

# Darra Adam Khel

## “Home Grown” Weapons

AQAB MALIK, PHD\*

The immense quantities of small arms and light weapons (SALW) diffused into Afghanistan and the surrounding regions are largely a consequence of the massive dispersal of such weapons by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the United States of America, and their respective allies during the final stages of the Cold War in the 1980s. Controls on the supply of SALWs had been limited due to their use as bargaining chips and the need to arm the conflicting parties as much as possible to counter each other’s advantages. The Soviet Union came well equipped with a modern conventional army—as did its proxy, the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan—but the mujahideen were by no means a well-armed fighting force in the initial stages of the Soviet occupation. Many were equipped only with antiquated weapons such as the Lee Enfield 0.303 and the British Sten Gun; modern arms were captured from deserting or defeated forces of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan and USSR.<sup>1</sup> However, apart from the progressively increasing supply of weapons aided by the superpowers’ rather hot Cold War competition in Afghanistan, an indigenous arms manufacturing industry has existed for hundreds of years in the area now known as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), especially in Darra Adam Khel. This small frontier town is sandwiched between the Pakistan and Afghanistan border and the Khyber Pukhtunkhwa Province (previously known as the North West Frontier Province) of Pakistan. In his narrative of

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\*The author is an assistant professor in the Department of Strategic Studies, National Defence University, Islamabad, Pakistan, where he received his PhD in strategic and nuclear studies. He was also a senior consultant and national adviser on counterterrorism at the National Counterterrorism Authority, Pakistan; a resident Senior Fellow at the School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University; and a Carnegie Fellow at the New America Foundation. His research has focused on small arms and light weapons proliferation, conflict dynamics in Afghanistan, irregular warfare, counterterrorism, information dissemination, revolution in military affairs, space power, grand strategy, and, more recently, exponential technologies. Among others, the author’s articles include “Violent Non-State Actors in South Asia and the Middle East,” “Jihad: Conflict Resolution or Its Anti-thesis,” “The Modernisation Process in Afghanistan: A Retrospective” (*Journal of Strategic Studies*); “Strategic Communication: A Synchronised Effort for Information Dissemination by Pakistan” (Sage International); and “Strategic Communication: A Proposal” (*Hoopae—Journal of the Military Intelligence School*).

Mountstuart Elphinstone's deputation to the Afghan court in 1808, Sir Olaf Caroe takes note of the *Darra* (the *Pass*) of the Adam Khel Afridis and their rifle factories in Zharghun Khel.<sup>2</sup> The Darra gunsmiths were even licensed by the colonial British Raj to provide weapons to border tribes in order to keep them at bay. According to John Fullerton, however, this strategy was used to prevent the tribes from acquiring original weapons of much better quality smuggled in from abroad.<sup>3</sup>

The FATA has traditionally been exempt from Pakistani laws on the production and possession of arms, leading to its emergence as a focal point for the manufacture of weapons. However, the smuggling of firearms is not exempted, even in the FATA, as enshrined in the Prevention of Smuggling Act (1977), which encompasses the whole of Pakistan.<sup>4</sup> Niobe Thompson and Devashish Krishnan estimate that the FATA is awash with about one million weapons of all kinds.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, given that these statistics are ascertained from the Pakistani Interior Ministry's estimates of licensed firearms, the inclusion of a vast number of unlicensed and unrecorded weapons, as well as those that have entered the regions since the beginning of the US-led occupation of Afghanistan in October 2001, may raise the total number several times. This possibility stems from the nature of tribal affairs vis-à-vis Pakistan's central government and the status that the tribal Pushtun bestow upon firearms.

The arms manufacturing industry in and around Darra Adam Khel (the main town in the Kohat Frontier Region of the FATA, the latter having a population of 88,456 in the last national census in 1998) was present prior to creation of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.<sup>6</sup> However, large-scale manufacture and retail sales of weapons began to increase significantly only during the early 1970s, perhaps as a consequence of the destabilization of political relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan during Mohammad Daoud's presidency in Afghanistan and the Baluch insurgency in Pakistan.<sup>7</sup> The coup d'état by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) in April 1978 (also known as the Saur Revolution) gave a further boost to the weapons trade in the FATA since the subsequent insurgency against the communist government was considerably lacking in modern weapons: "In 1978, when the revolution came, and the refugees followed, the insurgents weren't receiving foreign aid from abroad to buy weapons. In 1978 and 1979, they came here [Darra Adam Khel] themselves and bought weapons from what they could raise, and then fought the war. It was only later that the foreigners gave them the weapons."<sup>8</sup>

Before the PDPA coup and Soviet invasion, the majority of weapons produced were repeater rifles such as shotguns. However, the growth of the Afghan conflict also enhanced the knowledge and expertise of Darra gunsmiths in the

manufacture of more advanced weapons through the reverse engineering of new ones introduced into the conflict by the USSR.<sup>9</sup>

## Types of Weapons

An impressive range of arms is produced in Darra, including daggers; Colt and Webber handguns; Lee Enfield rifles; a variety of automatic weapons from the M-16, Protecta, and Russian 222 Kalacov and AK-47 assault rifles; Italian Beretta, German Walther, and Chinese TT pistols; and an assortment of 12-bore shotguns, repeaters, submachine guns, and smaller antiaircraft guns.<sup>10</sup> The array of firearms produced and those acquired for sale, such as landmines and RPG-7 rocket launchers, have facilitated a burgeoning black market trade in SALWs in the FATA, especially in Darra Adam Khel.

Heckler and Koch G-3 assault rifles, made under license in both Iran and Pakistan, were often seen in Darra shops.<sup>11</sup> According to Darra dealers, the town's gunsmiths did not make G-3s; rather, they were acquired from Afghanistan since Pakistani military aid to the mujahideen parties during the 1980s included limited numbers of these rifles.<sup>12</sup> Iran also supplied many G-3s to Shia mujahideen groups during the Soviet invasion in the 1980s.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the preference for the AK-47 led many groups and individuals to sell their G-3s to Darra dealers.

## The Arms Workshops

The quality of arms manufactured in Darra has improved measurably through the introduction of electricity and acquisition of better machines to aid their production by gunsmiths and artisans. Abdul Karim Qasuria, the home secretary of the Government of the Khyber Pukhtunkhwa Province, noted that, according to a study by the Pakistan Ordnance Factories, in October 2000 Darra Adam Khel contained about 60 small-arms production units (factories), which employed 20–25 people each.<sup>14</sup> In addition to the factories, approximately 300 smaller working places (workshops) exist that employ 4–5 technicians each, individually paid on a daily basis and earning an average Rs (rupees) 500–1,000 (\$5–10) per day, depending upon productivity and speciality.<sup>15</sup> A 2009 Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies report on *FATA: Tribal Economy in the Context of Ongoing Militancy* quotes Mohammad Tariq, the chief operating officer of the Pakistan Hunting and Sporting Arms Development Company, as saying that “around 250 small and medium enterprises and 2,200 families are associated with the weapons’ manufacturing business in Darra Adam Khel and Barra.”<sup>16</sup> Recent reassessments by the Pakistan Hunting and Sporting Arms Development Company, though, have

shown that the numbers of small-arms manufacturing units have decreased to 200, consisting of 1,600 workshops in Darra Adam Khel.<sup>17</sup> A more comprehensive study to actuate the extent of arms manufacturing and the numbers of units involved has been prevented by prevailing security conditions because of ongoing, intense Pakistani military operations against a whole host of terrorist groups, parties, and individuals in the FATA.

