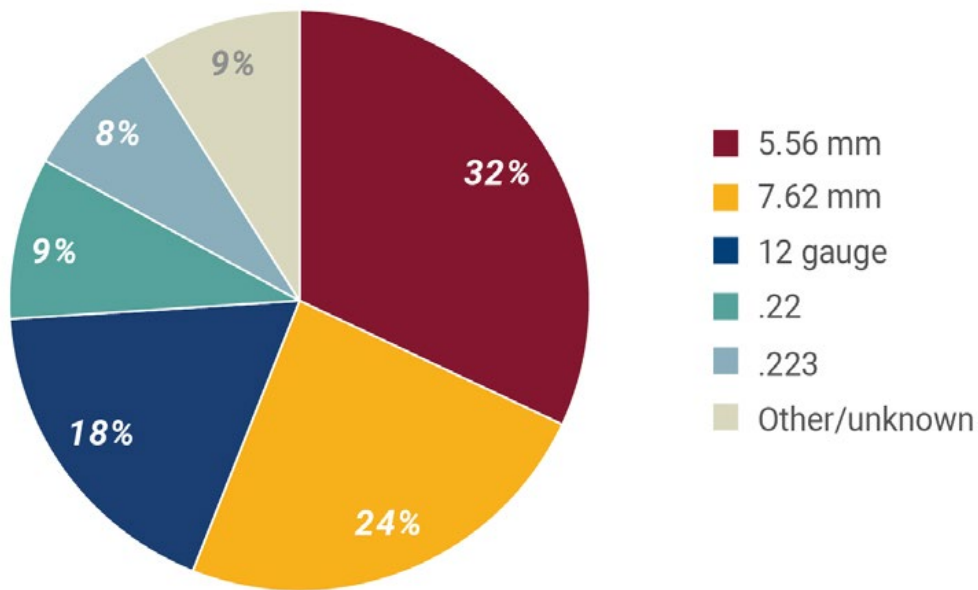
Seized 9 mm Handguns by Brand



Source: IBIS Crime Scene Database

insightcrime.org

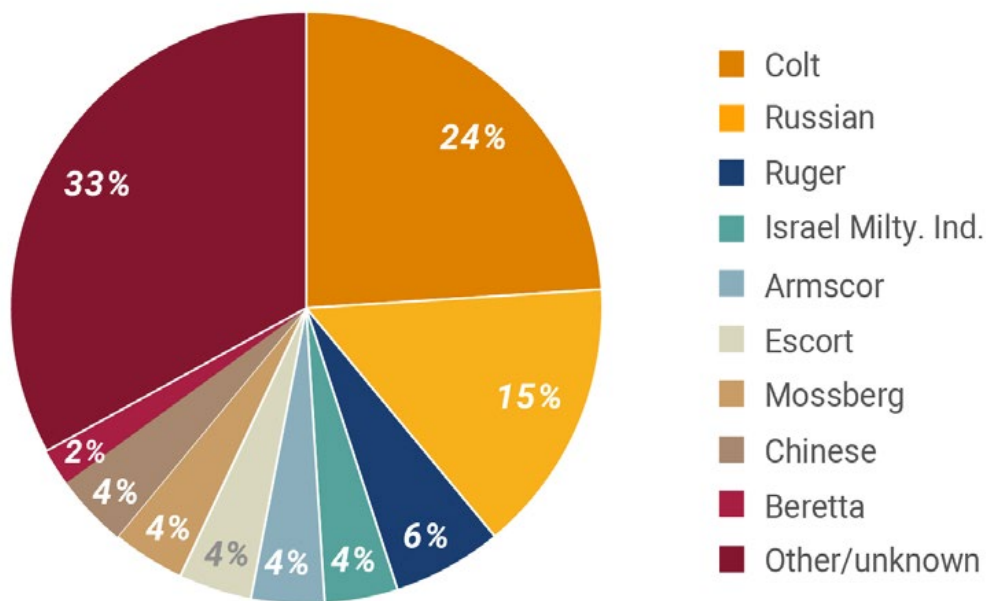
Seized Long Guns by Caliber



Source: IBIS Crime Scene Database

insightcrime.org

Seized Long Guns by Brand



Source: IBIS Crime Scene Database

insightcrime.org



AP Image / Esteban Felix

Trafficking Firearms into Honduras

Honduras does not produce weapons,²⁸ but weapons are trafficked into the country in numerous ways. These vary depending on weapon availability in neighboring countries, demand in Honduras, government controls, and other factors. They do not appear to obey a single strategic logic, other than that of evading detection, although many of them have a single origin. Nor does arms trafficking appear to be dominated by any one criminal group. In fact, arms trafficking appears to be as much a crime of opportunity for many individuals -- uniformed and civilian alike -- in Honduras as it is an established criminal activity for small and large groups of criminals, many of whom are also involved in other crimes such as international drug trafficking. The varied nature of the trade, the numerous means of trafficking weapons, and the shortfall in controls and regulatory agencies involved in policing it make this a very difficult crime to counter.

SOURCE 1: THE UNITED STATES

The most important source for weapons trafficked into Honduras is the United States, according to Honduran and US officials interviewed for this report. The statements are supported by the available statistics. Honduran officials say that most of the non-registered weapons seized in crime scenes came from the United States. US officials say it is slightly less than half.

In a report issued in 2010, ATF said that as much as 40 percent of weapons recovered

²⁸ There is a tradition of producing rudimentary, homemade weapons. The most recent examples are often found in the hands of street gangs. However, as the gangs have gained more revenue streams and the availability of weapons has increased, they increasingly obtain manufactured arms.

from Honduran crime scenes came from the United States.²⁹ The estimate was based on police statistics provided to the ATF and crossed with ATF's own e-trace system, which tracks sales of weapons purchased in the United States; they traced 1,609 guns from Honduras between 2008 and June 15, 2011.



A US-manufactured gun, recovered from a crime scene in Honduras. (Photo credit: Steven Dudley)

The results of the tracking also closely parallel that of the ballistics unit's IBIS registry and the police seizures referenced earlier in this report. Of those traced, 84 percent were pistols or revolvers, and 6 percent were rifles. As it was with the IBIS and police seizure statistics, the brands most heavily represented were Smith & Wesson, Taurus and Beretta. More than 100 weapons were traced all

the way back to gun shops in the United States, and nearly half of those traces led to Florida purchases.

This percentage of weapons suspected to have been manufactured or imported into the United States has held steady over the years. According to a 2014 ATF report, 45.8 percent of the firearms recovered in Honduras and submitted to the ATF for tracing in 2013 -- 386 of a total of 842 weapons traced -- had been manufactured or imported from the United States.³⁰ Of the 842 traced, 85.6 percent were pistols or revolvers, and 8.7 percent were rifles. No data was given on makes or caliber of the weapons.

There are three major ways these weapons appear to be entering the country from the United States, according to interviews with Honduran and US officials, as well as individuals connected to the trade. First, they are trafficked into the country in small quantities via commercial airlines, hidden in passengers' luggage.³¹ This technique

²⁹ Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, "Honduras," a presentation by the Office of Strategic Intelligence Information, the Violent Crime Intelligence Division, and the Violent Crime Analysis Branch. Data between 1 January 2008 and 15 June 2011.

³⁰ Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, "Central America," a presentation by the Office of Strategic Intelligence Information. Data as of 10 March 2014.

³¹ There are an estimated 1 million Hondurans residing in the United States, according to the US State Department, and 600,000 are thought to be undocumented. The biggest flows of Hondurans arrived in the United States in the late 1990s and early 2000s, particularly after the devastation caused by Hurricane Mitch in 1998. As a result they largely missed the legalization program of the 1980s, meaning that a high proportion are undocumented. See: US State Department, Bureau Of Western Hemisphere Affairs, "U.S. Relations With Honduras," 24 March 2014. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/p/wha/ci/ho/index.htm>. See also: Daniel Reichman, "Honduras: The Perils of Remittance Dependence and Clandestine Migration," Migration Policy Institute, 11 April 2013. Available at: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/honduras-perils-remittance-dependence-and-clandestine-migration>

appears to be on the wane following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States, and due to increased controls at the airports and increased understanding of the law on the part of Honduran authorities.³² Still, authorities in Honduras and other parts of Central America say this remains a fairly regular means of transporting weapons illegally, albeit in small quantities.

Second, traffickers hide weapons in legitimate imports of goods. One source described in detail to InSight Crime and ASJ how one of his relatives in the United States bought five Beretta XP-4 Storm rifles in the United States and placed them in a used car that he sent to Honduras in a container among various other items -- such as clothes and toys.³³ While InSight Crime and ASJ could not verify this story with the person who sent the items, it heard numerous similar stories of small-time trafficking operations that used this method.

Another source described how the source's family moved weapons inside appliances, televisions and VHS machines, as well in the doors, trunks and upholstery of cars they would ship to Honduras. The source said the family would purchase the weapons from work colleagues or in a "flea market."³⁴ Another method was to place weapons in aluminum foil and submerge them in paint, according to one source, who would then ship them via Miami. The source denied moving large numbers of weapons, but said his cousins were collecting and reselling dozens in the United States and Honduras.

The source said one cousin sent at least ten weapons in a shipment that he bought from a man who was selling weapons on the black market in North Carolina. The firearms were hidden in a car because, the source said, Honduran authorities never used to check the cars entering the country. The source's relative in Honduras went to the port to claim the goods. Port authorities -- who the relative says did not search the items -- planned to hold the goods for several days, so the relative paid a bribe to have them released the same day. The relative claimed to have no knowledge that the weapons had been smuggled into the country prior to their arrival in Honduras. Later, the cousin told the relative that some men would be coming by to pick up the weapons.

Camouflaging weapons in imported goods also appears to be the preferred method of large criminal groups, according to the authorities.

Camouflaging weapons in imported goods also appears to be the preferred method of large criminal groups, according to the authorities and one source who worked as

³² It is illegal to bring firearms into Honduras without a license from the Public Security Ministry. See "Ley de Control de Armas de Fuego, Municiones Explosiones y Otros Similares," 2000. Available at: <http://www.tsc.gob.hn/leyes/LEY%20DE%20CONTROL%20DE%20ARMAS%20DE%20FUEGO,%20MUNICIONES,%20EXPLOSIONES%20Y%20OTROS%20SIMILARES.pdf>

³³ InSight Crime and ASJ interview, source who wished to remain anonymous, Tegucigalpa, 18-19 February 2015.

