

## Following the Guns: Interview with Ashley Hamer



Ashley Hamer is a Field Investigator for Conflict Armament Research. Her research deals primarily with the circulation of illicit weapons and ammunition in West Africa and the Sahel. Ms Hamer worked as a journalist before joining CAR, covering East and West Africa as well as the Horn of Africa and Afghanistan.

Conflict Armament Research (CAR) is an investigative organisation that gathers information to support effective weapon management and control. How does CAR pursue these objectives?

In the framework of EU-funded projects “iTrace®” and “iTrace® Plus”, CAR works in conflict areas worldwide to document and trace the origins of illicit weapons, ammunition, vehicles, communication devices, components and precursors for improvised explosive devices (IED) which have been seized or recovered by national authorities from non-state and terrorist groups. By establishing relationships with governments, the UN and peacekeeping forces, we gain access to seized material. We document the material in situ, store data in our secure database, provide trend analysis and send formal requests to producing states and manufacturers to determine the origin of the material and trace its point of diversion. Our database counts more than half-a-million verified entries, which enables us to produce high-grade information on weapons trafficking and terrorist-sourcing capabilities, without the need to rely on unverifiable secondary sources. Additionally, we provide capacity-building training to defence forces, police, judicial authorities and investigative units in the countries we operate in. We aim to pass on the skills needed to safely identify weapons and ammunition, keep accurate and reliable records and conduct weapon tracing.

CAR is currently implementing an EU-funded project called iTrace. Could you describe briefly the project's scope and main findings thus far? What are the main challenges you have faced in implementation?

The iTrace® project is carried out by CAR, and consists of the world's largest repository of data relating to diverted and trafficked conventional weapons, ammunition and related material. Through an accessible global information-management system we provide policy-makers, manufacturers, arms control experts and customs and export control

authorities with relevant information to develop effective strategies against the illicit circulation of weapons and equipment used by armed non-state actors and terrorist groups. CAR teams have documented over 590,000 items in the field and we have sent more than 3,500 official trace requests since 2014. We have documented more than 14,000 cases of diversion in 27 conflict-affected states. Our dataset tells us that diversion into the illicit sphere in the areas where we work is mostly due to battlefield captures, ineffective physical security and stockpile management (PSSM) and state-sponsored diversion. One of the greatest challenges involves encouraging governments and manufacturers to cooperate in responding to trace requests, which is important in helping understand a weapon's chain of custody and identifying its point of diversion.

In your view, what further measures should the EU take to ensure that legally-sold weapons are not diverted to illicit markets and strengthen the arms management and control regime?

The EU is a strong global leader driving effective international arms control policy. We believe that national export licensing authorities – in Europe and throughout the world – should be encouraged to produce greater due diligence and conduct thorough risk assessments of entities involved in arms sales transactions prior to export. Despite non-retransfer clauses included in contracts and end-user agreements, we frequently document cases of unauthorised retransfers of legally sold weapons and ammunition, which can subsequently end up in the hands of terrorist and armed groups. In addition to increased sale transaction risk assessments, we feel there is an urgent need for systematic and recurrent end-use and retransfer monitoring at the intended destination as well as the appropriate tracing of material when it is recovered.

## NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT EDUCATION IN TIMES OF COVID-19

Education is a long-term process of disseminating knowledge and analytical skills. It encompasses capacity-building, the training of trainers as well as the engagement of next generations. The latter is particularly relevant for the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (NPD) epistemic community due to a current significant generational shift. NPD education is also important for other obvious reasons: raising awareness about weapons of mass destruction and conventional arms control is essential for an informed citizenry and for preparing (future) scholars and decision-makers. NPD scholars have regrettably noted the post-Cold War complacency and neglect of NPD issues despite a growing range of new and emerging security challenges.

