

Robbert van Strien

**The AK-47:
Twenty-first Century Pitchfork**

What makes the AK-47 assault rifle today's 'people's gun'? Robbert van Strien takes us into the illustrious world of insurgency.

'When that window roles down
And that AK comes out;
You can squeeze your little handgun
Until you run out;
Or you can run for your back up
If the machine-gun shells don't tear your
back up.'

— 50 Cent, *Heat*

Few artefacts are as numerous present in the modern world as the AK-47 assault rifle. Over sixty years old today, the assault rifle designed in the Soviet Union is unrivalled in sheer quantities. Praised for its availability, ease of use, sturdiness and destructive power, the AK-47 still proves to be the weapon of choice for a diverse crowd — equipped not only by the armies of various nations, but also by an obscure multitude of guerrillas, gangbangers, criminals, freedom fighters, child soldiers, religious extremists and the like.

In fact, the AK-47 seems to fit better in the hands of the dissident than the ruler, the oppressed rather than the oppressor, the criminal rather than the law. Its long association with opposition groups culminated in the AK-47's supporting role in Osama Bin Laden's first public address after the 9/11 attacks, but it had acquired the iconic status of 'the people's gun' well before the era of Al-Qaida.

Why is the AK-47 so prominently present in modern history? Why does it appear to be so inextricably linked with oppositions, to always carry the message of resistance? Why is it so very successful, much more successful than any other gun — not in practical terms alone, but as a symbol, a vessel for meanings?

Before continuing, it must be noted that the designation AK-47 has become synonymous with a family of closely related assault rifles, but in fact is the official name of only the first version of the rifle. The updated designs and the many, many copies of the gun are, for the sake of readability, referred to as AK-47 in most publications about the weapon — this paper will be no exception.

Avtomat Sovetskogo Soyuz

During the Battle for Bryansk, in the war against Nazi Germany, young Mikhail Kalashnikov, sergeant in the Red Army, was wounded. He was hospitalized in Yelets, where

he rehabilitated amongst other wounded soldiers. Their favourite pastime: discussing the merits of various weapons. Kalashnikov, born in a family of farmers in a remote part of Russia, did not contribute much to these discussions, but he did take in every word. He started reading up on arms design, began to make sketches of possible designs, and formed his ambition: to design a weapon for the Red Army, a gun that would serve to defend the Motherland.

After being granted a convalescent leave, Kalashnikov started to construct a submachine gun, using the railway depot in Matai as a workshop. The gun would prove to be his ticket to a more formal training as an arms designer, and Kalashnikov wound up as an arms designer at the Research Proving Grounds for Firearms and Mortars in Schurovo, a village some sixty miles southeast of Moscow. There, in 1946, he took part in a contest to design an automatic rifle, an avtomat, for the new M1943 cartridge. After being subjected to a variety of harsh tests, Kalashnikov's design was selected for further development. Eventually, the Avtomat Kalashnikov, completed in 1947, was chosen as the winner of the competition.

The above is an approximation of the narrative of the AK-47's origin. Or, at least, the version of the narrative that is best known and most repeated. It has it all: the peasants'-son-turned-hero-of-the-people, the devotion to the motherland, the optimized design process. It cannot be called true. Rather, it is a 'photo-shopped' version of the AK-47's narrative, augmented with many layers of fable and myth. After years of military secrecy and Soviet propaganda, followed by years of repetition, exaggeration and confusion, the history of the world's most famous weapon is positively obscured. However, it is possible to reconstruct its history to a certain extent.¹

During the Second World War, it became clear that the Red Army was poorly equipped in comparison to its German counterpart. Most of the Russian soldiers were provided with bolt-action rifles or carbines with a magazine capacity of five rounds.² The German soldiers increasingly came equipped with a new type of weapon, dubbed the StG.44 Sturmgewehr: a compact, versatile weapon capable of both single-shot medium-range marksmanship and automatic suppression fire.³