³⁴ "Flea market" is presumably a reference to gun shows, a common place of purchase and sale of weapons in the United States.

a private security guard for a criminal group in Honduras. The source said he had knowledge of how criminal groups moving weapons in bulk from the United States regularly paid personnel at the large ports to “turn off X-ray machines” or simply ignore the contents as they passed through.³⁵ Large weapons shipments necessitated these payments, he said. Police intelligence concurred with this assessment.³⁶ Neither the source nor the police offered an example illustrating this corruption, and both sources said this has become more difficult in the last several months with the implementation of a plan to use inter-agency units at the ports, among other measures. (See “Improvements in Recent Years” section)

There is at least one example of a US-based group facilitating the trafficking activities of a Honduran criminal organization or organizations. In 2010, the ATF and the Department of Justice prosecuted two US citizens and four Honduran nationals in Florida for trafficking weapons to Honduras and Puerto Rico.³⁷

The investigation began in 2009, when ATF agents registered a large number of handgun purchases by Hugh Crumpler III.³⁸ A decorated Vietnam war veteran, Crumpler told authorities that he had trouble finding gainful employment until he started buying weapons at gun stores in Florida and selling them at gun shows in the state. ATF records showed Crumpler purchased 529 handguns in 62 transactions in



A FN Herstal “Cop killer,” at the Attorney General’s Ballistics Unit office. (Photo credit: Steven Dudley)

2009.³⁹ Among the weapons purchased were numerous Fabrique Nationale Herstal 5.7x28mm semi-automatic handguns, also known as “matapolicias,” or cop killers, for their ability to pierce body armor at close range. (See picture)

³⁵ InSight Crime and ASJ interview, source who wished to remain anonymous, Tegucigalpa, 18 February 2015.

³⁶ InSight Crime and ASJ interview, source from the police intelligence unit SERCAA, Tegucigalpa, 19 February 2015.

³⁷ Two suspects escaped and remain fugitives.

³⁸ Under US federal law, gun dealers are required to notify the authorities when an individual purchases more than two handguns in five business days. See Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, “ATF Fact Sheet - National Tracing Center,” 1 February 2013. Available at: <https://www.atf.gov/resource-center/pr/atf-fact-sheet-national-tracing-center>

³⁹ The bulk of this account comes the Sentencing Memorandum developed by the United States District Court, Middle District of Florida, Orlando Division, “United States of America v Hugh Crumpler, III, et al.,” 15 September 2010. Additional information was culled from the affidavit of ATF Agent Christopher W. Temple in the case against several of the Honduran defendants given on 5 February 2010.

Crumpler also purchased and sent several assault rifles to be chrome-plated and get their barrels shortened.⁴⁰ In addition, Crumpler sold several rifles that had grenade launchers attached to them. By the end of the investigation, US agents monitoring Crumpler estimated that he had purchased 637 firearms worth an estimated \$270,000. Crumpler purchased weapons from 19 different gun shops in Florida and 4 from out-of-state dealers. The ATF believed that Crumpler and an associate purchased an additional 200 to 300 firearms at various Florida gun shows.⁴¹

Crumpler's top clients were a group of Hondurans, most of whom were residing undocumented in Orlando. US government investigators and prosecutors called them the "Alvina Way Orlando group" or the "7002 Alvina Way" for the address of a house where they met Crumpler and exchanged money for weapons on several occasions. The group received over \$65,000, some of it via wire transfers from Honduras, to pay for the weapons. Many of these transfers came via individuals in Honduras who moved the money through Walmart's MoneyGram system. In all, the ATF estimated that over \$163,000 was moved in this manner.

The group then hid the weapons in cars and appliances and shipped them to Honduras in containers, court documents say. The weapons included the FN pistols described above, Glock handguns and AR-15 assault rifles, all weapons of choice for criminal organizations operating in Honduras and elsewhere. One package that investigators followed netted 26 guns and rifles with an estimated street value of \$25,000, court records show. The group packaged the items in a big box that weighed 215 pounds and included clothing, cookware and holiday decorations.

The Hondurans appeared to act in concert, meeting and negotiating with Crumpler as a group. But they also maintained separate accounts and did not pool their money to purchase the weapons. Indeed, there appeared to be at least four different cells acting independently in some respects. They spoke to Crumpler individually, arranged prices with him individually, and moved money in small increments via Walmart MoneyGram individually. It's not clear if they did this to shield themselves from law enforcement or because they had their own, separate clientele in Honduras.

The case illustrated the importance of this network for the black market arms trade. Weapons that moved through Crumpler network were found in Puerto Rico crime scenes, in one case just 10 days after Crumpler bought the gun. As of June 2010, authorities in Colombia had recovered five Glocks from the Crumpler purchases, all of them in the hands of the feared crime syndicate the Oficina de Envigado. Another weapon was found in Panama. The ATF agent in charge of the investigation noted in his affidavit that, "a Cartel-led Drug Trafficking Organization (DTO) connection is suspected when the firearms and ammunition being 'trafficked' are popular with the Cartels, such as assault rifles (AR-15 type) and FN Five-seven pistols."

"The firearm problem in Central and South America is similar to the drug problem in the United States in that it is extremely difficult to reduce the supply of the illicit

40 Short-barreled assault rifles require a license under US federal regulations, and are banned in some states. See: Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, United States Department of Justice, "National Firearms Act (NFA)." Available at: <https://www.atf.gov/qa-category/national-firearms-act-nfa>

41 The ATF says Crumpler went to at least 12 gun shows between April 2008 and January 2010.

items without first reducing the demand,” he added. “Any small reduction in supply leads to an increase in price, which further stimulates efforts to provide a supply. Therefore, as long as the demand for such weapons persists, people will continue to find creative ways to meet that demand and make a profit.”⁴²



Weapons seized from the Valle Valle criminal group. (Photo credit: Steven Dudley)

To be sure, sources in Honduras’ police, military and the Attorney General’s Office said that criminal groups were getting much of their weaponry from the United States, pointing to the recent seizure of dozens of weapons from the Valle Valle group.⁴³ The Valle Valle family was one of the most prominent drug trafficking organizations in Honduras prior to the arrest of its core members

in August and September 2014. From one Valle Valle weapons cache, Honduran authorities traced two long guns and one pistol back to the US.

The third way weapons have arrived from the United States is via legitimate military purchases, aid packages that include weaponry, or clandestine movement of weapons to proxy armies supported by the US government. Much of this weaponry came during the 1980s, the height of US-Honduran military relations. The US provided \$2.5 billion of aid (in constant US dollars) between 1980 and 1989,⁴⁴ including \$333 million in military assistance, second only to El Salvador in the region. The Soviet Union countered with its own military assistance to other parts of Central America.

Both US and Soviet weapons moved through official and non-official routes as part of the Cold War tit-for-tat. US and Soviet interlocutors also had connections to organized crime. One of the most notable examples in this regard was Colonel Leonidas Torres Arias, the head of the Honduran military’s “G2” intelligence service (the equivalent of the CIA) in the late 1970s, a staunch US ally. Torres Arias worked closely with Juan Ramon Matta Ballesteros, the legendary drug trafficker who was the intermediary between the Medellin Cartel in Colombia and the Guadalajara Cartel in Mexico. Torres Arias also had strong connections to Manuel Noriega, and fell out of favor with the United States when it became known that he was trafficking

⁴² Affidavit of ATF Agent Christopher W. Temple in the case against several of the Honduran defendants given on 5 February 2010, pp. 27 -28.

⁴³ Kevin Ortega, “Hallan arsenal supuestamente propiedad de los Valle en Honduras,” *La Prensa*, 21 August 2014. Available at: <http://www.laprensa.hn/sucesos/policiales/740469-98/hallan-arsenal-supuestamente-propiedad-de-los-valle-en-honduras>

⁴⁴ Peter Meyer, “Honduras-US Relations,” Congressional Research Service, 24 July 2013. Available at: <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/204124.pdf>

weapons to leftist guerrillas in El Salvador.⁴⁵

In some respects, weapons from this tumultuous period remain a vibrant part of the black market in Central America. The lack of significant updates to the assault rifle, and its durability, means that many weapons from this period remain in circulation.⁴⁶ However, as the next section illustrates, much of this is due to the trade coming from Nicaragua, which received vast amounts of hardy AK-47 assault rifles. Leakage from military stocks also remains a concern. As the next section of this report illustrates, these include leakages from Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, and Guatemalan barracks, some of which derives from US government exports.

SOURCE 2: NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES

The movement of criminal organizations as well as individuals within these Central American nations is fluid, suggesting that weapons procured in any one country can easily be used in another. In all, the UN estimates the Central American illegal arms market is worth about \$14 million annually and moves about 70,000 weapons per year.⁴⁷

“On its face, then, there is no real need to smuggle weapons into Central America,” the UNODC writes. “The weapons are already there. But the location of the firearms and the location of the demand are not always the same, so considerable cross border trade exists. It is not really a matter of one country with a surplus feeding another with a shortage; rather, it is a matter of borders becoming irrelevant when someone wants to buy a gun.”⁴⁸

The buyers include drug traffickers from all over the region who made Honduras their home. Among these were Guatemalan trafficker Mario Ponce, a one-time Zetas ally, who was captured and extradited from Honduras in 2011, and received a 25-year sentence in the United States;⁴⁹ Jose Natividad “Chepe” Luna, a Salvadoran national who established a region-wide transport service for drug trafficking organizations based in San Pedro Sula; and Cesar Gastelum Serrano, a top Sinaloa Cartel trafficker, who based himself mostly in San Pedro Sula for the last decade before being captured in Mexico.⁵⁰

45 US Senate, “Drugs, Law Enforcement and Foreign Policy: A Report Prepared by the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Narcotics and International Operations of the Committee on Foreign Relations” (aka the Kerry Committee Report), December 1988, p. 74.

