

DISPATCH FROM THE FIELD

ISLAMIC STATE WEAPONS IN IRAQ AND SYRIA

Analysis of weapons and ammunition captured from
Islamic State forces in Iraq and Syria.

September 2014



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INTRODUCTION

This dispatch outlines preliminary findings from an examination of weapons and ammunition captured from Islamic State (IS) forces in Iraq and Syria between mid-June 2014 and early August 2014.

IS forces have been operating in Northern Syria for several months, around Ayn al-Arab (Kobanê in Kurdish) and Ras al-Ayn (Serêkanî in Kurdish). In addition, IS forces have recently launched offensives in Iraq, particularly around Mosul and Sinjar, in the north of the country, close to the Syrian border.

This dispatch is not intended to attribute responsibility for the supply of weapons to IS forces. Rather, it aims to review physical evidence from the weapons captured from IS forces in order to provide a fuller understanding of their types and origins. In the absence of other forms of documentary evidence, it is not yet possible to document the complete chain of custody of the weapons presented in this dispatch.



CONTEXT

Conflict Armament Research (CAR) documented weapons deployed by IS forces in Iraq and Syria. The team worked alongside Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which operate primarily in Syria, and Kurdish Regional Government Peshmerga Forces in Iraq, to document captured IS weapons.

The YPG and Peshmerga typically integrate captured IS weapons into their own weapon stockpiles to supplement their firepower. However, CAR documented IS weapons as recently as two days after their capture, which enabled the YPG and Peshmerga to identify precisely which weapons they had captured and when and where they had taken custody of them. CAR investigators documented all of the weapons included in this dispatch, personally, when conducting on-the-ground investigations in Iraq and Syria.

CAR DOCUMENTED ISLAMIC STATE WEAPONS AS RECENTLY AS TWO DAYS AFTER THEIR CAPTURE.



KEY FINDINGS

ANTI-TANK ROCKETS

M79 90 mm anti-tank rockets captured from IS forces in Syria are identical to M79 rockets transferred by Saudi Arabia to forces operating under the 'Free Syrian Army' umbrella in 2013.¹

US-MANUFACTURED WEAPONS ON THE BATTLEFIELD

Islamic State forces have captured significant quantities of US-manufactured small arms and have employed them on the battlefield.

SECONDARY SERIAL NUMBERS APPLIED TO MACHINE GUNS

Unidentified parties applied secondary serial numbers to two of the Chinese-manufactured M80 general-purpose machine guns, which the YPG captured in Syria from IS forces. These serial numbers are directly sequential, which suggests that the two machine guns most likely derive from the same intermediary.

USE OF OXY-ACETYLENE TORCHES OR ARC WELDERS TO REMOVE THE SERIAL NUMBERS

Unidentified parties used oxy-acetylene torches or arc welders to remove the serial numbers of IS weapons captured by the YPG in Syria. The consistent welding methods applied to several weapons suggests that the same party removed the serial numbers—most likely to conceal the point at which parties diverted the weapons from legal (state-owned) to illicit (non-state) custody; and that the weapons were diverted from a common source.

EVIDENCE OF LOGISTICAL COMPETENCY

YPG forces captured US-made materiel documented close to Ayn al-Arab, Syria, roughly two weeks after the fall of Mosul to IS forces. The distance between the two regions is roughly 500 km. The speed of transfer to Ayn al-Arab demonstrates the logistical competence of IS forces and the strategic importance of Ayn al-Arab to the group.



CIRCUMSTANCES AND MATERIEL DOCUMENTED

CASE 1: SMALL ARMS DOCUMENTED IN NORTHERN SYRIA

Description

CAR's investigation team documented several small arms captured from IS forces by YPG forces.

Date documented

26 July 2014

Materiel

One US M16A4 5.56 x 45 mm assault rifle manufactured by FN Manufacturing.



Captured in

Avdoké, Syria (GPS: 36.687074, 38.781824).²

Captured on

13 July 2014.³

Three AKM 7.62 x 39 mm assault rifles manufactured in the USSR (now Russian Federation) in 1960, 1964, and 1970.



CASE 1: SMALL ARMS DOCUMENTED IN NORTHERN SYRIA (CONTD)

Three AKM 7.62 x 39 mm assault rifles manufactured in the USSR (now Russian Federation) in 1960, 1964, and 1970 (continued).



UNIDENTIFIED PARTIES APPLIED SECONDARY SERIAL NUMBERS TO TWO OF THE CHINESE-MANUFACTURED M80 GENERAL-PURPOSE MACHINE GUNS, WHICH THE YPG CAPTURED IN SYRIA FROM ISLAMIC STATE FORCES.