Although the workshops tend to be located in the back streets with no regard for the general population, such as next to a girls' school, about 400 shops of varying sizes are engaged in dealing with the sale of arms and ammunition, many on the main road through Darra. Estimates as to the number of shops dealing in arms vary considerably. A study by the National Institute of Public Administration, Lahore (*Deweaponisation: Problems, Challenges, and Viable Strategy*), in 2001 indicates that "there are 2,600 arms manufacturing, repair and sales outlets in this tiny place which employ over 30,000 workers, including some 8,000 skilled hands."<sup>18</sup> However, Darra's arms dealers estimated that up to 5,000 shops (throughout the FATA) were engaged in the weapons trade during the Afghan-Soviet War (1979–89) and that the number of shops decreased considerably after the withdrawal of the USSR.<sup>19</sup> The main road through Darra is saturated with shop fronts showing small arms of all kinds. Home Secretary Qasuria also noted that 10,000 families may be dependent on the local arms industry around Darra<sup>20</sup> and that about 400,000 people were directly or indirectly involved in the arms industry in the Darra region (referring to the FATA as a whole).<sup>21</sup> According to the Pakistan Hunting and Sporting Arms Development Company, Darra alone is home to 2,500 retail arms and ammunition shops.<sup>22</sup>

The manufacture of weapons in Darra has produced a constant flow of various SALWs to satiate the demand from both tribal and detribalized Pushtun as well as the various parties involved in the insurgency in Afghanistan. This production also satisfies fluctuating needs in the wider region, as occurred in the supply of arms to the Sikh separatist movement for an independent Khalistan in India's Punjab province during the 1980s.<sup>23</sup> It also happened during the rise of the *Mutahida Qaumi Movement (MQM)* in the Sindh province and Karachi—in particular during the 1990s:<sup>24</sup>

There is no specific organization who buys weapons in Pakistan. Number one, Altaf Hussain's MQM people did come and buy weapons. Number two, people from Qazi Hussain Ahmed's Jamaat-i-Islami used to buy weapons; Kashmiri Mujahideen such as the Lashkar-i-Tayyaba bought weapons; and the Sikh people for an independent Khalistan also bought weapons from Darra. . . . In the Zia period, they used to do that a lot . . . to destabilize India.<sup>25</sup>

During the Afghan-Soviet War, Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) agency became increasingly involved in the supply of weapons to mujahideen parties from Darra and other arms dealers and workshops throughout the FATA. Although dealers interviewed in Darra admitted to no government contracts, they particularly referred to an arms dealer, Haji Baz Gul, and his large Asia Arms Store on University Road, Peshawar.<sup>26</sup> Gul, a former senator and member of Pakistan's National Assembly, admitted that Darra dealers had cooperated with different mujahideen groups in the supply of arms but adamantly denied any involvement of the Pakistani government, even after accepting the fact that other countries such as India, Iran, Russia, and Uzbekistan were supplying weapons to the conflicting parties in Afghanistan: "Our Darra people and dealers did a lot of cooperation with leaders of the Afghan mujahideen, like Mohammad Naveed Shabib and Pir Shabib. These leaders say that the Darra people have cooperated a lot with them. But it [the weapons supply] doesn't come from Pakistan."<sup>27</sup>

## Weapons Production in Darra Adam Khel

Research visits to Darra Adam Khel yielded insights into the methods used to manufacture a variety of different weapons by the local gunsmiths. The process of the manufacture of weapons has been in place since before the British colonized the Indian subcontinent. However, the recent massive proliferation of arms into the region during the Afghan conflict has also seen significant developments in this process; for example, the arrival of electricity and machines has greatly increased the productivity of Darra. The following is a brief account of the general manufacturing procedure in Darra Adam Khel and other workshops throughout the FATA. This description is accompanied by detailed pictorial representations to facilitate a greater appreciation of arms manufacturing in the FATA.

### *Acquiring Raw Materials*

The raw materials that workshops in Darra require for the manufacture of weapons come from many sources. Until the PDPA coup and Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, manufacturing relied upon small supplies of iron from scrap metal and several iron foundries throughout Pakistan. The numbers of weapons produced were limited to the small local demand in the FATA, and their quality was also constrained by the lack of reliable electricity sources and machinery. However, the introduction of electricity and, hence, machinery increased the demand for weapons after the PDPA coup, which also made modern weapons more available for reverse engineering and increased supplies of scrap metal from destroyed military hardware from Afghanistan. In turn, Darra and other FATA workshops expanded

their manufacturing capabilities to produce much greater quantities of modern weapons that were qualitatively superior to those of the earlier FATA: "Scrap metal came from destroyed tanks and planes and used to come through this way [through Darra] from Waziristan to Wana to Dera Ismail Khan to Lahore. Lots of weapons were also smuggled with the scrap metal and auto parts. The weapons were sold here, and the scrap went to the Ittefaq iron foundry in Lahore, and through a barter system, essential iron was provided to us."<sup>28</sup>

Some of the arms merchants who were willing to speak also mentioned that in the 1980s the United States supplied the mujahideen with weapons that were in very poor condition. These firearms often came to Darra for reconditioning. According to dealers, the weapons initially supplied by Egypt and Turkey in the early 1980s were obsolete and in such bad condition that they were not even repairable and could not be refurbished.<sup>29</sup> Many became spare parts; others were completely unusable, even as scrap. This was particularly the case with one of the arms shipments from Egypt in 1985:<sup>30</sup> "To my horror, no less than 30,000 82 millimeter mortar bombs were found unusable on the battlefield as cartridges had swollen in the damp and would not fit the bombs. The Egyptians had cobbled together arms that had been lying exposed to the atmosphere for many years in order to make a substantial amount of money."<sup>31</sup>

From the assertions of many local individuals, one can ascertain that the United States lost a great deal of credibility during the initial stages of the Afghan-USSR conflict due its sourcing of Soviet-origin weapons for the conflict to uphold its policy of plausible deniability in the international arena.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, several states took advantage of the situation to earn a quick buck and relieve themselves of degrading and obsolete stocks of weapons. Another incident exposed a Pakistani arms dealer who had persuaded the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to buy "30 million rounds of .303 ammunition . . . at 50 cents a round." Unknown to the CIA, these were from old stocks of the Pakistan Army stamped with the Pakistan Ordnance Factory trademark, hence voiding any prospect of deniability and rendering them useless unless they were defaced at tremendous cost.<sup>33</sup> Other suppliers also had no scruples, such as the Turkish delivery of "60,000 rifles, 8,000 light machine guns, 10,000 pistols and over 100 million rounds of ammunition," most of which turned out to be corroded, faulty, and unserviceable but were accepted to avoid a diplomatic row.<sup>34</sup>