46 Claudio Damian Rodriguez Santorum, et al., “Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean: A Threat Assessment,” United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), p. 59. Available at: <http://www.unodc.org/toc/en/reports/TOCTACentralAmerica-Caribbean.html>

47 Ibid, p. 64.

48 Ibid, p. 61.

49 El Heraldo, “Narco guatemalteco extraditado por Honduras es condenado a 25 años de prision,” 23 August 2012. Available at: <http://www.elheraldo.hn/csp/mediapool/sites/ElHeraldo/Sucesos/story.csp?cid=620094&sid=293&fid=219>

50 David Gagne, “Mexico Captures Sinaloa Cartel Head in Central America,” InSight Crime, 13 April 2015. Available at: <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/mexico-captures-sinaloa-cartel-head-in-central-america>

Nicaragua

According to various Honduran government sources, Nicaragua is a prime source of illegal weapons brought into the country. They offer scant evidence to back up this claim, but there is a plethora of unregistered weapons still circulating in the neighboring country. According to a United Nations report, there are 35 guns for every active-duty soldier in Nicaragua, compared to eight guns for every active-duty soldier in Honduras.⁵¹ (In all, the UN report says there are 870,000 weapons registered to security forces in Central America, far surpassing the number of soldiers and police in the region.⁵²)

There are certain patterns in weapons movement from Nicaragua. They are often relics from the civil wars of years past, yet still functional and, of course, deadly. The AK-47 is the most notable among these older weapons. This is, in part, because the Sandinista government received these en masse in the 1980s to repel counterrevolutionaries from the US government's proxy army, the Contras. Authorities also say they have recovered weapons with the serial numbers removed or "liso," something they say is more prevalent with weapons moving through Nicaragua.

A recent case in Nicaragua is a good illustration of how the country's surplus is trafficked into Honduras. In 2013, a Nicaraguan judge convicted Gerardo Ocón Olivas of stealing 35 AK-47s and one AR-15 from police stocks and sentenced him to seven years in prison.⁵³ However, Ocón said in court that the weapons were being trafficked to Honduras by police commanders.⁵⁴ The modus operandi, he said, was to send the assault rifles to a workshop run by a police commander's uncle for "maintenance," when in reality they were sold to third parties. He added that this practice had been going on for at least four years. The police denied Ocón's version; no officers were prosecuted.

At least part of this trafficking is related to recent history. Wars in Central America brought with them thousands of weapons. Between 1950 and 1990, the United States and the Soviet Union transferred tens of billions of dollars of weapons to the region, according to research by the Federation of American Scientists.⁵⁵ Between 1982 and 1987, the United States alone provided \$1.1 billion worth of arms and equipment to El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Costa Rica.⁵⁶

51 Claudio Damian Rodriguez Santorum, et al., "Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean: A Threat Assessment," United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), p. 61. Available at: <http://www.unodc.org/toc/en/reports/TOCTACentralAmerica-Caribbean.html>

52 Ibid, p. 61.

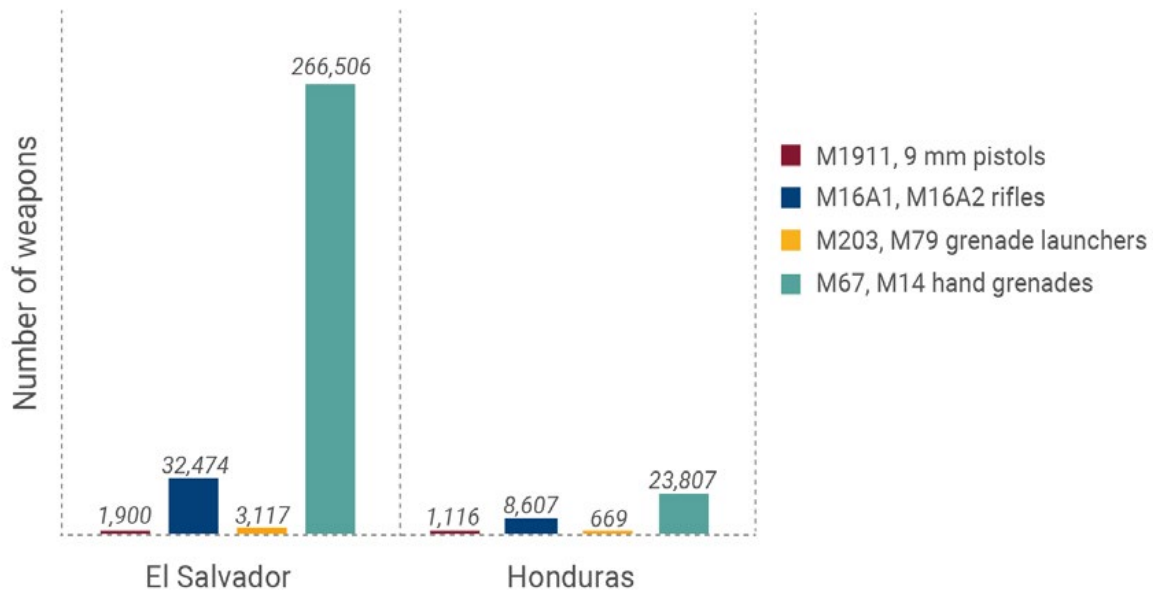
53 Martha Vasquez, "Lo condenan por robo de armas," La Prensa, 16 August 2013. Available at: <http://www.laprensa.com.ni/2013/08/16/nacionales/158755-lo-condenan-por-robo-de-armas>

54 Martha Vasquez, "Comisionados trafican armas," La Prensa, 26 July 2013. Available at: <http://www.laprensa.com.ni/2013/07/26/nacionales/156222-comisionados-trafican-armas>

55 Michael Klare and David Andersen, "A Scourge Of Guns: The Diffusion of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Latin America," Arms Sales Monitoring Project, Federation of American Scientists, 1996, p. 27.

56 Ibid, p.32.

Deliveries of Selected Arms Under the US Foreign Military Sales Program, (FY 1980-1993)



Source: Federation of American Scientists

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During the Cold War period, some weapons were legally imported to Central America, while others came via the black market, smuggled to revolutionary groups via Cuba or other third countries. Honduran military officials took part in these smuggling activities. As discussed above, the case of Torres Arias -- a US ally marginalized when Washington found out about his arms deals with El Salvador's Marxist rebels -- is an example. Still other weapons came in legally and later entered the black market, a subject we will return to later in this report.

Guatemala

Other sites of the Central American civil wars are also potential suppliers for Honduras' black market, most notably Guatemala. Guatemala has the largest arms market, by far, in the region. The country has an estimated 1.9 million weapons in circulation, according to Small Arms Survey data quoted by the UNODC, and fewer than 600,000 of them are legally registered to civilians or the security forces.⁵⁷ The World Bank put the number of firearms in civilian hands at 1.95 million, with only 147,000 legally registered.⁵⁸ Like Honduras, it has liberal gun laws and a vibrant private security economy that includes dozens of companies, many of which are run by ex-military personnel. Networking amongst these former military with the government is near constant, resulting in a partially privatized state security apparatus.

⁵⁷ Claudio Damian Rodriguez Santorum, et al., "Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean: A Threat Assessment," United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), p. 61. Available at: <http://www.unodc.org/toc/en/reports/TOCTACentralAmerica-Caribbean.html>

⁵⁸ World Bank, "Crime and Violence in Central America: A Development Challenge," 2011, p. 20. Available at: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTLAC/Resources/FINAL_VOLUME_I_ENGLISH_CrimeAndViolence.pdf

The system leads to a lot of movement of weapons between government and private hands, and this trade is often criminal in nature. Weak and corrupt regulatory bodies have further opened the door for malfeasance and the creation of underground arms pipelines. Mexico's criminal group the Zetas, for instance, used Guatemala as its virtual bodega for years. Between 2007 and 2009, the Mexican criminal group procured or stole thousands of handguns, rifles, rocket launchers, and other military equipment, Guatemalan officials told InSight Crime and ASJ.

This leakage of official weapons is not limited to the Zetas. One recent Wilson Center report, citing ATF sources, said that an astounding nearly 85 percent of grenades and other military ordinance assessed by ATF officials -- in a review of items seized by the Guatemalan police between 1997 and 2009 -- could be traced back to military stockpiles.⁵⁹ The same report, citing a Washington Post story, said that by 2010, at least 27,000 weapons had leaked from Guatemalan stockpiles into Guatemalan and Mexican criminal hands.⁶⁰

Honduran criminal groups capitalize on this market as well. Sources in the Attorney General's Office told InSight Crime and ASJ that the Valle Valle group, mentioned earlier, procured weapons from its contacts in Guatemala, most notably, José Manuel López Morales, alias "El Ché," a Chiquimula-based trafficker sought by US authorities.⁶¹ It is not known yet which of the over 100 weapons and thousands of rounds of ammunition seized in 2014 by the Honduran authorities came from Guatemala. But heavy artillery such as an M-60 machine gun and grenade launchers, both found amongst Guatemalan military stocks, were among the firearms seized in August 2014 by Honduran authorities when they raided Valle Valle properties.⁶²

El Salvador

Leakage of weapons from El Salvador's barracks is equally alarming. Several high profile cases have gone through the judicial system in recent years. These include one case of arms trafficking that reaches to the top of the Salvadoran military.⁶³ Other cases connected military personnel to leakage of grenades that were allegedly headed to the Zetas,⁶⁴ and the disappearance of four M-60 machine guns (capable of

59 Colby Goodman, "US Firearms Trafficking to Guatemala and Mexico," Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, April 2013, p. 8. Available at: http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/US%20Firearms%20to%20Guatemala%20and%20Mexico_0.pdf

60 Nick Miroff and William Booth, "Mexican Drug Cartels' Newest Weapon: Cold War-Era Grenades Made in US," The Washington Post, 17 July 2010. Available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/07/16/AR2010071606252.html>

61 elPeriodico, "Se oyen pasos de animal grande: El Cartel de narcos Valle Valle empieza a caer," 5 October 2014. Available at: <http://www.elperiodico.com.gt/es/20141005/pais/2854/Se-oyen-pasos-de-animal-grande-El-Cartel-de-narcos-Valle-Valle-empieza-a-caer.htm>

62 InSight Crime and ASJ interview, Honduras prosecutor who wished to remain anonymous, Tegucigalpa, 25 May 2015.

63 Seth Robbins, "El Salvador's Military: Arms Dealer to the Maras?" InSight Crime, 16 June 2014. Available at: <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/el-salvadors-military-arms-dealer-to-the-maras>

64 Charles Parkinson, "El Salvador Arms Cache Exposes Taxis Cartel - Zetas Link," InSight Crime, 11 October 2013. Available at: <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/el-salvador-arms-cache-exposes-taxis-cartel-link-to-zetas>

firing 500 bullets per minute to a distance of 1,000 meters).⁶⁵

Grenades were a particularly difficult item to get under control. The United States sent an estimated 300,000 grenades to Central America during the 1980s.⁶⁶ El Salvador was a prime recipient of US aid and grenades, receiving 266,506 M67 grenades between 1980 and 1993. (See graph, above) These grenades have been appearing in crime scenes from El Salvador to Mexico. The El Salvador police told the Washington Post in 2010, for instance, that they had recovered 390 M67s in the previous five years.⁶⁷

At least one high-profile case centered on Honduras after several military personnel implicated in a case involving the theft of grenades told prosecutors that at least 14, and as many as 39, M72 light anti-tank weapons (LAW), had been stolen from Salvadoran stocks and sold to a Mexican drug cartel operating in San Pedro Sula.⁶⁸ Honduran authorities found the cache -- which also included eight AK-47s, seven AR-15s, 11 rocket-propelled grenades, and mountains of ammunition, among other items -- in March 2011.⁶⁹

Mexico

Mexico is also a source of weaponry, although this appears to come largely from the regular flow of arms from the United States, because Mexico has tighter restrictions on the sale and ownership of guns than its neighbors. An estimated 253,000 weapons are purchased annually in the United States to be trafficked into Mexico, according to a report by the Igarapé Institute and the University of San Diego.⁷⁰ There appears to be a mix of entrepreneurial individuals, independent arms trafficking organizations, and criminal organizations exploiting liberal US gun laws.⁷¹ Like drugs moving north, high-powered weapons moving south fetch a premium on the black market and can be traded for other illicit goods.

