

casings from firing ranges, and in the process effect ammunition declarations and occasionally conduct spot checks through the turning out of pockets etc. The fact remains, however, that this is largely done to clean up the range and to re-cycle the casings. Individual counts are seldom conducted. There is little evidence available that indicates significant quantities of ammunition disappear in this manner.

With regards to legal shipments of ammunition, one government source suggested a "secure conduit" approach for ammunition and small arms of military type; i.e. assault weapons and their ammunition such as 9 mm, 7.62 mm and 5.56 mm. The source believes that specialized government approved carriers with security cleared personnel should be used for shipping all such material.⁷² This would require some form of international standard and agreement and would probably be somewhat more expensive than current methods. It should, however, probably limit the amount of cargo skimming, thefts and diversions taking place and could make legal transfers more transparent. Some sources believe that it is illicit ammunition that is most susceptible to theft in transit because it would not be reported as missing.⁷³ Those few companies that responded to the questions regarding loss of ammunition in transit all said that it was not a problem. This could be the subject of further study but it would require the cooperation of police forces, shipping companies and ammunition distributors, both commercial and state, none of which are prone to transparency on this issue -- some for valid reasons.

Ammunition Numbers and Shelf-Life

In another study concerning US military services ammunition, the GAO noted that the US military had over five million tons of conventional ammunition, explosives and missiles in storage valued at \$80 billion dollars.⁷⁴ Much of this was surplus to requirement -- for example .30 caliber ball ammunition exceeded army requirements by a factor of 517. In addition, there was some doubt as to the actual accuracy of the accounting procedures. Reasons for overstocking were various, running from the ridiculous (needed for military funerals); to the possibly more perturbing within the context of ammunition controls (trade purposes and foreign military sales). There are numerous anecdotal references to huge supplies of small arms ammunition available from eastern Europe and the countries of the former Soviet Union.

It is quite clear that ammunition does not time expire. As stated by the GAO in their report on surplus US military ammunition:

"We observed ammunition dating to the 1940s. Service officials generally said that unless ammunition has a shelf life, its age does not alter its serviceability. They

⁷² Private correspondence with author.

⁷³ See Annex B.

⁷⁴ Complete details can be obtained in GAO/NSIAD-96-129 see: <http://www.gao.gov>. A search of this site will find several reports on ammunition.