The mujahideen also acquired large quantities of ammunition, whether by capture or as aid from the United States and its allies. Most of the ammunition was unusable because of its unsafe condition or its inappropriate specification for the weapons used by the mujahideen, whether small-arms rounds or tank shells. Such ammunition was often sold to Darra dealers as scrap for its metal constitu-

ents, which were separated and then used as raw materials for Darra-made ammunition.<sup>35</sup> For example, the tank shells captured with destroyed tanks were broken down into their constituent parts—that is, bronze casings, projectiles made of different metals, and explosives. Unusable small-arms ammunition was similarly reduced into its constituent parts and sold for cash or working weapons: “Commanders used to sell tank ammunition as scrap because they were not holding the tank, so the ammunition was basically useless. They used to contact us, and we went there [Afghanistan] to dismantle the ammunition into its parts and brought it back with us.”<sup>36</sup>

Even though the manufacture of weapons in Darra contravenes Pakistani laws, it is, in fact, governed by the Frontier Crimes Regulations. Consequently, however, the Government of Pakistan has made efforts to bring the arms manufacturing industry in the FATA within the official purview of the Pakistan Ordnance Factories (based in Wah Cantt, Punjab) while also encouraging economic development of the region to promote alternative livelihoods for people engaged in the arms manufacturing industry.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, Pakistani agencies could also severely restrict the supply of essential raw materials to the workshops if they desired. For the scrap, auto parts, and obsolete weapons to reach the foundries, the transporting trucks would have to pass through numerous barriers and checkpoints set up by the political agencies, customs, and police:

When they used to pass through the political agent’s barrier, they used to give 10,000 rupees per truck and 10,000 rupees to customs and 10,000 to the police, and they used to smuggle in the daytime between ten o’clock and twelve o’clock. It was all done on a mutual understanding. On whether they would rather take a bribe or control the weapons smuggling, they did not control weapons smuggling; they took the money, and all this came to the administration.<sup>38</sup>

### ***Quantity of Weapons Produced***

Darra does not claim to produce massive quantities of weapons. Nevertheless, the workshops in the small town do have a significant impact on the indigenous production of firearms and do directly aid the proliferation of SALWs throughout the region. Estimates vary considerably although many are relatively dated in comparison to the rapidly changing market conditions of the arms demand and supply over the past decade. The *Small Arms Survey 2003* notes that “the Darra region produces approximately 20,000 units of all kinds of weapons each year.”<sup>39</sup> Thompson and Krishnan’s estimates nearly double this annual figure with the production of the AK-47 alone: “They have the capacity to produce over 100 AK-47s per day at less than \$153 (US).”<sup>40</sup> The daily production of 100 AK-47 assault

rifle units is equal to an annual figure of over 36,000 units. The number of other weapons produced would likely bring the total amount to well over 50,000 weapons per annum, depending upon the prevailing security conditions and demand from individuals, groups, or parties involved in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Pakistan or further afield—a massive influx of unregulated and unchecked weaponry into the region. To corroborate, a Darra gunsmith noted that one skilled workshop unit of between four to five workers can produce “one Kalashnikov [AK-47 or Kalacov] in one day.”<sup>41</sup> Other larger workshops can turn out a larger number of weapons, up to five per day.<sup>42</sup> With an estimated 3,000 father-and-son production units, the total number of weapons may rise even higher.<sup>43</sup> The Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies report observes that upwards of “6,000 30 mm pistols are manufactured every month and 73,000 annually [in Darra Adam Khel and Peshawar] . . . [and] 4,500 shotguns of different categories are manufactured here [Miranshah, Sakhakot, and Momand Agency] every month.”<sup>44</sup> According to the Pakistan Hunting and Sporting Arms Development Company, “Around 400–700 guns are made in Darra each day and the number is rising with the adoption of more tools,” which amounts to between 12,000 and 21,000 a month or 144,000 to 252,000 weapons a year from Darra alone.<sup>45</sup> This is a staggering number of weapons likely to enter the general populace of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the surrounding region.

### *Process of Manufacturing*

The process of manufacturing weapons in the numerous workshops in Darra and surrounding areas within the FATA does not differ greatly from those procedures within a modern arms-manufacturing factory environment (figs. 1 and 2). The differences, however, manifest themselves through the automation of modern factories as compared to the artisan handmade processes in Darra workshops. The two do not differ in the approach since distinct separation and delegation of responsibilities exist for making different components. Rather than one person or groups of workers aiming at self-sufficiency in the production of a weapon, Darra has evolved a cooperative method of production among groups of workshops designed to increase productivity and profitability. Workshops have developed specializations in the manufacture of specific parts and components. A degree of coordination has evolved over time to allow a more efficient production line. The variegated workshops simulate a production line—that is, workshop(s) are linked to others along one part of the line. One workshop may produce rifle barrels for particular weapons; others may specialize in the breach-block and firing mechanisms of certain weapons or the stocks and ammunition. Completed parts are transferred to or bought by other workshops for fitting and testing, after which



they are transferred to or bought by retail outlets for public sale. It is possible that a single individual or group may own a number of workshops and retail outlets since takeovers are not unknown. Weapons are also sold in bulk to various agencies or parties interested in avoiding the recorded and regulated weapons.