Mexican organizations can also pay for services rendered in Honduras with weapons, according to Honduran police intelligence services. In September 2014, Honduran

65 Marguerite Cawley, "El Salvador Arms Theft Highlights Military Weapons Trafficking," InSight Crime, 9 July 2014. Available at: <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/el-salvador-arms-theft-highlights-military-weapons-trafficking>

66 Nick Miroff and William Booth, "Mexican Drug Cartels' Newest Weapon: Cold War-Era Grenades Made in US," The Washington Post, 17 July 2010. Available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/07/16/AR2010071606252.html>

67 Ibid.

68 Suchit Chavez, Jessica Avalos and Cesar Castro Fagoaga, "Cartel del Milenio compro cohetes Law que eran de la FAES," La Prensa Grafica, 23 April 2015. Available at: <http://www.laprensagrafica.com/2015/04/23/cartel-del-milenio-compro-cohetes-law-que-eran-de-la-faes>

69 InSight Crime and ASJ interview, Attorney General's Office representatives, Tegucigalpa, 25 May 2015.

70 Topher McDougal, David A. Shirk, Robert Muggah and John H. Patterson, "The Way of the Gun: Estimating Firearms Traffic Across the US-Mexico Border," Igarape Institute and the University of San Diego Transborder Institute, 5 March 2013.

71 Steven Dudley, "How Guns are Trafficked Below the Border," InSight Crime, 1 February 2011. Available at: <http://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/how-guns-are-trafficked-below-the-border>

authorities captured two Mexican nationals suspected of ties to the Valle Valle group, and seized an M-60 machine gun, five fragmentation grenades and an M-16.⁷²

Panama

The UNODC notes that Panama is also an important hub in the region's illegal arms trade, as the country allows duty-free arms purchases, so US weapons can be bought legally, and then smuggled into other countries. In the UNODC's words, "This provides a convenient regional shopping center for the 9 mm pistols that criminals demand."⁷³

72 La Prensa, "Decomisan una ametralladora de guerra M60 en Copan," 16 September 2014. <http://www.laprensa.hn/sucesos/policiales/748266-98/decomisan-una-ametralladora-de-guerra-m60-en-cop%C3%A1n>

73 Claudio Damian Rodriguez Santorum, et al., "Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean: A Threat Assessment," United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), p. 62. Available at: <http://www.unodc.org/toc/en/reports/TOCTACentralAmerica-Caribbean.html>



AP Image / Rodrigo Abd

Trafficking Firearms in Honduras

The weapons trade within Honduras is difficult to monitor. This is largely because the military, the country's sole importer, and the Armory, the sole salesmen of weapons, do not release information to the public. The lack of transparency extends to private security companies, which do not have to release information regarding their purchases and have been granted great leeway with regards to the weapons they can possess. As noted at the onset of this study, the police, who are tasked with registering weapons, have trouble keeping track of what they have confiscated. Police stockpiles are also vulnerable, as will be evident later in this report.

The problems extend to ammunition. Understanding and enforcement of the laws on munitions was reportedly very lackadaisical until recently. Hondurans could purchase munitions for high-powered weaponry in the country's foremost department stores. Although these loopholes appear to be closing, there remains a vibrant black market for munitions, much of which appears to be sold by active and retired members of the security forces and others who have access to large quantities of ammunition.

MILITARY LEAKAGE

The military has control over many weapons, yet we know little about its regulatory system, cases of leakage, or its internal control mechanisms. While there is information on total weapons imports (see below), there is a reluctance on the part of the armed forces to release the number, type and caliber of weapons, as well as the amount of ammunition, in their possession. InSight Crime and ASJ attempted to obtain this information from the Honduran military via freedom of information requests ("derecho de petición"), but without success. The military cited "security" reasons in its justification for withholding the information. (See Annex for the full responses from the Ministry of Defense and the Military Pension Institute.)

Military Weapons Imports (in millions of dollars)

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
8.1	10.7	5.7	16.6	7.8	4.8	6.0	10.4	7.4

Fuente: Central Bank of Honduras

insightcrime.org

In its report on Honduras, the ATF noted further contradictions in firearms legislation regarding control mechanisms for the military, which seems to be quite literally above the law when it comes to reporting on its stocks of munitions, explosives and weapons, among other items. “The ... ballistics database does not contain information on firearms belonging to the military or security forces, but the Firearms Law does require the military to maintain a special daily register of their firearms and ammunition inventories, which is also promulgated in their organizational law,” the ATF wrote. “However, the Firearms Law is silent on pertinent inventory control provisions for the public security forces ... Also absent are firearms marking requirements in the aforementioned statutes.”⁷⁴



A weapon -- initialized by the Honduran Armed Forces -- that was seized by authorities at a crime scene. (Photo credit: Steven Dudley)

Given this it is perhaps not surprising that there have been no broad, official investigations or oversight of the military’s imports or of its weapons and munitions stocks. As noted earlier, these stocks have weapons reaching back to the 1980s, when the country received hundreds of millions of dollars worth of US military assistance and military hardware. And without any available registry of military imports or reports on its weapon stocks, it is impossible to know the extent of illegal sales of arms and munitions emanating from the armed forces. Nevertheless, the examples delineated below suggest that it is an ongoing problem.

The vulnerability of Honduran military stockpiles reaches back at least a decade. Of the 3,000 AK-47s handed over to the government as part of an amnesty in 2003,

⁷⁴ US Department of Justice, “Honduras Small Arms Assessment 2011,” Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Office of Field Operations, International Affairs Office, 2011, p. 9.

officials could only account for 1,615 by the year 2011,⁷⁵ and those may have been gathered in a later amnesty.⁷⁶

In the biggest case of leakage from military stocks to date, police seized a cache of military weapons in Choloma, Cortés, in 2004, reportedly destined for the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - FARC) guerrilla group. The cache included 163 M-16s, 26 AK-47, 11 M-60, 4 FAL, 9 grenade launchers, 5 RPGs, 54 crates of ammunition of different caliber, and 374 M-16 and AK-47 cartridges.⁷⁷ One of the alleged traffickers, Pedro García Montes, was assassinated in Colombia in 2004.⁷⁸ Honduras' Minister of Security Oscar Álvarez told *La Tribuna* at the time that García Montes had traded weapons with the FARC for drugs.⁷⁹ (Other sources told the press that García Montes was part of a Colombia-based drug cartel.)⁸⁰ Álvarez added that the large numbers of US-made weapons made authorities believe that the leakage was coming from firearms stocks dating back to the 1980s.

“We know that in the country there are many weapons of Soviet origin from the time of the Cold War in the 1970s and 1980s,” he said. “But in this lot were found more than 150 M-16 rifles, M-203 grenade launchers, M-60 machineguns, and five anti-tank rocket launchers, as fresh as if they just left the factory, all US-made.”⁸¹

In a more recent case dating from at least 2010, the Attorney General's Office opened an investigation into the theft and resale of 22 rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs).⁸² The weapons and munitions were stolen from a logistical base, a military tribunal found, although the accused sergeant denied any knowledge of the theft or resale. The grenades, or “papayas” as they are called on the black market, could have fetched as much as \$7,000, according to one former military official consulted for this study. With the launcher included -- as it apparently was -- the price could have reached as high as \$25,000. The records for this case were reportedly “frozen” by that tribunal, but at least one military official was sentenced to house arrest.

There have been no publicly reported cases since, but current and former military officials appear to be active in what remains a vibrant black market. The same former military official consulted for this report revealed how much of this black market

75 *America Economía*, “Honduras: buscan frenar el tráfico de armas robadas,” 2 October 2012. Available at: <http://www.americaeconomia.com/politica-sociedad/politica/honduras-buscan-frenar-el-trafico-de-armas-robadas>

76 A police official managing the storage of AK-47s at police headquarters in Tegucigalpa cited the exact same number of this assault rifle in government custody, which he linked to an amnesty in 2010.

77 *La Prensa* (Nicaragua), “Incautan arsenal en Choloma,” 16 April 2005, published by Instituto de Estudios Estratégicos y Políticas Públicas (IEEPP).

78 *El Tiempo*, “Misterio del Hondureño baleado,” 20 July 2004. Available at: <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1538430>

79 *La Tribuna*, “Con dos mil kilos de ‘coca’ compraron armas,” 17 April 2005, published by Instituto de Estudios Estratégicos y Políticas Públicas (IEEPP).

80 *Ibid.*

81 *Ibid.*

82 *El Heraldo*, “Se roban 22 lanzacohetes RPG-7 del Comando de Apoyo Logístico,” 7 February 2012. Available at: <http://www.elheraldo.hn/csp/mediapool/sites/ElHeraldo/SeccionesSecundarias/UnidadInvestigativa/story.csp?cid=617346&sid=659&fid=322>

works via individual connections over the telephone. The source showed InSight Crime and ASJ messages on his telephone he had exchanged with former colleagues -- retired and active -- about munitions and weapons. One message from “a friend” -- who he said was ex-military -- was selling a Glock 19. The firearm retails in the United States for about \$600; the asking price in Honduras was \$3,500.

Another message began, “I’m selling an AR-15”

Source: Photo and how much?

