

Keeping Weapons, Ammunition, and Vital Assets Out of the Hands of Terrorists: The Asset Tracking Solution

Executive Summary

The threat of terrorism is prominent around the world, and the global terror threat is expected to remain high over the next decade. Terrorists are taking advantage of modern technologies to gain intelligence used to develop weapons – such as biological and chemical warfare agents – as well as to plan and coordinate increasingly sophisticated attacks. At the same time, terrorists are gaining access to weapons, ammunition, secure communications equipment, body armor, respirators, and other materials (including those that can be used to make explosives) through theft and diversion of assets from nations' defense forces.



Photo via <http://www.heartpublications.co.uk/arms-cache-found/>

In light of these trends, it's become clear that one important key in the war against terror is preventing terrorists from gaining access to valuable defense equipment. However, doing so proves challenging, due to the complexity of the threat landscape as well as the various means through which these assets end up in the wrong hands. Radicalization of civilians or military personnel, intentional diversion by arms dealers, and unsecured or poorly managed stockpiles are just a few of the ways that terrorists gain access to defense assets. Insufficient export tracking, inadequate security during transport, and even the black market diversion of assets provided to forces also lead to assets getting into the wrong hands. Finally, terrorists also acquire weapons and other assets by capturing them from anti-government militias.

There are some existing measures aimed at preventing diversion. Many nations have laws that govern the control of firearms and ammunition, such as the United Kingdom's Firearms Act 1968. Sanctions, which block assets held by terror-

ists, are another measure. The first international treaty aimed at regulating the international trade of conventional arms is the Arms Trade Treaty, which, while it focuses on trade, does address tracking measures, but falls short of a full solution. Nations also have trade and export regulations which aim to control the export of goods, depending on the nature and destinations of the proposed export.

Despite these measures, terrorists continue to acquire weapons, ammunition, and other materials from defense forces. While current marking standards do exist for firearms, ammunition, and other materials, there is no single, internationally recognized regulatory framework for consistent marking standards, which is desperately needed to improve item marking and traceability around the globe. Through the use of barcodes, such a framework would support tracking the movement of weapons, ammunition, and other supplies such as respirators, body armor, and other tactical gear.

Barcodes also enable the implementation of check-in/check-out procedures, which provide a clear chain of custody trail to increase accountability. Using this approach, weapons and other supplies can be traced back to the last known point of possession to more easily identify possible corruption and weak points in the security chain. Additionally, barcodes act as a deterrent for theft and diversion; clearly marked and labeled supplies are less likely to be stolen, making it clear to perpetrators that the items are traceable. Barcode-labeled items discovered or seized from weapons caches or during raids or arrests can be traced back to the point of origin or the last known point of legitimate custody – making it easier for authorities to identify the sources of corruption and halt asset diversion in its tracks.