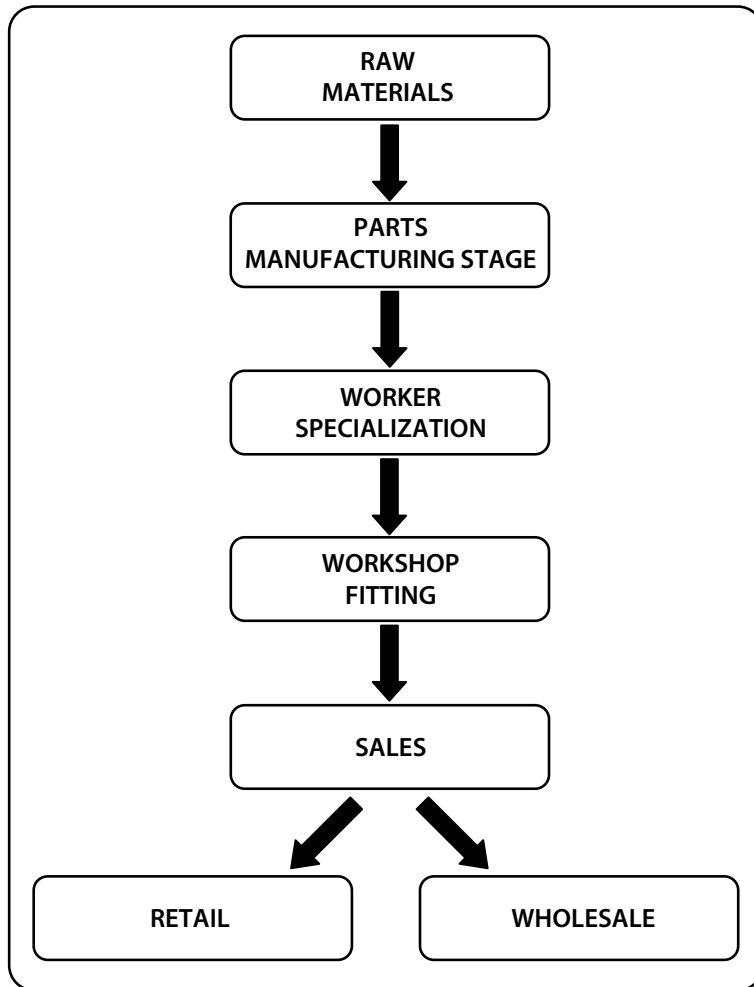


Figure 1. The arms manufacturing process in Darra Adam Khel

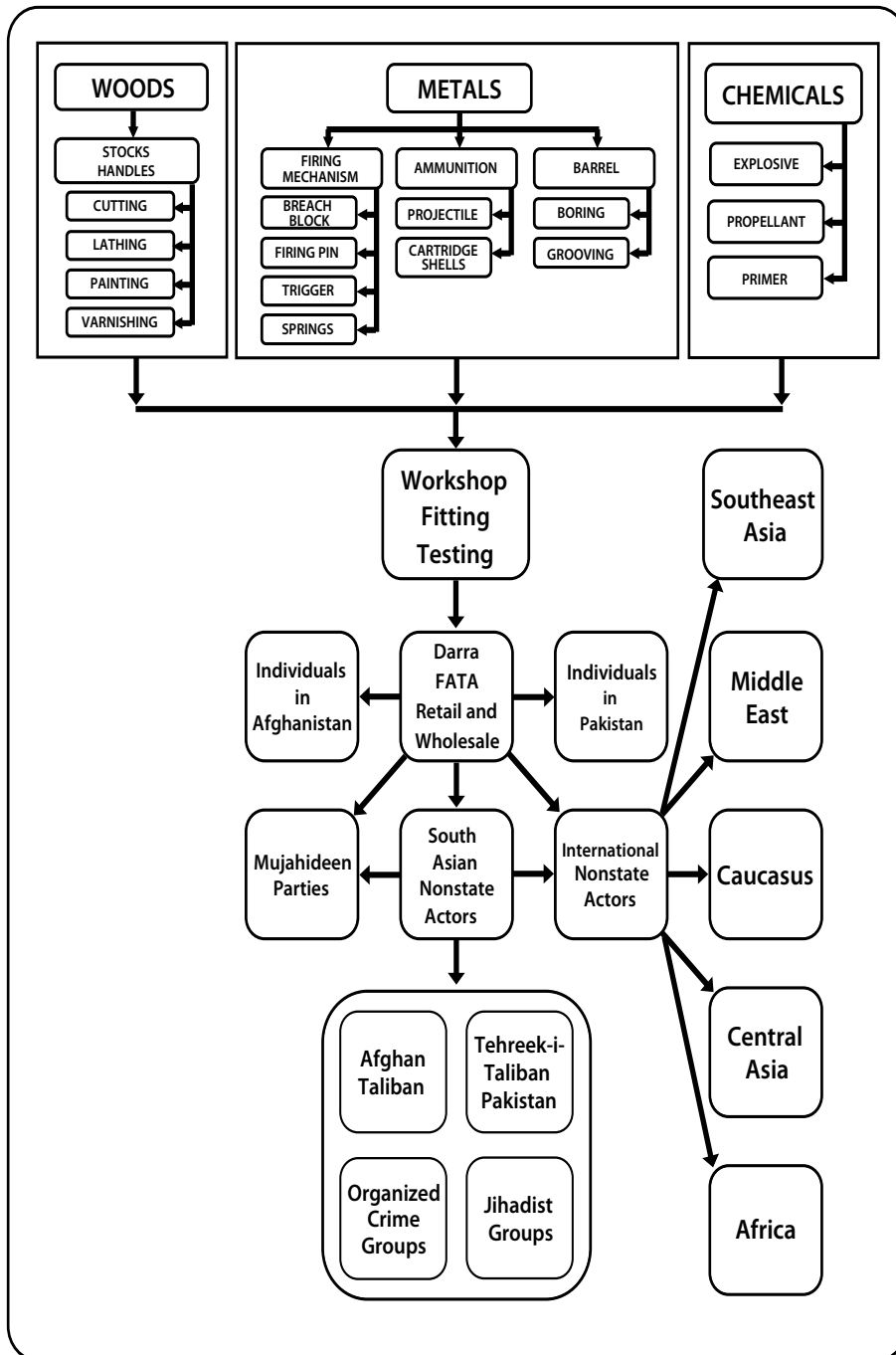


Figure 2. Indigenous small-arms production in Darra Adam Khel and FATA: Manufacture and distribution since 1980

### *Beating the Licensing Laws on Weapons Types*

Darra has also been able to circumvent Pakistani laws on the prohibition of certain types of weapons. For example, because the AK-47 Kalashnikov is a prohibited weapon in Pakistan, a license cannot be obtained for it. By changing certain specifications of the standard AK-47, Darra and FATA workshops have been able to circumvent such laws and regulations and maintain weapons sales to some extent. The AK-47 Kalashnikov is transformed into the Kalacov, the latter having a different barrel: "The Kalashnikov is .62 bore, and the Kalacov is .333 bore. They make this [the Kalacov] out of the original Kalashnikov. . . . They just change the barrel; the rest of the machinery remains the same. They make barrels according to demand."<sup>46</sup>

### *Testing and Quality Differences*

The accuracy and quality of the final product do not follow the traditional path of test firing at a secure firing range. In Darra the firing range is the open space between the back of the workshop and the mountains that surround the town. As would be expected, locally manufactured weapons differ in quality from those produced under the quality-control conditions of a large factory. Darra gunsmiths unanimously accepted that local firearms were fundamentally inferior. The primary faults lie in the quality of the materials used. Regarding weapons of Russian and Chinese origin, "those weapons are machine crafted; the material used is much better than the material used over here since it is not processed as well and is generally of inferior quality."<sup>47</sup> The quality of a weapon manifests itself in the life expectancy that it has before it begins to fail. Therefore, the retail prices of Darra-made weapons are significantly less than those for original weapons: "Since they are handcrafted, their barrels are not as precise as they should be. If they burst, they are fixed up again. But sometimes they are not properly crafted. Either their barrels blow up from where they are weak or the bolts break because of repeated hammering. These are not as strong as foreign weapons and are not as reliable."<sup>48</sup>