Seller: And M16 munitions [that also work for AR-15]

Seller: \$2,500

Seller: A full cartridge belt [1,000 bullets]

Source: Send me a photo so I can coordinate with people who might be interested (Vender sends photograph -- see below)



A weapon -- initialized by the Honduran Armed Forces -- that was seized by authorities at a crime scene. (Photo credit: Steven Dudley)

The only market more vibrant than that of pistols and assault weapons may be that of munitions. The ex-military source showed InSight Crime and ASJ investigators a message from another “friend” (active military, he said) asking about possible buyers for up to 10,000 rounds of 5.56 mm bullets (used for AR-15s and M-16 assault rifles,

among others). The asking price was 10 lempiras (about \$0.50) per bullet, giving this bundle of munitions a market value of close to \$5,000. The leakage of these munitions is related in part to the lack of controls on military trainings, the source noted. There is, simply put, no regulation of munitions use at military trainings or shooting ranges.

“You sign out 10,000 rounds and use 5,000,” he said. “Who is going to know what you do with the other 5,000?”

Beyond the barracks, there is the supply of weapons from the Armory. As noted previously, the Armory is the sole licensed dealer of weapons in Honduras. Exactly how many weapons the Armory sells is unknown. This is because it does not release official data on sales, and the military claimed it could not provide InSight Crime and ASJ with that information -- in response to our freedom of information request -- due to “reasons of national security.” (see Annex)

In an interview, however, Armory officials told InSight Crime and ASJ it had sold “just under 200,000 weapons” in its 42 years of existence. This is consistent with what Armory representatives told the ATF in 2010 -- that it had sold 6,000 weapons

in 2009, and about 160,000 in total at that time. The Armory imports weapons from Mexico and Brazil, among other countries, but it told the ATF in 2010 that it had not imported weapons from the European Union or the United States since 2002. Armory representatives stated that they believed this contributed to the high volume of US weapons trafficked on the black market.⁸³

This black market, Armory representatives told InSight Crime and ASJ, had cut into their bottom line with regards to weapons sales. Sales were 30 percent what they were in 2008, they said. Without showing any corroborating reports, Armory representatives insisted that the majority of weapons it sells are “revolvers,” such as Taureg and Armscor, and “12-gauge shotguns,” such as Remington and Mossberg, of which 70 percent are sold to private security firms. The representatives said that the Armory puts strict requirements on the private firms seeking weapons beyond what the law requires, such as requesting to see paperwork demonstrating their legal constitution as a company.

Despite prohibitions against weapons that require 5.56 mm and 7.62 mm bullets, the Armory still sells these munitions or variations of them. The .223 caliber bullets available at the Armory, for instance, work with AR-15 and M-16 assault rifles, which are illegal for civilians to carry in Honduras. They come in boxes of 50, and have a retail price of 802.70 lempiras, about a 37 percent markup on the black market price mentioned earlier for 5.56 mm. Armory representatives say purchasers of the Mini-14 Ruger seek .223 caliber bullets. But when InSight Crime and ASJ visited an Armory retail outlet, the sales clerk said that the Armory no longer had these for sale. The sales clerk also said that the Armory did not sell any weapons that were compatible with 7.62 mm bullets, though he showed a box of 20 retailing for 626.75 lempiras to the investigator. Armory representatives insist that the vast majority of the munitions they sell are .22 caliber bullets, used for the hunting rifles they say they sell in large quantities.

The Armory’s sales are the second most important source of income for the Military Pension Institute, IPM.⁸⁴ On the surface, it would seem that the military’s dependence on weapons sales to finance its pension system provides incentives to sell more, to increase the pension’s holdings. This is particularly troubling given the lack of transparency with regards to imports, sales, and subsequent regulatory measures around the administration of weapons and munitions sales.

What’s more, it is baffling that Armory representatives insist they are not required to, and do not, inform the police’s National Firearms Registry of all weapons sold. This contradicts what Armory representatives told the ATF in 2010, when they claimed that the Armory reported its sales “daily and monthly” to the national registry representatives. The only time period in which they said this did not occur was when there was, according to the ATF’s report, a “contractual issue with the company providing support” to the registry.⁸⁵

83 US Department of Justice, “Honduras Small Arms Assessment 2011,” Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Office of Field Operations, International Affairs Office, 2011, p. 19.

84 The first source of income is the stock of the Argos Cement company, Armory representatives told InSight Crime and ASJ.

85 US Department of Justice, “Honduras Small Arms Assessment 2011,” Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Office of Field Operations, International Affairs Office, 2011, p. 19.

Still, Armory officials insist that they are going above and beyond the call of duty. They say they do not have to require individual buyers to provide an individual criminal background check; that they do not have to ensure, using information from their database, that no single individual owns more than five weapons; and that they do not have to control the resale of munitions by ensuring that individuals not stock up on bullets via their stores. Despite this, they say they do all of the above and more.

This effort, however, is not stopping weapons from seeping into criminal hands. Attorney General's Office representatives estimated that 20 percent of the weapons it seized from the Valle Valle group in 2014 had been purchased at the Armory.⁸⁶ Prosecutors added that Luis Valle, one of the group's leaders, had purchased a weapon from the Armory that he had registered with the National Firearms Registry.

POLICE: STOCKS, SEIZURES, AND RESALE

The police also appear to be a source for weaponry on the black market, as the case against the Special Forces known as the Cobras illustrates below. As with the military, the problem begins with a lack of transparency. Police stocks, weapons purchases and holdings are hidden from view and not available to the public. The police registered its weapons in the precursor of the National Firearms Registry,⁸⁷ but it has not done so since the registry was created in 2002. It has also stopped tracking the weapons that it registered in that time period.

Police-issued weapons are registered in inventories at each individual police station. However, there is no known centralized database of police weaponry, munitions, or other arms. In other words, if authorities recover bullets or a weapon from a crime scene, crossing it with the IBIS database or the registry will not lead to a match. The same is true for military-issued weapons.

What's more, the police have a very haphazard way of managing weapons they seize. According to the inspector managing the police's central confiscated weapons depository, each police command post has a place where it keeps weapons it seizes for six months before sending them to his office. This is "to give the owners a chance to reclaim it," presumably by filing the necessary paperwork. (The procedure recalls the earlier ATF observation that few people, if any, are prosecuted for carrying weapons illegally.) This management philosophy also obviously carries with it numerous issues, especially considering the accusations of corruption within the police.⁸⁸

86 InSight Crime and ASJ interview, Attorney General's Office representatives, Tegucigalpa, 25 May 2015.

87 See: "National report of the Government of Honduras on measures to prevent and combat the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and other security measures," UN Programme of Action National Reports, 2004. Available at: <http://www.poa-iss.org/Poa13/CountryProfiles/CountryProfileInfo.aspx?Col=86&pos=10>

88 Geoffrey Ramsey, "Departure of Honduras Security Minister a Victory for Corrupt Cops," InSight Crime, 12 September 2011. Available at: <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/departure-of-honduras-security-minister-a-victory-for-corrupt-cops>



The police's main storage unit in Tegucigalpa. Weapons have sat in the unit for years.
(Photo credit: Steven Dudley)

The police's central warehouse has between 3,000 and 4,000 weapons, the inspector said. The police said they had destroyed about 3,155 guns in the last three years -- about 700 of which were homemade and the rest were "not functional." In 2014, the police also destroyed 20 of 1,615 AK-47s it had received during a 2010 amnesty, he said. When asked why it had not destroyed any more AK-47s, he said it was because the police did not have a clear protocol about the destruction of weapons. He also noted that the first batch of 20 weapons had been destroyed without protocol because civil society groups, Church representatives, the US ambassador and others were present.⁸⁹ The machine, donated by the United States to destroy seized weapons, now sits in an empty room. (See picture below)

Even those who have asked the police to destroy weapons they no longer need have had a hard time. In 2014, a major regional chicken supply company, Pollo Rey, asked the police to destroy 52 weapons that it no longer used. But the weapons sat in an empty room for months, waiting for the police to firm up their protocol, the police inspector said.

It is little surprise, then, that many black market weapons emanate from the police. In the most recent noteworthy case, in August 2013 the Attorney General's Office opened an investigation into the police Special Forces unit known as the Cobras, regarding the disappearance of 300 FAL rifles and 300,000 rounds of 5.56 mm bullets

⁸⁹ El Heraldo, "Honduras destruye 12,000 armas y municiones incautadas al crimen," 3 June 2014. Available at: <http://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/715567-364/honduras-destruye-12000-armas-y-municiones-incautadas-al-crimen>



A machine donated by the US to destroy seized weapons in Honduras, May 2015. (Photo credits: Steven Dudley)

from stockpiles in August 2011.⁹⁰ In an investigation of the case, *El Heraldo* said that the weapons were transported “ant-style” (“operacion hormiga” -- divided into small batches) to Guatemala, where they were sold to the Zetas criminal organization.⁹¹

Other cases show a similar modus operandi. In 2007, some 186 weapons “disappeared” from the Cobras’ armory. In 2011, police reported dismantling a

criminal group that was found carrying four of the same type of weapons stolen from the Cobras, but it was never confirmed whether the serial numbers matched those stolen in 2007.⁹² And in 2011, it was reported that 80 weapons had been “stolen” from the police training institute (Instituto Tecnico Policial) in the city of La Paz. It’s unclear whether the Attorney General’s Office investigated the case.⁹³

PRIVATE SECURITY COMPANIES

The private security industry has grown substantially in Latin America in recent years. The industry is notoriously opaque and unstable, making data collection difficult, but since around the 1990s the annual growth of this sector in the region has been at least 10 percent per annum.⁹⁴ In 2007, for instance, Honduras had 116 registered security companies with 20,000 employees, and another 284 estimated unregistered companies with 60,000 estimated employees.⁹⁵ By 2013, there were 709 registered private security companies with an estimated 70,000 employees, about twice the size of Honduras’ military and police combined.⁹⁶ By 2017, there

90 *La Prensa*, “MP investiga en sede de los Cobras depositos de armas,” 15 August 2013. Available at: <http://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/apertura/328658-98/mp-investiga-en-sede-de-los-cobras-dep%C3%B3sitos-de-armas>

91 *El Heraldo*, “Armas de los Cobras, vendidas en Guatemala,” 7 November 2011. Available at: <http://www.elheraldo.hn/alfrente/564390-209/armas-de-los-cobras-vendidas-en-guatemala>

92 *Ibid.*

93 *El Heraldo*, “Desaparece un lote de armas asignado al ITP,” 21 November 2011. Available at: <http://www.elheraldo.hn/csp/mediapool/sites/ElHeraldo/SeccionesSecundarias/UnidadInvestigativa/story.csp?cid=617340&sid=659&fid=322>

94 Mark Unger, “Securing the Imperium: Criminal Justice, Privatization & Neoliberal Globalization (2007-08),” *Social Justice*, vol. 34, no. 3/4 (109-110), pp. 20-37.