More than a comparison of types of guns, the difference between the German and Soviet guns comes down to a comparison of ammunition. While the Red Army, like the armies of most nations, was committed to powerful cartridges, Germany was the first to see the advantages of a smaller round.⁴ A powerful round with a large charge of propellant is needed to fire a heavy bullet, shooting it far, accurate, and with a big impact — smaller ammunition means a smaller range, a less precise trajectory, and a smaller impact of the bullet. Traditionally, armies clung to the idea of infantrymen shooting at one another from great distances: situations in which high-powered ammunition was necessary. A German study had shown that most modern infantry fighting occurred at ranges of fewer than 400 meters, making the classic high-powered ammunition unnecessary.⁵ A choice in ammunition has a big influence on the design of the gun required to fire it: a powerful cartridge needs a large, strong body, and a heavy, long barrel; due to its recoil and consequential muzzle climb, it is difficult to maintain a good aim when shot in rapid succession. Furthermore, bigger ammunition means more weight per cartridge, meaning that one soldier can carry fewer rounds of bullets; and more material is needed to make each cartridge. A short round, on the other hand, only requires a relatively small rifle, with a relatively short barrel. It can be shot in rapid succession with less chance of the weapon overheating, or the muzzle rising too much. Less material is needed to produce the rifle and the cartridges, making it cheaper. Furthermore, a compact rifle can be yielded in narrow spaces with relative ease, while a long-barrelled rifle is impractical to use in buildings or densely forested regions. Finally, a short round makes it easier to handle the rifle — soldiers would need less training in marksmanship.

The 7.9x33 calibre developed by the Germans in 1938 — the so-called *Kurz*, or 'short', ready in 1940 — was 33 millimetres long, much shorter than its' contemporaries.⁶ This placed it somewhere in between the ammunition fired by rifles and by pistols.⁷ The Red Army began to develop a similar intermediate-size cartridge: a .30 calibre, 56 millimetres in length.⁸ This cartridge, the

M1943, laid the fundament for the AK-47: a new rifle had to be designed to fire it.

In 1945, a contest was organized to design this weapon. Mikhail Kalashnikov and his design team joined in, as did others. In the summer of 1947, the prototypes were tested — none were accepted outright.⁹ Three designs, including the rifle made by Kalashnikov's team (dubbed the AK-46), were ordered to be reworked.¹⁰ Kalashnikov's team made many drastic changes to their prototype, and this is the point when the AK-47 was designed.¹¹ The AK-47 won the contest, and was put into production from 1949 onwards.¹² In the years to follow, many features of the rifle and the production process were fine-tuned and altered, by contributors who have remained anonymous.¹³ After the collapse of the Soviet Union and consequentially of the rigid system of state-controlled information, one Soviet armorer wrote an article in which he coined the nickname 'ASS47', short for *Avtomat Sovetskogo Soyuza*: the automatic designed by the Soviet Union.¹⁴ The AK-47 should not be understood as the product of a single persons' work, but rather as a product of collective conception, the outcome of a process that began with the development of an intermediate cartridge, and was carried out by a big collective.¹⁵

Using the AK-47

Leaving aside the question of who contributed what to the AK-47's design, the fact remains that the end-result is terribly impressive. There are a number of qualities that set the AK-47 apart from its competitors; that make it so successful in many respects. All of these qualities play a role in the eventual rise of the AK-47 as the universal icon it is today.¹⁶

One of the most remarkable aspects of the AK-47 is its ease of use. One particularly enthusiastic author notes that it took him only 4 and a half minutes to teach an inexperienced man how to load, aim, fire and unload the gun.¹⁷ Its straightforward design, with only nine moving parts, makes the AK-47 both easy to produce and easy to operate.¹⁸ This is no coincidence — the gun was designed to be as simple as possible, to be used by the average Soviet layman.¹⁹ Its low weight and low recoil further ensure that most people can handle the gun:



Fig. 1. 106-year-old Armenian woman sitting in front of her home guarding it with an AK-47 in the village of Degh, near the border of Azerbaijan. Accessed through www.imgur.com/r/pics/NaWMPjQ on 28 July 2013.

not only soldiers, but civilians as well.²⁰ Disturbingly, even children can handle the AK-47.²¹

Another aspect that sets the AK-47 apart is its universal applicability. Relatively short and light, it can be transported easily, and yielded in narrow spaces.²² This ensures its owner a degree of mobility and flexibility valuable in many contexts. With the choice to shoot single bullets or automatic bursts, the gun is equally capable to mark off targets a few hundred meters away, lay down suppression fire, or wreak havoc in confined spaces.²³

Finally, the AK-47 is extremely durable. Again, this is no coincidence: it was designed to last. Instead of fragile and small components, the rifle is made up from bulky parts. Instead of close and precise fittings, the different parts were all designed with excess space and openings. This ensured that the rifle could withstand plenty of wear and tear, and impressive amounts of dirt, before failing to operate. Even without regular cleaning and care, the gun lasts

long.²⁴ Good maintenance further increases the lifespan of an AK-47.²⁵

All these aspects — ease of use, universal application, and great durability — are fundamental to the iconic status the AK-47 has today. However, the gun would not be the symbol it is without one most perplexing aspect: its sheer overabundance.