## Mechanisms Involved in the Supply, Distribution, and Diffusion of Weapons

### *Diffusion*

The methods used to distribute small arms manufactured in Darra and FATA in general have been in existence since the times of the British Raj. The only differ-

ence is the addition of new technology to evade capture from law enforcement authorities. Many workshops and factories have their own shops to retail the weapons that they manufacture. Others also have retail outlets throughout the FATA to enable wider access and distribution of weapons: "The weapons workshops here have their own workers who distribute weapons to Pakistan. They have their own people who take them to Kurrum Agency, North Waziristan, South Waziristan, and then to Quetta."<sup>49</sup>

However, the intensity of the distribution effort increased dramatically after the PDPA coup. Arms dealers in Darra not only sold the weapons they manufactured but also acted as intermediaries between arms buyers and sellers. As mujahideen parties became established, their demand for arms grew proportionally. Many of the arms that they acquired were initially captured from their adversaries. However, the seizure of arms by party members or commanders in the field meant that they had to be relinquished to party stores; consequently, those who captured them, many of whom had no real relationship with one or other party, were not rewarded for their efforts. In such circumstances and to gain an income of some sort, weapons often found their way to arms bazaars across the FATA through various intermediaries, who frequently purchased arms from mujahideen individuals or groups and then sold them at a higher rate to mujahideen parties or other groups in need of them: "Whatever the Afghans captured from the Russians and Afghan soldiers over there [Afghanistan] was brought over here to sell to us. We used to buy the weapons and ammunition on a cheaper rate and then used to sell it to some other party at a higher rate to make a profit."<sup>50</sup>

In the early 1980s, many of the arms given to the mujahideen were obsolete and ineffective. Further, most of the mujahideen had no funds to fight against the Soviets. Weapons already in the possession of the mujahideen were frequently sold to pay for food, fuel, and the salaries of mujahideen fighters. Therefore, "the arms that came from abroad came here or to Pakistan. All the old weapons were given to the Afghan mujahideen, who sold them quickly and then asked for more weapons."<sup>51</sup> Mujahideen regularly raided arms caches of competing mujahideen groups, sold the weapons that they did not need,<sup>52</sup> reequipping themselves with the cheaper Darra-made weapons: "The Afghans used to sell foreign weapons to us and get more money, and they used to buy local weapons at a cheaper rate."<sup>53</sup>

After the withdrawal of the Soviet Union and the fall of the PDPA, the United States announced rewards for the return of Stinger missile systems still in the possession of various mujahideen. Consequently, arms dumps were routinely raided for these systems and other high-value weapons and perpetuated by owners of arms stores due to their willingness to sell illicit and stolen arms. This situation provided a market for the raiders.<sup>54</sup> Upon raising the question of the avail-

ability of the Stinger surface-to-air missile systems in Darra, one arms dealer diplomatically admitted their presence over a decade ago but refrained from furthering the conversation:<sup>55</sup> "The Americans used to buy Stingers. They started from \$60,000 to \$80,000 (US). Because of this, lots of people used to break into lots of arms depots, especially for Stingers."<sup>56</sup> These Stingers were not solely those supplied to the mujahideen: "Of the original 900 Stinger SAMs [surface-to-air missiles] and 50,000 M16 rifles that the US supplied to Pakistan, as many as 560 Stinger and nearly 20,000 rifles were untraceable. There were reports that 312 of these were sold in Landi-Kotal market in January 1993."<sup>57</sup>

### *Smuggling*

To an extent, the smuggling of arms from Darra is facilitated by the preexistence of the lucrative trade in smuggled goods, especially electrical appliances, due to loopholes in the Afghan Transit Trade agreement concluded in 1965 between the Afghan and Pakistani governments.<sup>58</sup> The agreement allowed goods imported by Afghanistan to come through the port of Karachi without incurring customs duties. These goods are transported through two main routes although others are also used: Peshawar-Torkham and Chamman-Spin Boldak. Once in Afghanistan, the goods are unloaded and reloaded on mules to be smuggled along the many mountain passes of the porous border, back into Pakistan's many *barras* (literally *bazaars*, but the term is used to refer to those bazaars in the FATA) to be sold at prices much less than those for Pakistani indigenous and imported products.<sup>59</sup> The rationale behind the lower prices may be related to Pakistan's policies on trade and tariffs, which offer some incentive for the continuation of black market transactions, as noted by a recent study on "The Causes of Transit Related Pak-Afghan Cross Border Smuggling":

Our estimates show that market prices of certain popular smuggled goods are on average 30–40% lower than their corresponding landed prices under official imports. The main reason for this has been high tariff and sales tax on these goods. On the other hand, the costs of smuggling are fairly low, ranging from 5–17% (average of 10–20%) which further motivates smugglers to supply goods through unofficial channels.<sup>60</sup>

Hence, preexisting smuggling routes and methods are also used to smuggle arms—which are just substituted for consumable goods—into and out of Afghanistan.<sup>61</sup> Close tribal and kinship relations make it easier to retain secrecy from the authorities. The tribes even act as guarantors between dealers in the contraband, narcotics, and illicit arms trade.<sup>62</sup> A large police presence is maintained on the main roads within the Khyber Pukhtunkhwa Province and leading

to the other provinces, especially Punjab, to deter smuggling activity. However, rampant corruption within the police force itself has not deterred increasingly larger smuggling activities and, in turn, has allowed a massive diffusion of sophisticated arms into the whole of Pakistan.

It is important to note that for each and every occasion that goods and arms are smuggled to and from Afghanistan, a different method may be used according to the prevailing conditions that facilitate or deter each operation. The human dimension is of paramount importance to every operation. Obstacles may arise at any point, whereby the smuggler must adopt various tactics to be successful: "They are armed because there is every likelihood of an encounter."<sup>63</sup> Illicit goods (whether arms, contraband, or narcotics) are smuggled across the border in two ways: "One is vehicular. People just conceal the weapons, the arms and rifles, and start on the road. The other is on the hilly tracks through the mountains."<sup>64</sup> For the latter, smugglers, calling themselves *Sauda Ghar* (traders) rarely travel alone, preferring to fully arm themselves and move in convoys of between 20 to 50 people, carrying goods on their backs or on pack animals, such as mules and camels.<sup>65</sup> A juridical *raison d'être* exists for going across country rather than by road. The Frontier Crimes Regulations, inherited from the British Raj by the Pakistani government to maintain a superficial degree of law and order in the FATA, permit the relevant political agents of the tribal agencies concerned jurisdiction over the roads in the FATA but not those areas beyond the roads, such as the hills.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, the hills offer smugglers a degree of immunity from law enforcement authorities.