95 *Ibid.*

96 *La Prensa*, “Agencias de seguridad, bajo la mira del crimen organizado,” 15 August 2013. Available at: http://www.laprensa.hn/content/view/full/171886?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+laprensa_titulares+%28La+Prensa+-+Titulares%29#.UVBVQRySiSq

were an estimated 1,038 companies.⁹⁷

For multiple reasons, the explosion in private security has opened a door for the black market weapons trade. To begin with, private security operations manage a lot of weapons. According to police, they represent as much as 20 percent of the total number of arms registered,⁹⁸ which would put their total above 100,000 weapons. The police team monitoring this registry is made up of 23 inspectors in Tegucigalpa and another 10 in San Pedro Sula. Officials in the capital city told InSight Crime and ASJ they do inspections “every day,” and that they leave Tegucigalpa every two weeks to inspect firms outside of the city.⁹⁹ Even if true, it would be impossible for 33 inspectors to properly inspect 700 private security firms in any manageable time period.

Secondly, there is little consensus about the laws regarding what weapons the companies can possess. When InSight Crime and ASJ visited the police unit that was established to monitor private security companies’ weaponry, it received three conflicting answers as to whether these companies could possess the AR-15 assault rifle: one representative said it was legal until the latest amnesty ends December 31, 2015; another said it was only legal if the company had obtained special permission from the Security Ministry or the police chief; a third said it was illegal.

The reality is that companies -- both the for-profit companies and what are called “non-profit” -- have weapons that are technically illegal. These are the result of “misunderstandings” in the law, malfeasance or corruption. One recent example of this confusion came in Olancho in May 2015, when authorities seized as many as 15 weapons, some of which were illegal under the law, a grenade and other military ordinance in the capital of the Olancho province, Juticalpa. The owners of these weapons, who included Juticalpa Mayor Ramon Sarmiento, said they had permits for the weapons.¹⁰⁰

Ramon Sarmiento is the nephew of Ulises Sarmiento, a.k.a. “Don Liche,” a staunch supporter of the Libre Party, whose suspected ties to organized crime have been highlighted in the past. In 2009, following the overthrow of President Manuel Zelaya, Sarmiento’s house was attacked by men wielding high-powered automatic weapons, in what many at the time described as part of an ongoing battle amongst organized criminal groups. Ulises’ son Rafael Sarmiento -- who is himself a Congress hopeful for the Libre Party -- told InSight Crime and ASJ when we visited shortly thereafter that the attack was part of the political battle playing out in the country.¹⁰¹

97 El Heraldo, “En Honduras hay 31,387 guardias privados en posesión de 28,464 armas,” 23 July 2017. Available at: <http://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1092223-466/en-honduras-hay-31387-guardias-privados-en-posesi%C3%B3n-de-28464-armas>

98 InSight Crime and ASJ interview, head of the National Firearms Registry, Tegucigalpa, 20 May 2015.

99 InSight Crime and ASJ interview, police unit in charge of monitoring private security firms in Honduras, Tegucigalpa, 20 May 2015.

100 El Heraldo, “Armas e indumentaria militar decomisan en operativo en Olancho,” 18 May 2015. Available at: <http://www.elheraldo.hn/sucesos/841201-219/fusina-realiza-operativo-masivo-en-olancho>

101 Zelaya was holed up at the Brazilian embassy at the time. Sources told researchers that Sarmiento not only bankrolled Zelaya but facilitated his clandestine return to the country. Sarmiento’s son smiled when asked about this rumor but did not comment.

Indeed, many of these security firms are suspected fronts for organized crime groups. The Attorney General's Office said that the Valle Valle group had a private security firm, which it used to purchase weapons from the Armory. Another trafficker, Jose "Chepe" Handal, owned a private security firm, Honduras Security, which trafficked high-caliber weapons.¹⁰² The son of a powerful businessman and politician by the same name, Handal had at one point more than a dozen bodyguards armed with high-powered assault weapons.

Thirdly, these private security firms are largely run and stocked with ex-police and ex-military personnel. The former security force members have strong networks inside the active ranks that can get them weapons and munitions illegally, be they seized or legally procured. This is evident in the vibrant, close-knit person-to-person networks

Despite the laws surrounding private security firms, they are often largely informal operations.

explored in other sections of this report. Add to this the lack of transparency on the part of the police and the military about their own procurements and stocks, as well as the lack of controls surrounding seized weapons, and the potential for leakage to the black market via this channel becomes evident.

Fourthly, despite the laws surrounding private security firms, they are often largely informal operations. In some instances, their personnel are not subject to rigorous, thorough background checks. For example, the police said that failure to report new personnel -- which would undermine the state's ability to check employee criminal records -- is one of the most common transgressions of private security firms. The police say that firms do this in order to avoid taxes and licensing fees.¹⁰³ However, there are clearly other incentives for these companies, such as to avoid providing the criminal history of each guard.

On the other end of the spectrum, many guards do not receive proper training or pay for their work. Their lack of training, and the often poor and unsafe working conditions, makes them susceptible to pressure from criminal groups, in particular street gangs, to either give or sell their weapons to these groups. In some cases, resistance is met with violence. But given the low pay and poor training, the guards are likely to simply relinquish their weapons rather than fight for them.

In one recent example, suspected members of the Barrio 18 street gang ransacked the offices of a security company in San Pedro Sula, taking with them eleven 12-gauge rifles, seven 9 mm pistols, twenty-nine .38 caliber pistols, a .22 caliber pistol and eight radios.¹⁰⁴ The suspects reportedly took advantage of the guard's lack of training or disregard for protocol: when the guard opened the entrance so other members of the security team could enter the facility, suspects slipped in as well. The newspaper report said the suspects then intimidated the guard, so that he would open the garage door and allow the suspects' accomplices to enter the facility.

¹⁰² Interview, Honduran prosecutor who wished to remain anonymous, Tegucigalpa, June 2015.

¹⁰³ The government breaks down the taxes of these firms by number of guards, and there is a licensing fee per guard on the payroll.

¹⁰⁴ El Heraldo, "Supuestos pandilleros roban armas de empresa de seguridad," 5 May 2014. Available at: <http://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/705630-364/supuestos-pandilleros-roban-armas-de-empresa-de-seguridad-en-san-pedro-sula>

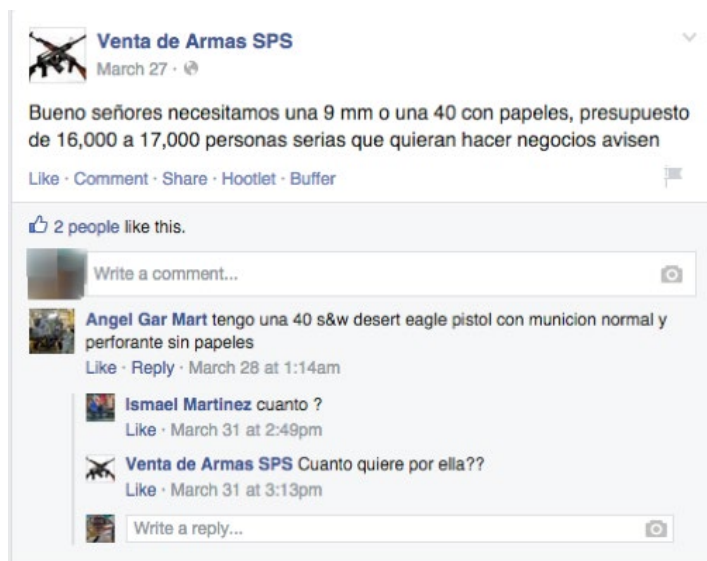
OTHER MEANS:

NETWORKING, PAWN SHOPS, AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The resale market appears to be a popular means to circulate illegal weapons in Honduras. There are several ways these sales occur. Much of it is by word of mouth, numerous sources told InSight Crime and ASJ. As illustrated earlier, these sales can happen via text message and networking amongst current and former security officials. Relatives and close-knit communities can also peddle weapons through their networks at work or in social settings. Street gangs and others who control small, underground economies can also access weapons easily by networking amongst themselves and other small criminal groups.

These weapons also move through pawnshops in Honduras. There is little to no regulation of these establishments. Our researcher visited three pawnshops in the country, two of which said they would sell weapons to the researcher. One of these said the service was “by appointment only.” In other words, the pawnshop would bring a specific weapon requested to the shop but did not keep them on the premises. The shopkeeper offered the researcher a “CZ,” a Czech-made 9 mm handgun, as a starting point. The other shopkeeper said his shop had “run out” of weapons for the moment, but that it does sell them.

The latest method of selling weapons is via Facebook. Police investigators pointed one of our researchers to two such sites, which they said they were investigating. One of them, “Venta de Armas SPS,” had 407 members.¹⁰⁵ There was a recent post asking for a “9 mm or a 40 with papers,” presumably meaning already registered with the police. One user replied that he had a .40 caliber Smith & Wesson Desert Eagle “without papers,” which prompted the administrator of the page and a user to inquire about the price and number of Desert Eagle pistols available. (See below) It’s not known whether any transaction occurred.

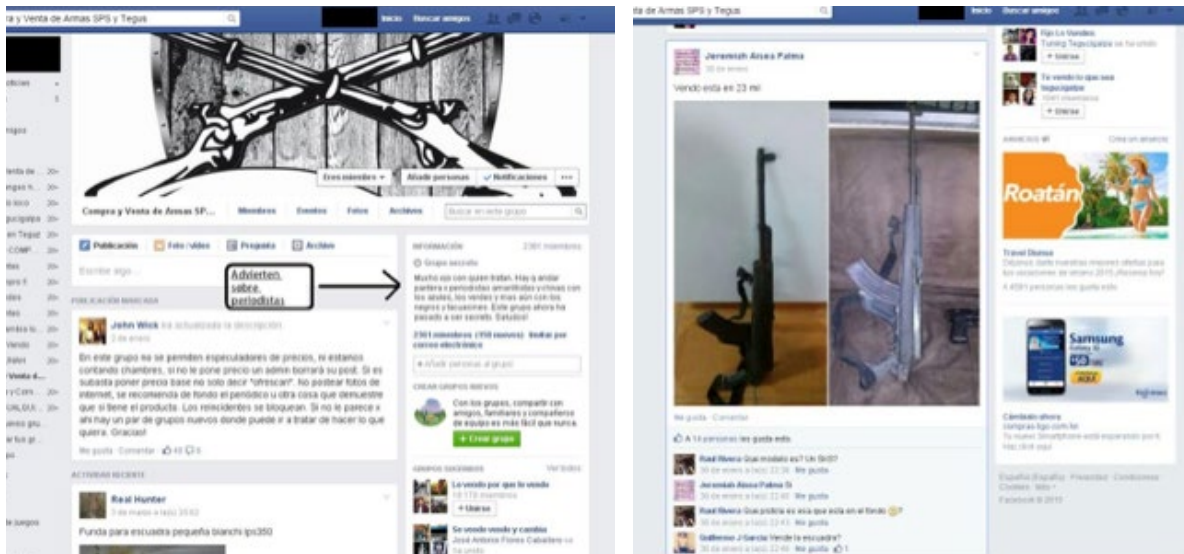


A screenshot of a Facebook conversation about a potential weapons purchase.