The AK-47' Spread

Rather than a rifle to defend the Russian motherland, the AK-47 found employment in the hands of a wide variety of groups. Its spread started soon after it was taken into production. The Soviet Union provided allied nations or ideological partners with AK-47s as a means of waging the Cold War.²⁶ But the Soviets did not export the rifle alone; more importantly, they shared the blueprints for the gun, and plans for its production with the countries involved in the Warsaw Pact. Soon after, copies of the AK-47 started to be produced in East Germany,

Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, and other countries.²⁷ The Chinese demanded the plans as well, and they, too, started production of their own indigenous version of the gun.²⁸ We could add that the AK-47 was not subject to patent, and the rifle could be freely copied.²⁹

China and the Eastern European countries, in turn, passed on the gun and its plans to others. The AK-47 found its way to North Korea via China: the North Korean version, the Type 98, is still in service in the North Korean army.³⁰ Czech rifles were shipped to Egypt in 1955; by the 1960's, the Egyptians had reverse-engineered the gun, and were producing their clone, the Misr AKM, for their own army and the export market.³¹ Militant groups in the Middle East that relied on terrorism to fight the newly founded state of Israel soon wholeheartedly embraced the AK-47.³² The Iraqi and Iranian armies (and their respective fifth columns) fought each other with their own copies of AK-47's during the First Persian Gulf War.³³ The large-scale distribution of Kalashnikovs by the Americans in Afghanistan during the 1980's Soviet occupation is well known these days, as is its grim repercussion.³⁴

The Soviet Union did not mind losing control of the AK-47's spread, even when it ended up in the hands of groups not necessarily close to the Soviets' ideals. The availability of standardized ammunition and replacement parts in countries surrounding the Soviet Union would be a logistical blessing, should full war on the continent break out.³⁵

During the Cold War, the countries involved in the Warsaw Pact were urged to produce the AK-47. As cogs in planned economies, the factories producing the AK-47 were given priority, and were assigned the most skilled workers and the best resources.³⁶ The somewhat paranoid mind-set of many of the communist governments ensured that the AK-47 was produced in absurd quantities.³⁷ Warehouses were filled with AK-47s: not only for the military, but also for the police force and the secret police.³⁸ Additional arsenals were established to be equipped to factory workers, to create a civil defence in the event of Western invasion.³⁹ By the time the Soviet Union collapsed, Russia and Eastern Europe were speckled with poorly guarded stockpiles of AK-47s. In the chaotic years that followed, the majority of these rifles

leaked away, and found their way to the black market.⁴⁰ From there on, they were distributed all over the world, to anyone with the funds to arm himself or others (fig. 1).

It is difficult to estimate just how many AK-47s are currently in use across the globe; but there is no doubt they are abundant.⁴¹ AK-47s and ammunition are obtainable virtually everywhere; there are stockpiles of both newly produced and second-hand (or third-, or tenth-) rifles on every continent, and AK-47s can be bought for a few hundred dollars.⁴² Fluctuations in the AK-47's price on the black market are used as an indicator of regional stability.⁴³ On the long run, a high price indicates social stability, while a low price may indicate a labile environment.⁴⁴ On the short run, changes in price (often preceding elections and the like) may indicate imminent problems: the higher the price, the higher the demand must be.⁴⁵

Twenty-First Century Pitchfork

All of the above makes the AK-47 an ideal weapon for insurgents; but we may add a few reasons here why it did, indeed, become the insurgents' preferred weapon.