### *The Hawala System*

Arms dealers used numerous methods to obtain and distribute arms during the Afghan-Soviet War. One successful and universally employed method depends upon a high degree of trust between dealers and couriers in the establishment of an underground network of transactions. Due to the illicit nature of the enterprise, many of the arms dealers adopted the *Harwala* system. Dealers and couriers employed a *parchi* (literally, note) for the purpose of identification and condition of the weapons. According to Saeed Afridi (a Darra arms dealer), the basic process of a transaction involved a Darra dealer, an arms buyer, an arms source, and several couriers.<sup>67</sup> An arms buyer, for example, from Thailand, approaches the Darra arms merchant and identifies his intention to buy 1,000 weapons. The Darra dealer shows him an original weapon from Afghanistan—for instance, from Bamiyan: "Lots of these weapons were bought by Thailand dealers from Bamiyan."<sup>68</sup>

Afridi describes the Hawala system as follows.<sup>69</sup> The Darra dealer, having already established contact with the arms supplier from Bamiyan, negotiates a deal for the supply of 1,000 weapons at a predetermined rate—for example, Rs 100,000 per weapon (fig. 3).<sup>70</sup> The Bamiyan supplier transports 1,000 firearms, at his own risk, to Jalalabad, where a local dealer or courier pays the Bamiyan supplier in full with a total of Rs 100,000,000 while also supplying a parchi as proof of the condition of the weapons received and as a form of protection for the supplier. He also receives a parchi from the Bamiyan supplier as proof of the condition of the weapons if they are already damaged and of the extent of damage. The Jalalabad courier transports the arms to Torkham, an Afghan town on the Pak-Afghan border crossing. The Jalalabad courier is paid in full by the Torkham courier with the original outlay of Rs 100,000,000 while also receiving a commission covering the transportation costs, risk, and charges at a predetermined rate (e.g., Rs 5,000 per weapon), making a total payment of Rs 105,000,000. Each courier exchanges a parchi as a receipt of the condition of the weapons given and received, respectively. If the firearms received have been damaged in any way, the Jalalabad courier may produce the parchi from the Bamiyan supplier as proof that they were not damaged by him. Otherwise, he may have to accept that they were delivered damaged by him and provide a receipt to indicate this fact if he cannot offer proof to the contrary. A predetermined penalty per weapon, depending upon the extent of the damage, may be noted on the parchi.

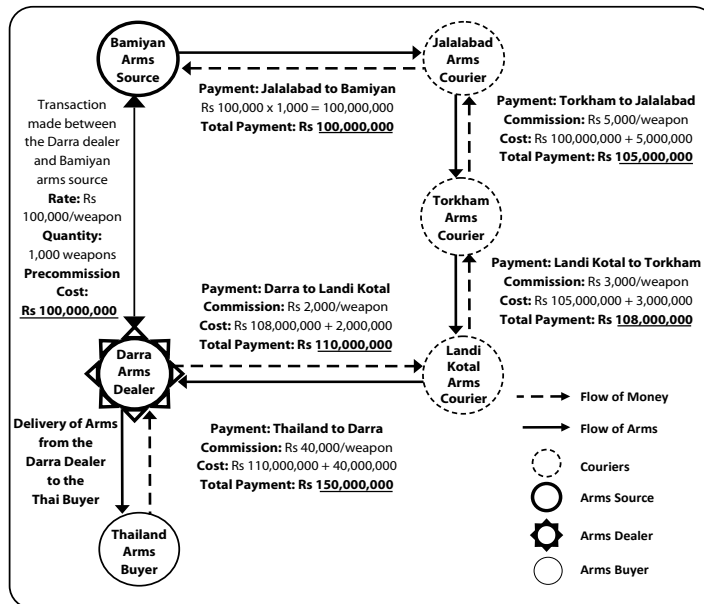


Figure 3. The Hawala system of arms dealing

The Torkham courier transports the weapons across the border to a Landi-Kotal courier where he receives a payment of Rs 105,000,000 while also receiving a predetermined commission—for example, of Rs 3,000 per weapon because of the increased risk taken to smuggle the weapons across the border, making a total payment of Rs 108,000,000. Each courier exchanges a parchi as a receipt of the condition of the weapons given and received, proof of damage to weapons provided if necessary, or responsibility taken and written in the parchi given to the Landi-Kotal courier. The latter transports the weapons to the Darra dealers and receives a payment of Rs 108,000,000, as well as a predetermined commission of Rs 2,000 per weapon, making a total payment of Rs 110,000,000.

Production of the parchi accounts for the condition of the weapons, indicating whether and where they may have been damaged. If they are, the Darra dealer may contact the relevant party for compensation later, if necessary. Nevertheless, in the transaction between the Thai buyer and the Darra dealer, the latter takes responsibility for any damage during transportation from the supplier in Bamiyan until the weapons are handed over to the former. The buyer would take responsibility for the risks and any further costs incurred from the point of collection in Darra up to the final destination, whether in Thailand or elsewhere. The Darra dealer receives payment in full for the weapons delivered at the predetermined price of Rs 150,000,000, which includes the full cost of the weapons hitherto—110,000,000—and the dealer's commission covering the risk and profits (e.g., Rs 40,000 per weapon, less the damages incurred). If the weapons are damaged en route or stolen by a courier, even though he may have paid for the weapons, the Darra dealer can appeal directly to a tribal council (Jirgah) within the perpetrator's locality, which can enforce recovery of the weapons and impose fines and/or sanctions on the perpetrator and his family.<sup>71</sup> The individual relationships between the dealers and couriers, therefore, tend to have matured over an extended period of time and often cross generations.

### *Smuggling Routes*

The availability of numerous routes for these types of transactions, the security measures incorporated into the Hawala system, and the semitribal backing for the trade have successfully prevented law enforcement authorities from fully conquering the illicit trade in weapons. One of the routes taken to gain entry into Afghanistan—one frequently used by smugglers yet rarely patrolled—is along a dirt-track road that travels from Peshawar to Sper Sang and then along the Darya Kabul (Kabul River) into mountainous terrain. During this journey, several small caravans of mules laden with sacks of narcotics passed in the opposite direction. They crossed the border after consultation, over a cup of green tea, with tribal el-



ders for safe passage across the feud-ridden tribal territory along an undefined, level, arid, desert-like plain with no roads. Once over the border, Darya Kabul must be crossed to get to the main highway linking Peshawar and Jalalabad. However, the lack of a bridge along the smuggling route has led to the growth of a local crossing over Darya Kabul at La'l Pūr, comprised of a number of boats large enough to carry a sizeable car across the river. All the boats are connected to strong cables and ropes, linking both sides of the river, acting as guides and supports along which the boats are winched across the river perpendicular to the flow of the current. No pictures were permitted at this juncture because of the presence of a local tribal administrator and his guards who were fully aware of the trade passing across the river (fig. 4).



**Figure 4. A smuggling route across the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.** (Base map from "Pakistan Tribal Areas," D-maps, Free Maps, accessed 16 December 2015, [http://d-maps.com/carte/php?num\\_car=29641&lang=en](http://d-maps.com/carte/php?num_car=29641&lang=en).)