CASE 1: SMALL ARMS DOCUMENTED IN NORTHERN SYRIA S (CONTD)

Two Chinese PKM-pattern M80 7.62 x 54R mm and two Chinese PK-pattern M80 7.62 x 54R mm general- purpose machine guns.



One Croatian Elmech EM-992 7.62 x 51 mm sniper rifle.



One Chinese Type 79 7.62 x 54R mm sniper rifle, manufactured in 1985.





CASE 1: SMALL ARMS DOCUMENTED IN NORTHERN SYRIA (CONTD)

One Belgian FN Herstal Browning Hi-Power 9 x 19 mm semi-automatic pistol.



CASE 2: ANTI-TANK ROCKETS DOCUMENTED IN NORTH-EASTERN SYRIA**Description**

CAR's investigation team documented two M79 90 mm HEAT (High-Explosive Anti-Tank) rockets captured from IS forces by the YPG.

Date documented

8 August 2014

Materiel

Two M79 'Osa' 90 mm HEAT (High-Explosive Anti-Tank) rockets, manufactured in September 1983 in Yugoslavia (now Serbia).

Captured in

Tal Khinzir, (GPS: 36.753740, 39.836426), west of Ras al-Ayn (GPS: 36.8446999, 40.073061), Syria.⁴

Captured on

Mid-June 2014.⁵



M79 90 MM ANTI-TANK ROCKETS CAPTURED FROM IS FORCES IN SYRIA ARE IDENTICAL TO M79 ROCKETS TRANSFERRED BY SAUDI ARABIA TO FORCES OPERATING UNDER THE 'FREE SYRIAN ARMY' UMBRELLA IN 2013.

CASE 3: SMALL ARMS DOCUMENTED IN NORTH-WESTERN IRAQ

Description

CAR's investigation team documented several small arms that YPG captured from IS forces.

Captured in⁶

North of Bara, Sinjar Mountains, Iraq (GPS: 36.445314, 41.509781).⁷

Date documented

11 August 2014

Captured on⁸

4 August 2014.⁹

Materiel

Three US M16A4 5.56 x 45 mm assault rifles, manufactured by FN Manufacturing.



CASE 3: SMALL ARMS DOCUMENTED IN NORTH-WESTERN IRAQ (CONTD)

Three US M16A4 5.56 x 45 mm assault rifles, manufactured by FN Manufacturing (contd).



One US M16A4 5.56 x 45 mm assault rifle, manufactured by Colt Defense.



ISLAMIC STATE FORCES HAVE CAPTURED SIGNIFICANT QUANTITIES OF US-MANUFACTURED SMALL ARMS AND HAVE EMPLOYED THEM ON THE BATTLEFIELD.

CASE 3: SMALL ARMS DOCUMENTED IN NORTH-WESTERN IRAQ (CONTD)

One US XM15-E2S 5.56 x 45 mm semi-automatic rifle, manufactured by Bushmaster Firearms International.



One Austrian Glock G19 9 x 19 mm semi-automatic pistol.



CASE 3: SMALL ARMS DOCUMENTED IN NORTH-WESTERN IRAQ (CONTD)

One Croatian HS Produkt HS-9 9 x 19 mm semi-automatic pistol.



ENDNOTES

- 1 CAR has not confirmed that these two anti-tank rockets are part of the same consignment of M79 rounds supplied by Saudi Arabia. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/26/world/middleeast/in-shift-saudis-are-said-to-arm-rebels-in-syria.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&
- 2 Interview with YPG fighters on 26 July 2014.
- 3 Interview with YPG fighters on 26 July 2014.
- 4 Interview with YPG fighters on 8 August 2014.
- 5 Interview with YPG fighters on 8 August 2014.
- 6 Interview with Asayish (security forces) members in Syrian Kurdistan on 11 August 2014.
- 7 Interview with Asayish (security forces) members in Syrian Kurdistan on 11 August 2014.
- 8 Interview with Asayish (security forces) members in Syrian Kurdistan on 11 August 2014.
- 9 Interview with Asayish (security forces) members in Syrian Kurdistan on 11 August 2014.



**THE SPEED OF TRANSFER TO
AYN AL-ARAB DEMONSTRATES
THE LOGISTICAL COMPETENCE
OF ISLAMIC STATE FORCES AND
THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE
OF AYN AL-ARAB TO THE GROUP.**



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