¹⁰⁵ Facebook, “Venta de Armas SPS.” Accessed March 2017, at: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Venta-de-Armas-SPS/686976961387071?fref=ts>

Another page was called “Compra/Venta de armas y municiones Honduras.”¹⁰⁶ This page can only be accessed by invitation. One of our researchers requested access, but is still waiting for permission to join. It had 281 members as of 5 May 2015. The page advertises itself as a promoter of weapons for “sporting purposes” and has a disclaimer with regards to the posts of its members.

The most active Facebook page consulted by one of our researchers was called “Compra Venta Armas en SPS y Teguz”¹⁰⁷ (see photos below). There is a constant movement of weapons and munitions on this site, both registered and illegal. Munitions on sale included 5.56 mm and .223 caliber, both used in weapons that are illegal for civilians to possess in Honduras. There were also flak jackets and other accessories for sale, as well as services to help legalize weapons via the aforementioned amnesty.



Screenshots of an arms trafficking page on Facebook.

In 2015, when our researcher first consulted the page, it had over 2,300 members. There are strict requirements about posting items (you must include a base price, use a photo and prove the weapon is in Honduras by posting the photo of a weapon with a local newspaper, for instance). The site also warns against “yellow journalists” infiltrating the site.

106 Accessed 5 May 2015, at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/687371851384119/>

107 The page is not accessible to the general public. One of our researchers gained access via a police investigator who has become active as part of an ongoing investigation of the site.



AP Image / Rodrigo Abd

Enforcement: Closing the Gaps

GAPS IN ENFORCEMENT

As set out in this report, the legal structure around Honduras' arms trade is deeply flawed. The legislation is inconsistent and unclear as to the roles of different institutions, while the regulatory system is insufficiently funded, anachronistic, and administered by officials who are overworked or susceptible to corruption.

As noted, there is a massive backlog in carrying out ballistic tests on registered firearms. Given the current rate that these tests are carried out, it would take 30 years to register the ballistic traces of all the country's legal weapons.¹⁰⁸

The lack of a centralized database is a serious problem for arms control. The databases that exist are not regularly cross-checked against one another -- for example, the Armory does not check potential weapon purchasers against the database of gang members.

There is no consistent policy for destroying seized firearms. Under the law, the security secretary has the power to order weapons destroyed in the case of "damage or extreme danger."¹⁰⁹ There are also shortcomings in how police handle seized firearms, with a lack of clear chain of custody. Seized firearms are stored by different entities across the country, with little centralized control. A recent audit to count the weapons held by the Attorney General's Office, for example, found that they were storing some 4,000 weapons across the country.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ El Heraldo, "Honduras: 235 mil armas sin prueba de balística," 7 April 2015. Available at: <http://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/828600-331/honduras-235-mil-armas-sin-prueba-de-bal%C3%ADstica>

¹⁰⁹ Ley De Control De Armas De Fuego, Municiones Explosiones Y Otros Similares (Art 53)

¹¹⁰ El Heraldo, "Unas 4,000 armas decomisadas serían distribuidas," 20 February 2013. Available at: <http://www.elheraldo.hn/csp/mediapool/sites/ElHeraldo/Sucesos/story.csp?cid=621699&sid=293&fid=219>

Another serious issue is the lack of trained personnel. There is no specialized unit within the police that handles arms trafficking cases.¹¹¹ The armed forces, including the Military Police of Public Order (Policia Militar de Orden Publico - PMOP), are charged with combating arms trafficking in cooperation with the police, but there is no unit dedicated to this.¹¹²

The poor training of officials involved in gun control is manifested in their lack of understanding of the tools -- for example, IBIS is used as a way to register guns, not as a way to prosecute violators, track criminals or do sophisticated criminal analyses, which it is designed for.



The ballistics unit's storage area for cases files. Some of the files were damaged by rain. (Photo credit: Steven Dudley)

An additional issue is that combating arms trafficking does not appear to be a high priority for the government. It is working with its limited resources to solve the cases that have reached the courts, but a substantial number never get to that stage. As is widely reported, the vast number of homicides and other crimes are never resolved by the justice system. The ballistics unit of the Attorney General's Office is a case in point. The unit is chronically understaffed and woefully underpaid (entry-level

staff receive minimum wage). They are not compensated for overtime. Their working conditions are precarious (the San Pedro Sula office burned down, taking with it years' worth of data). The storage areas are vulnerable to accidents (thousands of files were damaged in a recent rainstorm) and open to theft (the entrance to the area where they stored their weapons in Tegucigalpa in the parking area of the forensics medicine building had no working lights when InSight Crime and ASJ visited in February 2015).

IMPROVEMENTS IN RECENT YEARS

However, Honduran authorities have begun implementing a number of promising anti-arms trafficking measures in recent years, with varying degrees of success.

First, they have tightened security at legal points of entry to the country. Authorities told our researchers that trafficking has been curbed in recent months, due to increased vigilance and the implementation of improved security at key points of

¹¹¹ Breakdown of police units in the newly-launched DPI available here: <http://www.seguridad.gob.hn/images/organigramas/dpi.jpg>

¹¹² El Heraldo, "Honduras: Resolución de JOH sobre la PMOP," 25 January 2015. Available at: <http://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/788554-214/honduras-resoluci%C3%B3n-de-joh-sobre-la-pmop>

entry. This includes Puerto Cortés on the northern coast, which is Honduras' busiest port. Puerto Cortés has undergone a renovation worth hundreds of millions of dollars, including the addition of extra X-ray machines to scan containers.¹¹³ There have also been efforts to train staff at other points of entry to better detect weapons, including a recent course to help police and customs officials identify weapons and parts being smuggled, with training provided by Nicaraguan and Colombian police.¹¹⁴

Second, the authorities have increased patrols around informal points of entry to the country in a bid to cut arms trafficking. In March 2015, the Honduran government launched a bilateral force along with Guatemala, the Inter-Agency Task Force Maya Chorti, to fight organized crime on the border, combining police, military personnel and prosecutors.¹¹⁵ The Honduran anti-crime task force known as FUSINA has also been working on the borders with Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador¹¹⁶ to destroy unmonitored crossing points, or "blind spots," using explosives and bulldozers, in order to prevent these crossings being used for the illegal transport of weapons and other goods.¹¹⁷ In one of its first weeks of operation, the Maya Chorti task force reported that it had seized six AK-47s; rifles ranging from M-16 to FAL; a 12-gauge shotgun; seven pistols; and various types of ammunition.¹¹⁸

Moreover, Honduras' Security Minister Julian Pacheco has publicly recognized the problem of arms trafficking in border states. He heralded the results of an operation in Olancho, the state with the highest number of registered weapons in the country,¹¹⁹ stating that arms trafficking in the region had been tolerated for many years, but that the security forces were putting a stop to it.

113 Bessy Lara Barrera, "La productividad de los buques se ha duplicado," *La Prensa*, 14 June 2015. Available at: <http://www.laprensa.hn/economia/849370-410/la-productividad-de-los-buques-se-ha-duplicado>

114 Direccion Ejecutiva de Ingresos, "Funcionarios de Aduanas y Policía Nacional de Honduras recibirán curso para la identificación de armas y partes en contenedores y equipaje," 2 June 2015. Available at: <http://www.dei.gob.hn/website/?art=2117&title=Funcionarios%20de%20Aduanas%20y%20Polic%3%ADa%20Nacional%20de%20Honduras%20recibir%3%A1n%20curso%20para%20la%20identificaci%3%B3n%20de%20armas%20y%20partes%20en%20contenedores%20y%20equipaje&lang=es>

115 Secretaria de Defensa Nacional, "Fuerza Maya Chorti supervisa movimientos fronterizos en zona occidental," April 2015. Available at: <http://sedena.gob.hn/index.php/component/content/article/1-latest-news/475-fuerza-maya-chorti-supervisa-movimientos-fronterizos-en-zona-occidental.html>

116 Proceso Digital, "Honduras: Destruyen nueve puntos ciegos fronterizos con El Salvador y Guatemala," 18 November 2014. <http://www.proceso.hn/component/k2/item/91550-honduras-destruyen-nueve-puntos-ciegos-fronterizos-con-el-salvador-y-guatemala.html>

117 *La Prensa*, "Honduras destruye "puntos ciegos" en frontera con Guatemala," 18 January 2015. <http://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/786539-410/honduras-destruye-puntos-ciegos-en-frontera-con-guatemala>

118 *El Tiempo*, "Fuerza Maya-Chorti reporta decomiso de armas, indumentaria militar, lanchas, vehículos y narcopistas," 20 April 2015. Available at: <http://www.tiempo.hn/nacion/item/27845-fuerza-maya-chorti-reporta-decomiso-de-armas,-indumentaria-militar,-lanchas,-vehiculos-y-narcopistas>

119 *La Prensa*, "Entre 400 y 500 mil armas circulan en Honduras legalmente," 19 May 2015. Available at: <http://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/841451-410/entre-400-y-500-mil-armas-circulan-en-honduras-legalmente>

“You can see what kind of people we are talking about from the quantity of weapons that are being seized each week,” he told the press.¹²⁰

Third, there have been various efforts to tighten Honduran gun laws. At the time of writing, the Honduran Congress was considering preliminary versions of proposed reforms. Some versions would reduce the number of firearms that can be registered to each person to three, down from five, and increase the penalty for possession of an illegal weapon to a maximum 12 years in prison. There are also proposals to solve the backlog in ballistic testing by creating several offices in cities across the country where tests can be performed,¹²¹ and to restrict purchases of ammunition to those with a license for the corresponding gun. One version of the reforms would prevent gun owners from pawning their weapons.¹²²

Honduran authorities have also indicated that they will act against the domestic illegal trade in arms and ammunition. In May 2015, *La Prensa* published an investigation showing that Tegucigalpa shops were illegally selling bullets.¹²³ The following day, the government announced an investigation and operations to shut down this trade. Congressman David Chávez, head of the Congress Defense Committee, said that the new law on the arms trade would include “tough regulations, controls and sanctions against small businesses in the informal economy which trade in projectiles.”