### The Arms-Narco Nexus

The lack of regulations also facilitates continuation of the ancient narcotics trade, which has mushroomed in recent years with the growth of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. Many of the *barras* that openly deal with smuggled goods support shops stuffed with narcotics of all kinds, especially hashish (openly sold), opium (sold under the counter), and even those not indigenously produced, such as cocaine. Although no official statistics exist, and apart from those shops that focused solely on the sale of narcotics, many of the arms shops visited by the au-

thor also sold small quantities of narcotics. However, Haybat Khan, a Darra arms merchant, vigorously denied any link between the weapons and narcotics smuggling and trading: “There are different people for different things. People who smuggle weapons don’t smuggle narcotics, and people who smuggle narcotics don’t smuggle weapons. They are separate fields, separate staff, separate everything.”<sup>72</sup> Such denials are contradicted in view of the evidence produced by Pakistani law enforcement authorities. Nevertheless, Superintendent Iqbal Khan of the Anti-Narcotics Force, Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, evidently disagreed with the supposition that the arms traders and smugglers were mutually exclusive from narcotics smugglers and traders: “People keep on changing over here. From drugs to customs articles [contraband], from customs articles to weapons. Wherever there is money. . . .”<sup>73</sup> Superintendent Iqbal Khan’s assertions were evident from the massive number of narcotics and arms seizures that he regularly made during his service.

### Retail and Costs of Weapons

Arms manufacture and production are not the only form of income for the people of Darra Adam Khel. The town evolved a significant enterprise in the sale of arms that were supposed to have been supplied to the mujahideen parties from the CIA-ISI arms pipeline and those weapons captured from Soviet and Democratic Republic of Afghanistan sources. Corruption was rampant throughout all of the stages of the arms pipeline: “There is clear evidence that many of the weapons being sold in Darra—and other arms markets nearby—come from CIA-funded arms shipments meant for the Afghan Mujahideen.”<sup>74</sup> Many commanders did sell off weapons that had been captured and even those supplied by the CIA-ISI to raise cash to provide food and logistical support for their fighting men and families.<sup>75</sup> According to Mohammad Yousaf, this was a reflection of their corruption.<sup>76</sup> At every stage of the pipeline, funding was “being diverted . . . or sold by corrupt Peshawar representatives of Mujahideen groups.”<sup>77</sup> This diversion involved at least one-third of the financing<sup>78</sup> and sometimes up to one-half. Yet, many mujahideen commanders were forced to sell weapons to pay for the transport of weapons deliveries and the running of mujahideen party offices, in part because of the lack of funds allocated from the ISI-CIA pipeline and other Arab donors.<sup>79</sup> This was particularly true of the nationalist “old” regime parties run by Pir Sayyid Ahmed Ghailani and Sibghatullah Mojaddedi.<sup>80</sup> Darra, with over 100 arms stores, was the center of a lucrative trade in arms and may be, according to Yousaf, “the biggest open arms market in the world.”<sup>81</sup>

The cost of individual weapons sold in Darra shops has varied over the course of the Afghan conflict. During the early 1980s, according to Francis Fukuyama, "The standard Enfield cost 10,000 Rupees, or \$1,000. . . . The grenade launcher cost a staggering \$9,000. One grenade for the RPG-7 was \$700 and a single .303 bullet cost \$2-3" at the beginning of the war.<sup>82</sup> In 2001 Yousaf ascertained that the cost of a single AK-47 assault rifle was as much as \$1,500 (US).<sup>83</sup> In 1980 Fukuyama noted that the cost was in the range of \$2,000-\$2,400.<sup>84</sup> More recently, the cost of weapons has increased, as pointed out by the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies in its study "FATA: Tribal Economy in the Context of Ongoing Militancy":

Mujahideen used to sell weapons [in Darra Adam Khel] earlier, but were now buying arms and ammunition for themselves. Requesting anonymity, the shopkeeper said the price of a second-hand Kalashnikov had risen from Rs 20,000 to Rs 35,000 and that of a new one from Rs 25,000 to Rs 45,000. The price of bullets made in Egypt has risen 14 percent and those in China 19 percent. Previously, the arms market in Miranshah, in North Waziristan Agency, met militants' weapons needs but the supply has failed to keep pace with the growing demand.<sup>85</sup>

Costs were also dependent upon the origin of the weapon. Soviet-made Kalashnikovs tended to be of better quality, reflected in their relatively higher prices in comparison to their Chinese, Egyptian, and especially Darra counterparts. The availability of assault rifles such as the AK-47 was severely limited before the Soviet invasion. One Darra arms dealer pointed out that the original AK-47 rifles were in excess of Rs 35,000.<sup>86</sup> Prices inevitably fell because of the massive influx of SALWs during the Afghan-USSR war. By 1987 the price of a single AK-47 assault rifle had been halved.<sup>87</sup> In 1990 the same rifle was Rs 15,000.<sup>88</sup> The departure of the Soviet Union and the United States from the Afghan conflict in the early 1990s coincided with the beginning of a gradual and progressive increase in weapons prices: "During the war, Kalashnikovs [AK-47] made by China or Russia used to cost Rs 15,000 to Rs 16,000; now they are Rs 22,000 to Rs 23,000 to Rs 25,000."<sup>89</sup> Superintendent Iqbal Khan corroborates, noting that "brand new AK-47 rifles which come wrapped in greased paper cost Rs 20,000 to Rs 22,000."<sup>90</sup> These prices are relatively higher than those for Darra-made copies and used originals, which retail for Rs 12,000 to Rs 15,000.<sup>91</sup> However, the prices do fluctuate according to market supply and demand: "When we are receiving many weapons in bulk from Afghanistan and the demand is low, the prices go down. But when there is more demand and the weapons are in short supply, then they are expensive, or the prices shoot up."<sup>92</sup> More recently, after the devastating attacks on the twin towers and the Pentagon in the United States on 11 September 2001, the availability of US-made weapons increased gradually. As of this writing,

an American Colt M-4 Carbine was selling for anything up to \$15,000 (US). The limited availability of such a weapon and the high demand due to its trophy-like status in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and further afield have drastically driven up the costs of ownership. However regular attacks orchestrated by the Afghan Taliban and Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan on North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) container cargo transported to Afghanistan through Pakistan did lead to a relative reduction of the unit costs of US-made weapons until NATO forces had completely withdrawn at the end of 2014, significantly reducing the supply of such weapons. As such, a corresponding increase in unit costs of a variety of US-made weapons has occurred.

During the late 1970s, ammunition for the AK-47 before the war was relatively cheap at Rs 12 per 7.62 round because of the weapon's lack of notoriety and limited availability.<sup>93</sup> However, this situation dramatically changed after the PDPA coup because of the need to acquire greater firepower, especially after the mujahideen began receiving a massive influx of military and financial assistance during the 1980s. Currently, though, the price of original ammunition is approximately Rs 600 per round while the Darra-made version is about Rs 120 per round.<sup>94</sup>

The "anyone is welcome" ethos in Darra's shops has also led to increased ownership of weapons, resulting in significantly greater firepower among ordinary civilians in the tribal areas and those who come to Darra from anywhere in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Thus, shotguns and antiquated Lee Enfield 0.303s have largely been replaced by automatic assault rifles, machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades, and even mortars in tribal feuds. These weapons have drastically increased their firepower and have catalyzed discordant relations into broader escalating conflicts between feuding parties, given the presence of suitable sociopolitical and economic conditions.