COVID-19 has changed the way education is performed. For the greater good of public health and prevention, previous forms of in-class teaching and training, in-person instructions or meetings have been suspended in favour of distance-learning and -communication. As challenging as these exceptional circumstances can be, they also provide opportunities to innovate education for the long term and promote participatory autonomous learning. Instructors can encourage students, interns and young fellows to create projects or engage in simulation games and modelling activities. Students and young scholars can contribute to or conduct open source analysis by collecting available data, creating databases and assessing information through software. It is essential to empower newcomers and younger generations to use their linguistic, methodological and technological skills; this does not only present effective participatory learning, but also contributes to research and analysis of broad and interlinked NPD issues.

While EUNPD Network members have already turned to web-based lectures, video conferencing and online onboarding of interns and new fellows, they can improve accessibility and outreach by increasing and promoting the use of online learning platforms and collaboration tools, ensuring adaptability to future challenges and the characteristics of new generations. NPD education is, in fact, not only about recruitment, but also about engaging and empowering next generations. Network members are encouraged to share best practices and refer their students, interns and colleagues to the following web-based learning opportunities such as the EUNPDC E-Learning Platform: <https://nonproliferation-elearning.eu>

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## Latest Publications

*Dilemmas of Arms Control: Meeting the Interests of NATO's North-Eastern Flank*, Artur Kacprzyk and Łukasz Kulesa, International Centre for Defence and Security (EESTI – Estonia), 2020

*Modernising conventional arms control: An urgent imperative*, Nicholas Williams, Simon Lunn, European Leadership Network (ELN), 2020

### Implications of COVID-19:

*The Postponement of the NPT Review Conference. Antagonisms, Conflicts and Nuclear Risks After the Pandemic*, Pugwash, 2020

*How many intensive care beds will a nuclear weapon explosion require?* Tom Sauer, Ramesh Thakur, University of Antwerp, 2020

## EU INSTITUTIONAL NEWS

### The European Union publishes a factsheet on lessons learned from COVID-19

The EU has published a factsheet on the key lessons and implications that the COVID-19 pandemic presents for its security and defence. The aim of this reflection is to be ready to confront possible security consequences of the current pandemic and to become better prepared and resilient for the future.

The factsheet underlines the need to enhance international cooperation, including within the United Nations, and to address vulnerabilities deriving from cyber, hybrid, disinformation challenges as well as Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) threats.



For more information:

[Factsheet](#)

[COVID-19 -Lessons and Implications for EU Security and Defence](#)

## Network Calls

### RESEARCH ASSISTANCE, ARMS AND MILITARY EXPENDITURE PROGRAMME

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) is seeking Research Assistance to support the work of the Arms and Military Expenditure (AMEX) Programme.

Deadline: 1 June 2020

Location: Stockholm, Sweden

For more information:

Visit the [website](#)

### EUNPD: NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT INTERNSHIP

The EUNPD Consortium is offering a number of internships to junior diplomats, master students, PhD students and post-docs interested in arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament.

For more information:

Visit the [website](#)

Or contact [Sophia Wenzel](#)

## NETWORK NEWS

### EUNPD Network member celebrates 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the UK Project On Nuclear Issues (PONI)

The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) will celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UK Project On Nuclear Issues (UK PONI) in June 2020. Over the years, the UK PONI Annual Conference has become the premier UK national forum for emerging scholars and professionals to consider salient issues in nuclear policy, share their work and connect with peers and established experts.

This year's Annual Conference will be completely held online, over three afternoons:

- 9 June 13:00-18:00 - Emerging Technology and Nuclear Proliferation
- 10 June 13:00-18:00 - Challenges and Solutions for Sustaining Nuclear Expertise in the Next Generation
- 11 June 13:00-18:30 - UK Nuclear Weapons and Euro-Atlantic Security

During these sessions, participants will hear from emerging nuclear experts, UK PONI alumni and senior keynote speakers, as well as have the opportunity to take part in a nuclear policy-making exercise run in collaboration with Chatham House.

The closing keynote address will be given by **Angus Lapsley**, Director General Strategy and International, UK Ministry of Defence.

For further information about the conference and details on how to register, please visit [the website](#) or contact [ukponi@rusi.org](mailto:ukponi@rusi.org)