For one thing, the AK-47 has historically grown in the role of the dissidents' weapon. It was shipped out to groups opposing the West, fighting 'wars of national liberation'.⁴⁶ For instance, to the North Vietnamese Army in 1967, or to a number of revolutionary groups in Latin America through Cuba.⁴⁷ Often, AK-47s are supplied to insurgent groups in order to destabilize a certain region or government — as is the case in Liberia, where Joseph Kony's army of child soldiers was armed with AK-47s by the Sudanese government.⁴⁸ In many of the bloody conflicts in Africa, the AK-47 played a crucial role — so much so, that it was given the nickname 'Africa Killer'; 'Kalash' has become a popular boy's name in some African countries.⁴⁹

The affiliation of Muslim extremists with the AK-47 began in Egypt, where in the 1940's king Farouk I founded groups of guerrilla warriors to fight Israel.⁵⁰ The unconventional form of warfare used by these groups of individual insurgents fits the AK-47's abilities well.⁵¹ With Egypt, Iran, Iraq, and Sudan producing their own copies of the AK-47, it is now in wide use with Middle Eastern terrorist groups.⁵² In Iraq, several statues commemorate the AK-47.⁵³ It

has become somewhat of a code to display an AK-47 in video messages; it immediately sends a message of affiliation and determination.⁵⁴ Public displays of AK-47s in the hands of jihadist and the like have really solidified the role of the AK-47 as the insurgents' weapon.

Furthermore, the aesthetics of the AK-47 play a role. With its steep front sight post, its gas tube parallel to the barrel and its odd, banana-shaped ammo clip, the AK-47 can never be mistaken for another gun: its profile is very recognizable, and this has perhaps made the path to becoming a symbol more easy.⁵⁵ What is more, the crudeness of the design in contrast with the more refined looking weapons yielded by professional armies sends of a message of resistance: highly trained and expensively equipped armies versus poor, oppressed and motivated fighters.

One author notes that this crude aesthetic is intentional, that the Soviet design philosophy

rejected refined, streamlined designs and opted for utilitarian- and robust looking weaponry.⁵⁶ Though hard to verify, this does seem plausible; at the very least, one could observe that the American alternative to the AK-47 — the M-16, the 'first plastic machine gun' — was designed to look modern and high-tech.⁵⁷

With its distinct, crude aesthetics and irrefutable silhouette, the AK-47 in the hands of those confronting Western forces, sent off a powerful message. The 'anti-imperialistic gun' acted as a standard, as a declaration of affiliation.⁵⁸ In a war that was fought through image as much as armed conflicts, the technical superiority of the AK-47 over the Western M16 was a great victory for the Soviet Union.⁵⁹ The robust plywood forearm and shoulder stock, the stamped steel body with little detail; the overall clunky-ness of the design: the AK-47 looks like a tool as much as a weapon; a twenty-first century pitchfork in the hands of the masses.