120 Proceso Digital, “Olancho: tráfico de armas en la mira,” 9 June 2015. Available at: <http://www.proceso.hn/component/k2/item/103896-olancho-tr%C3%A1fico-de-armas-en-la-mira.html>

121 El Heraldo, “Honduras: 235 mil armas sin prueba de balística,” 7 April 2015. Available at: <http://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/828600-331/honduras-235-mil-armas-sin-prueba-de-bal%C3%ADstica>

122 El Heraldo, “Fuertes medidas para uso y portación de armas en Honduras,” 16 May 2015. Available at: <http://www.elheraldo.hn/csp/mediapool/sites/ElHeraldo/AlFrente/story.csp?cid=566149&sid=300&fid=209>

123 *La Prensa*, “Venta ilegal de munición crece en mercados de Tegucigalpa,” 18 May 2015. Available at: <http://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/841087-410/venta-ilegal-de-munici%C3%B3n-crece-en-mercados-de-tegucigalpa>



AP Image / Ginnette Riquelme

Conclusions

Honduras is suffering from one of the highest homicide rates in the world, part of which is fueled by the wide availability of firearms. Over 80 percent of all homicides occur at the hands of someone wielding a gun. The availability of weapons is in turn fueled by liberal gun laws, lax and corrupt regulators, and the illegal trade that takes place -- almost unchecked -- across Honduras' borders and on its streets.

Still, arms trafficking in Honduras is difficult to monitor. It does not follow any single route and is not dominated by any single group. Honduras does not produce weapons, and its sole importer and salesman -- the Honduran Armed Forces -- does not release any information on what it imports or sells to the public. The regulatory agencies are many and the government has yet to create a central database for legally registered weapons.

In addition, the varied and opportunistic nature of the trade makes this a very difficult crime to understand and to counter. There are so many parts of the system that are broken that Honduras' black market arms trade has become a fairly democratic criminal enterprise. From a housewife to a former military officer, there is so much opportunity for purchase and resale of weapons and munitions, and so little chance of getting captured and punished, that it is quite literally the crime that pays.

The United States is doing its part to fuel this trade. Weapons purchased in the US represent close to half of all weapons found at crime scenes in Honduras -- or higher, in the view of Honduran officials. The United States is the source of many weapons that are trafficked directly to the country, as well as those that come indirectly via Mexico and Panama. Indeed, the US was responsible for many of the weapons that entered Central America during the civil wars of the 1980s and 1990s, and which continue to stream into Honduras today. These same weapons now leak from military stockpiles into the black market that flourishes throughout the region.

But while lax regulations, liberal gun laws, and old weapons stocks in other countries facilitate this trade from abroad, contradictory legal statutes, corruption, malfeasance and bureaucracy fuel the local black market in Honduras. The problems

start at the top. The Honduras military refuses to be held publicly accountable for the illegal movement of weapons, even though it may be a source of illegal arms. The police -- the institution with nominal control over the national registry -- has limited resources and refuses to take responsibility for the chaotic nature of the gun registration system in Honduras, as well the poor control it administers over the private security firms. The Attorney General's Office has yet to use the tools provided to it to slow criminal use of black market weapons.

What's more, the government has shown little will to change the behavior of any of these institutions, provide them with the resources they need, or institute consistent legislation that outlines clear restrictions on gun ownership or enforces meaningful penalties. On the contrary, while some elements of the security forces have joined in the fight to stop the flow of illegal weapons into Honduras, the internal mechanisms needed to keep high-powered rifles out of the hands of organized crime groups are not implemented, or are poorly understood. This also allows private security companies to obtain, own, and use these weapons without repercussions.

*As well as tightening controls on firearms, it is vital that Honduras increases **controls** on ammunition.*

Honduras was taking the first steps toward tightening its rules on weapons ownership (though similar legislative initiatives have failed in the past). This is welcome, but it should be accompanied by legislation that clearly sets out the roles and responsibilities of different government agencies in regulating the arms trade, and mandates the sharing of information between them

via a centralized database of arms seizures, purchases and other information. The reform should also fill in basic holes in the existing legislation, such as by supplying definitions of key terms like "firearm." Moreover, as well as tightening controls on firearms, it is vital that Honduras increases controls on ammunition.

Transparency is key to tackling the illicit arms trade in Honduras. In order to design and implement effective measures it is necessary to gather accurate data on the size of this industry and the methods used to move weapons. The security forces should be obliged to share data on their purchases and measures they take to prevent losses from their stockpiles, while private security companies should be more closely regulated and obliged to report on their arms holdings. In the absence of detailed information from these two important groups, researchers and policymakers will be left in the dark about the real scale of arms trafficking in the country.

Annex

Responses to InSight Crime and ASJ's freedom of information requests from the Defense Ministry and the Military Pension Institute (IPM) (the name of InSight Crime and ASJ's researcher has been redacted).

[REDACTED]

PRESENTE

Estimado [REDACTED]:

De la manera más atenta y cordial le saludo fraternalmente deseándole éxitos en sus labores diarias:

En atención a su solicitud presentada en forma electrónica identificada Sol. IPM-04-2015, con Tarjeta de Identidad No. [REDACTED], contraída a que se dé información según las interrogantes planteadas en relación a las operaciones mercantiles que realiza LA ARMERIA.

Para tal efecto se le informa que constitucionalmente está reservada como facultad privativa de las Fuerzas Armadas, la fabricación, importación, distribución y venta de armas, municiones y artículos similares, lo cual es ratificada por la Ley Constitutiva de las Fuerzas Armadas, así como la Ley de Transparencia y Acceso a la Información Pública, mediante la Resolución 093-2012, en donde dicha información es considerada como Reservada, por razones de seguridad nacional.

No obstante lo anterior, se colabora con las autoridades del Estado, proporcionándole información según requerimiento de los Juzgados competentes, Ministerio Público, etc., etc.

Sin otro particular me suscribo de usted, con muestras de consideración y respeto.

LICDA. WENDY ALVARADO SORTO

Oficial de Información Pública IPM

Ext. 1128

MEMORANDUM
S.G. No 037-2015

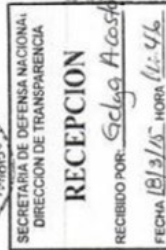
PARA : Licenciada
Gelga Acosta

DE : Abogada
Olga Suyapa Irías
Secretaria General

ASUNTO : **Dar respuesta al Oficios No. DT-09-2015**

FECHA : 16 de marzo de 2015.

por [Handwritten Signature]



Con instrucciones del Señor Secretario de Estado en el Despacho de Defensa Nacional Ingeniero **SAMUEL ARMANDO REYES RENDÓN**, me dirijo a usted en ocasión de dar respuesta a la Solicitud de Información Pública No. 04-2015 que fue remitida a ésta Secretaría General mediante el Sistema de Información Electrónica de Honduras (SIELHO), en fecha 02 de marzo del 2015, por la Dirección de Transparencia de ésta Secretaría de Estado.

Con relación a lo anterior, se tiene a bien hacer las apreciaciones siguientes:

- a) Que el artículo 16 numerales 1 y 2 de la Ley de Transparencia establece que el ejercicio del derecho de acceso a la información pública estará restringido cuando así lo manden la Constitución, las leyes o tratados y cuando sea declarada como reservada o confidencial con sujeción a lo dispuesto en la referida ley.
- b) Que la mayoría de la información generada, administrada o resguardada por la Secretaría de Defensa Nacional es concerniente a personal que labora en la Institución, **operaciones, planes, procesos de investigación y equipo** utilizado en el desarrollo de las funciones de seguridad y defensa atribuidas constitucionalmente y por mandato Presidencial, por consiguiente si uno de estos extremos es conocido podría originar un daño mayor que el interés público de conocerse, puesto que la divulgación de la información podría poner en riesgo o perjudicar la seguridad del Estado, la vida o seguridad de cualquier persona miembro de la institución o pondría en peligro el desarrollo de las operaciones que realiza.
- c) Que corresponde al Instituto de Acceso a la Información Pública, otorgar a las instituciones la clasificación de la información de carácter reservado; contando la Secretaría de Defensa Nacional con Resolución No. 73-2009 favorable en la clasificación de Información con carácter reservado, de fecha 08 de diciembre de 2009.

Con relación a lo anterior, se recomienda dar respuesta a la solicitud de Información que el ciudadano [Redacted] pide, declarando sin lugar la solicitud, en virtud de que la información requerida en su totalidad cuenta con restricción del acceso por ser clasificada como reservada.

Sin otro particular, atentamente.

Investigative Team

The InSight Crime team for this report was led by InSight Crime Co-director **Steven Dudley** and then InSight Crime Assistant Director **Elyssa Pachico**. Research was led by Steven Dudley and **Mario Cerna**, a long-time journalist from Honduras. The report was written by Steven Dudley. Special contributions were made by Mario Cerna. Translation into Spanish by **Diego García** and **María Luisa Valencia**. Editing and fact-checking by **Mike LaSusa**, **Felipe Puerta** and **Victoria Dittmar**. Graphics by **Elisa Roldán**. Report photos by Steven Dudley. Cover photo by **Rodrigo Abd**, AP Images. InSight Crime would like to give special thanks to **ASJ** for its support and assistance.



The InSight Crime Foundation

InSight Crime is a foundation dedicated to the study of the principal threat to national and citizen security in Latin America and the Caribbean: organized crime.

InSight Crime's goal is to deepen understanding on organized crime in the Americas through on-the-ground investigation and analysis from a transnational and policy perspective.

We fulfill this mission by:

- providing high quality and timely analysis of news events linked to organized crime in the region;
- investigating and writing reports on organized crime and its multiple manifestations, including its impact on human rights, governance, drug policy and other social, economic and political issues;
- giving workshops to journalists, academics and non-governmental organizations on how to cover this important issue and keep themselves, their sources and their material safe;
- supporting local investigators through these workshops and by publishing, translating and promoting their work to reach the widest possible audience;
- developing a region-wide network of investigators looking at organized crime;
- presenting in public and closed-door sessions to governments, non-governmental organizations, academics and stakeholders on best practices, strategies and pitfalls in implementing citizen security policy on the ground.

For more information, visit www.insightcrime.org
Or contact: info@insightcrime.org

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