## Conclusion

As an ongoing process, the proliferation of SALWs in Afghanistan was complicated by the collapse of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (the Taliban) in 2001. The present government, headed by President Ashraf Ghani, has effective control only to the extent of the suburbs of the capital and other major urban areas. The government's association with the country's provinces depends upon a quid-pro-quo relationship with the various warlords who have retained hold of their local dominions. The latter's desire to retain such authority, therefore, also facilitates further proliferation of SALWs. Furthermore, Afghanistan has become infamous through its unregulated export of SALWs to insurgencies in countries

throughout the region, such as Pakistan, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Mozambique, India, Burma, Chechnya, China, and a number of Central Asian republics by substate actors, arms merchants, and dealers.<sup>95</sup> The Afghan conflict has not died down as a result of the American-led invasion. In fact, the protracted strife has exacerbated local ethnic and tribal fissures. The diffusion of weapons within and without Afghanistan is unlikely to change until a broad-based government that reflects the ethnic, cultural, and sectarian diversity of Afghanistan is successfully installed through a negotiated settlement among all indigenous conflicting parties without external interference. This is a tall order for a region that has had a historical relationship with perpetual external interventions and invasions.

## Notes

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3. John Fullerton, *The Soviet Occupation of Afghanistan* (London: Methuen London, 1984), 77.
4. Yousuf Kazmi, "The Prevention of Smuggling Act, 1977, Act No. XII of 1977," in *The Controlling and Preventive Laws about Prohibition: Price Control, Profiteering, Blackmarket, Hoarding Smuggling, Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil Industry* (Lahore: Pakistan Legal Publications, 1978), chap. 1, par. 1 (2), 21–43.
5. Niobe Thompson and Devashish Krishnan, "Small Arms in India and the Human Costs of Lingering Conflicts," in *Over a Barrel: Light Weapons and Human Rights in the Commonwealth*, ed. Abdel-Fatau Musah and Niobe Thompson, 1st ed. (London: Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, 1999), 38, 60, 94–96.
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7. Noor Zamaan (Darra arms dealer), interview by the author, trans. advocate Kareem Masoud, conducted in Darra weapons retail shop in the presence of a number of other individuals related to the local arms trade, 5 February 2013.
8. *Ibid.*
9. "1998 Pakistan Census," Government of Pakistan, Directorate of Projects—Orakzai Agency, accessed 25 November 2013, [http://dop.fata.gov.pk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=47&Itemid=59](http://dop.fata.gov.pk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=47&Itemid=59).
10. National Institute of Public Administration (NIPA), *Deweaponisation: Problems, Challenges, and Viable Strategy*, Syndicate Research Paper 1 (Lahore: NIPA, September 2001), 12.
11. Maj Saifullah Babar (former Inter-Service Intelligence officer), interview by the author at the Peshawar residence, 23 November 2013. See also, Fullerton, *Soviet Occupation of Afghanistan*, 77.
12. Sajid Khan (Darra arms dealer), interview by the author, trans. Alam Zaib, conducted in Darra weapons retail shop, 5 February 2013.

13. Andre Brigot and Oliver Roy, *The War in Afghanistan* (London: Hervester-Wheatsheaf, 1988), 145; and Oliver Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 185.
14. Pakistan Ministry of Interior, "Illicit Manufacturing in and Trafficking of Fire Arms from Tribal Areas," in *Seminar on Arms Control in Pakistan* by Abdul Karim Qasuria (Islamabad: MoI Government of Pakistan, 2 August 2001).
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24. Masoud and Touri, interview.
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32. George Crile, *Charlie Wilson's War: The Extraordinary Story of the Largest Covert Operation in History* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2003), 209. See also Benjamin Brémaud Billand, "Of the Use of Plausible Deniability by the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan" (master's thesis: Université d'Angers, France, 24 June 2013), 8, <http://dune.univ-angers.fr/fichiers/20031843/20132MALLC1111/fichier/1111F.pdf>.
33. Yousaf and Adkin, *Afghanistan*, 86.
34. Ibid.
35. Saeed Afridi (Darra arms dealer), interview by the author, trans. Alam Zaib, conducted in Darra weapons retail shop, 10 February 2013.
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47. Haybat Khan (Darra arms merchant and shop owner), interview by the author, trans. Ali Qazi, conducted in Darra weapons retail shop, 23 November 2013.
48. Ibid.
49. Zamaan, interview.
50. Afridi, interview.
51. Masoud and Touri, interview.
52. Afridi, interview.
53. Haybat Khan, interview.
54. NIPA, *Deweaponisation*, 2.
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58. Zafar Mahmood, *A Study of Smuggling on Pak-Afghan Border*, Research Report Series no. 164 (Islamabad: Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, 1998), 12.
59. Ibid., 25. (See “Routes and Mechanisms of Afghan Transit Trade for a Better Understanding of the Actual Process of Smuggling Goods,” enclosed in box 1 on that page.)
60. Sayed Waqar Hussain, Asmat Ullah, and Bashir Ahmad Khilji, “The Causes of Transit Related Pak-Afghan Cross Border Smuggling,” *Dialogue* 9, no. 1 (2014): 40–66.
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66. “The Frontier Crimes Regulations (Amended in 2011),” Institute for Social Justice, accessed 19 October 2015, <http://www.isj.org.pk/the-frontier-crimes-regulations-amended-in-2011/>.
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68. Ibid.
69. Ibid.
70. The cost of weapons and commission rates in this example are hypothetical to facilitate an understanding of the process. The actual values of the weapons vary according to the weapons being supplied, their condition, their suppliers, the buyers involved, the couriers, and the market conditions—for example, whether or not the demand is high due to the prevalent security environment.
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76. Yousaf and Adkin, *Afghanistan*, 135.
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80. Pir Sayyid Ahmed Gailani is an ethnic Pushtun, leader (Pir) of the Afghan Qadiriyyah Sufi order, and founder of the National Islamic Front of Afghanistan (Mahaz-i-Milli Islami ye Afghanistan). Sib-

ghatullah Mojaddedi, who became the interim president of Afghanistan in April 1992, is also the founder of the Afghan National Liberation Front. In 2005 he was appointed chairman of the Meshrano Jirga, upper house of the National Assembly of Afghanistan, and is on the Afghan High Peace Council.

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83. Yousaf and Adkin, *Afghanistan*, 135.

84. Fukuyama, *Security of Pakistan*, 12. The prices given to a foreigner may well have been exaggerated by the Darra gun merchants as compared to those given to locals and the mujahideen.

85. Mian, "FATA," 3.

86. Sajid Khan, interview.

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