

# Small Arms and Brokers

## **Arms brokering contributes to small arms proliferation and misuse because:**

- **Arms brokers are key suppliers of weapons to violent non-state actors and repressive governments**
- **Brokers are skilled at manipulating current weak national and international arms controls**
- **Few countries have laws specifically regulating arms brokering**

Arms brokers are individuals that help connect buyers and sellers of weapons. During the Cold War, rival governments recruited arms brokers to carry out arms deals. While the superpower rivalry has ended, many of these brokers, as well as new ones, continue to operate today, maintaining Cold War trafficking pipelines, as well as new connections, to supply weapons to problematic clients, including human rights abusers. These same pipelines are also used to transfer drugs, endangered animal species and products, precious minerals such as diamonds and other valuable commodities, as well as materials for making nuclear weapons.

Arms trafficking networks frequently involve the cooperation of a number of actors, often scattered in several countries. For example, the transfer of a Bulgarian surface-to-air missile system to Zimbabwean forces fighting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) involved Dutch arms brokers, who worked with transport companies based in the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Belgium to fly the weapon system from Bulgaria and Slovakia to Harare, Zimbabwe and then to Kinshasa, DRC.

While not all arms brokers are involved in illegal activities, some are at the core of the shadowy networks that arm rebels, violent extremists, and repressive governments. Motivated primarily by profit, arms brokers are skilled in 1) using counterfeit documents, or acquiring legitimate documents through bribery; 2) transporting goods clandestinely (primarily via

air and sea routes); and 3) avoiding attention or escaping punishment—either by successfully circumventing national arms controls and international arms embargoes, or by benefiting from government protection.

Despite some national and international efforts to rein in these brokers, only about 40 governments have developed national legislation covering arms brokering. Even among these 40 countries, the quality of national brokering laws, and the rigor with which these laws are enforced, varies significantly. For example, some countries lack extraterritorial control over arms brokers who are citizens of their countries, but that arrange arms deals from abroad.

In recent years, the activities of arms brokers have come under increasing scrutiny. The role of these traffickers in the supply of small arms to conflict zones around the world has been documented by the United Nations, non-governmental organizations, national intelligence agencies, and the press. For example, according to UN reports, a Russian arms dealer Victor Bout has been implicated in violating or contributing to the violation of UN arms embargoes in Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the DRC. Yet Bout, like many other arms brokers, continues to operate with impunity.