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- 1 E.g., Nigel Bennett, *AK-47 Assault Rifle. The Real Weapon of Mass Destruction*, Gloucestershire: Spellmount Publishers, 2010, pp. 13-19.
- 2 With regards to my position and the quality of the source material: I am not an expert on the subject of weaponry or martial history, and I cannot say that I've read everything there is to read about the AK-47. The amount of publications regarding the AK-47 is overwhelming, and the difference in quality of these publications is enormous. This weapon's history, its features, and its cultural impact are clouded by myths, over-colouring and confusion; in consequence, it is hard to tell fact from fiction, and many sources conflict. With regards to technical specifications I based myself on Gordon Rottman, *The Ak-47 Kalashnikov-series Assault Rifles*, Oxford: Osprey Publishers, 2011; and with regards to the origin and the historical context of the guns' development on C.J. Chivers, *The Gun*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010, pp. 16-17, 150-154.
- 3 To be exact, different models from the Moisin Nagant series of rifles, specifically the M1891/30, M38 and M44.
- 4 Chivers, op. cit. (note 2), pp. 164-165. The translation of 'Sturmgewehr', assault rifle, came to be the common name for this type of rifles. Legend has it that the designation 'Sturmgewehr' was given to the rifle by Adolf Hitler himself, but Rottman notes this is highly doubtful. See: Rottman, op. cit. (note 2), p. 9.
- 5 Chivers, op. cit. (note 2), p. 161. This commitment to powerful, large cartridges may seem strange in hindsight, but was the common sentiment in military circles. From the context of the time, it is an understandable commitment: the shift to a smaller cartridge is counterintuitive. It meant spending money and resources on the development of cartridges that were, at least in theory, less lethal than the cartridges that were already in production and available.
- 6 Rottman, op. cit. (note 2), p. 8.
- 7 Chivers, op. cit. (note 2), p. 161; Rottman, op. cit. (note 2), p. 8.
- 8 Chivers, op. cit. (note 2), p. 163.
- 9 For those confused by the strange practice of calibre sizes: designations between inches and millimetres are used together, as they refer to standard sizes of cartridges developed in America or the West. A .30-inch calibre is of comparable size to the 7.9-millimeter calibre. In addition, the first number in a standard cartridge designation refers to the calibre (diameter) of the bullet, the second to the case length.
- 10 Chivers, op. cit. (note 2), p. 187.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 187.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 188.
- 13 Rottman, op. cit. (note 2), p. 18. The final tests of the contest were harsh, including subjection to extreme cold, salt water, long periods of submersion in swamp water, and drops from heights onto a concrete floor. In one test, the gun was bathed in sand and powdered stone, until every opening was completely clogged; without cleaning, the gun was expected to fire. The AK-47 performed outstanding. See: Chivers, op. cit. (note 2), p. 198.
- 14 A number of Kalashnikov's colleagues have claimed responsibility for certain distinct aspects of the rifle; additionally, allegations have been made that the rifle took parts of its design from competing prototypes, and that Kalashnikov's team had inside help from the test director. The role of German Hugo Schmeisser, who had worked on the Sturmgewehr, and was a prisoner of war, forced to work in the Soviet Union until 1952, is unclear, but it is suspected he worked on the AK-47, as well. See: Chivers, op. cit. (note 2), p. 152, pp. 206-209, and Rottman, op. cit. (note 2), pp. 15-16.
- 15 Chivers, op. cit. (note 2), p. 207.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 154.
- 17 As mentioned earlier, some qualities can be attributed to the M1943 cartridge — from here on, we should understand the cartridge and the rifle as existing in symbiosis. In 1959, an improved version of the AK-47 was put in production. This version, the AKM (or *Avtomat Kalashnikova Modernizirovanny*, the Modernized Automatic by Kalashnikov) replaced the original weapon, and is the most produced version of the rifle. See: *Ibid.*, pp. 242-243.
- 18 Bennett, op. cit. (note 1), p. 63. Rottman gives the more applicable average time of one hour. See: Rottman, op. cit. (note 2), p. 20.
- 19 Jurgen Brauer, 'Arms Industries, Arms Trade, and Developing Countries' in: K. Hartley and T. Sandler (eds.), *Handbook of Defense Economics* (Volume 2), Elsevier, 2007, p. 998.
- 20 Paul Graves-Brown, 'Avtomat Kalashnikova' in: *Journal of Material Culture* 12(3) 2007, pp. 285-307, p. 301.
- 21 Rottman, op. cit. (note 2), p. 46.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 46, p. 51; Philip Killicoat, 'Weaponomics: The Global Market for Assault Rifles' in: *World Bank Policy Research*, s.l., 2007, pp. 3-4. Rottman adds that the AK-47 can be yielded by both sexes, a quality appreciated by Marxist guerrillas in Latin America. See: Rottman, op. cit. (note 2), p. 52.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 59. As Chivers notes, the popular model of the AK-47 with under-foldable stock is shorter than a regulation tennis racket — short enough to be hidden underneath a coat. See: Chivers, op. cit. (note 2), p. 209.
- 24 The AK-47 is not as accurate as a high-powered rifle, and is of little use on the long range. It is not as devastating as a true machine gun: as a compromise, it does not perform a single task to perfection, but a broad variety of tasks adequately. We might add here that in the 1950's, complementary weapons based on the AK-47 were designed: the RPK (*Ruchnoi Pulemyot Kalashnikova* or Handheld Machine-gun by Kalashnikov); the PK (Pulemyot Kalashnikov or

- Machinegun by Kalashnikov); and the SVD (Snaioperskaya Vintovka Dragunova or Sniper Rifle by Dragunova). As these were all based on the AK-47, they shared some functionality, interchangeable parts, and ammunition. See: Chivers, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp. 243-244; Rottman, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 39.
- 25 Rottman shows an AK-47 taken from a Somali pirate; it is entirely encrusted with rust due to its salt water environment, but still functions. See: Rottman, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 18.
- 26 Killicoat uses an average AK-47's life expectancy of fifty years to account for depreciation in his models on the economics of the AK-47. See: Killicoat, *op. cit.* (note 22), p. 15. On a visit to Afghanistan in 2008, Chivers took a photograph of an AK-47 produced in 1954 that was still in use. See: Chivers, *op. cit.* (note 2), figure 33.
- 27 Rottman *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 47; Chivers, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp. 203, 340.
- 28 The MPiK, AKK, AKM-63, and KbK AK respectively. Bennett, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp. 76-80, 91-100, 101-107, 112-114.
- 29 The Type 56 and its derivatives. *Ibid.*, pp. 81-86; Chivers, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 217.
- 30 Killicoat sees this as a crucial early advantage of the rifle's eventual popularity. See: Killicoat, *op. cit.* (note 22), p. 4. Brauer adds that the AK-47 was patented as late as 1999, and that this patent was much disregarded. See: Brauer, *op. cit.* (note 19), p. 998.
- 31 Bennett, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp. 87-90.
- 32 Chivers, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 349; Bennett, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp. 90-91.
- 33 Chivers quotes Fatah-commander Abu Jihad: 'The Kalashnikov is our only language until we free all of Palestine.' See: Chivers, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 350.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 361.
- 35 *Ibid.*, pp. 361-362.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 203-204. A telling example: when Finland, affiliated with neither the Warsaw Pact nor the West, secretly tried to obtain AK-47s for its own army, its efforts to do so where secretly helped by the Soviet Union. *Ibid.*, pp. 249-250.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 245.
- 38 *Ibid.*, pp. 342-344.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 342.
- 40 *Ibid.*, pp. 342-344.
- 41 *Ibid.*, pp. 341-342, 366-368. Killicoat points out that the collapse of the Soviet Union surprisingly did not cause a significant supply shock for the small arms market. See: Killicoat, *op. cit.* (note 22), p. 16.
- 42 Killicoat gives a number of 100 million (100.000.000) AK-47s. See: Killicoat, *op. cit.* (note 22), p. 12. Rottman and Killicoat both mention 75.000.000 true AK-47s, and an additional 25.000.000 belonging to the Kalashnikov family (machine guns, sniper rifles, etc.). See: Rottman, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 4; Killicoat, *op. cit.* (note 22), p. 3.
- 43 Rottman for instance notes that Venezuela has begun to produce their own version of the AK-47 in 2010 in excessive quantities; it is foreseeable that these copies will, in time, find their way across South-America as well. Bennett adds: 'If you want one or need one, someone will sell it to you.' See: Rottman, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 37; Bennett, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 9.
- 44 Rottman, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 47; Chivers, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 13. See also: Killicoat, *op. cit.* (note 22) and Brauer, *op. cit.* (note 19).
- 45 For instance: on average, the price of an AK-47 in the period 1986-2005 was US\$ 990 in Western Europe, and US\$ 267 in Africa and the Middle East. See: Killicoat, *op. cit.* (note 22), table I.
- 46 Rottman gives a good example: in Lebanon, the price for an AK-47 doubled to \$600 after the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri in 2005, and tripled during the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War. See: Rottman, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp. 47-48.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 48.
- 48 *Ibid.*, pp. 48, 52.
- 49 Chivers, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 377.
- 50 Rottman, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 72.
- 51 Chivers, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 350.
- 52 *Ibid.*, p. 351.
- 53 Rottman, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp. 48-49.
- 54 *Ibid.*, p. 73.
- 55 Interestingly, the weapon yielded by Osama Bin Laden in photographs is an atypical version of the gun: an AKSU-74 taken in the 1980's from a Soviet helicopter crew. Brandishing this version rather than a regular AKM really send off the message of Bin Laden being hard-core. The AKSU-74 now bears the nickname 'The Osama' and is quite popular. See: Chivers, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 383.
- 56 The AK-47 is not the first to feature such a banana-shaped magazine. See: Graves-Brown, *op. cit.* (note 20), p. 303.
- 57 Rottman, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 18-19.
- 58 Graves-Brown, *op. cit.* (note 20), p. 300.
- 59 Rottman, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 47.
- 60 Chivers, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 204; the image of American soldiers in Vietnam who had replaced their M16s with captured AK-47s was painfully effective — the malfunctioning M16 led to a national controversy. See: *Ibid.*, chapter 7 (pp. 263-336).