



Superior reliability, ease of manufacture, and popularity among [Islamic terrorist groups](#): those are some of the things that come to mind when you ask anyone what they think of the AK-47.

More than forty years ago, right before the [Soviet-Afghan War](#), the Kremlin started supplying the Afghanistan government with AK-47s, among other Warsaw pact weapons. These automatic rifles were plentiful, thanks to their ease of manufacture and reliable design.

The CIA (and other players who didn't like the idea of the Soviet having significant control over the outcome of the war) did the same. They provided the insurgent mujahideen with armaments as well, but they didn't give AR-15s. Instead, they gave them Chinese-made rifles patterned after the same AK-47s their hostile government counterparts are equipped with.

Fast forward to a few years ago (and [up to this date](#)), members of Al-Qaeda and ISIS (at least those fond of filming themselves) are brandishing the very same AK-47 rifles given to their fathers and grandfathers by the Soviet and U.S. cold war players from the late 1970s to early 1980s.

No one could have predicted that the low-maintenance rifle well known for its ease of manufacture and frustratingly high levels of reliability would become the symbol of insurgency and terrorism that we know of today.

But how did it get to this point? Why is it that of all the automatic rifles invented within the last 100 years, it's the AK-47 that earned the kind of notoriety it is known for today? If you find yourself asking the same questions and you want answers, stick around and read through this post.

A Quick History Lesson



Before it became the quintessential terrorists' assault rifle, through much of the cold war era, the AK-47 rifle had developed a reputation as the weapon of choice for insurgents, by communists. Anyone looking to take part in a revolutionary movement **against** their government was expected to have an AK-47. Purpose-wise, it was a far cry from what the rifle was primarily designed for: as a tool **for** the government.

The man behind the creation of the AK-47, the late [Mikhail Kalashnikov](#), is considered a genius by many of his countrymen. Born in 1919 to parents in a peasant province in Siberia, Kalashnikov was reportedly fascinated by the inner workings of the crude machines accessible to him in his childhood. As a young adult, he worked as a railroad clerk.

In 1938, just before the Second World War, Kalashnikov joined the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic's [Krasnaya Armiya](#) (more commonly referred to as the Red Army). Designated as a tank mechanic, he was assigned to man one of the T34s of 24th Tank Regiment.

When his training was over, he started to exhibit a high level of mechanical expertise by designing modifications for Soviet tanks. Not long after, he was promoted to tank commander. Things were looking up for the mechanic.

In 1941 during the [Battle of Bryansk](#), Kalashnikov's tank was hit by a shell from the Nazis forces. He was badly wounded and had to be hospitalized. That meant he would never be sent back to the front line.

Rumor has it that during that time, all he could think about was the [StG-44](#), the German military's standard issue automatic rifle. It was far more effective than theirs in the battlefield, and that fact brought about a compelling desire for him to act – to help his comrades in battle by coming up with an automatic rifle design that will surpass the enemy's.

Depending on who you'd hear the story from, Kalashnikov would either go on to form the team responsible for building the first working prototype of his automatic rifle design – or he would do it all himself. Regardless, it would take him around five years to finish producing it.

The Cold War Era



In 1947, Kalashnikov would join his rifle in a firearms design contest launched by the Soviet Union's Defense Ministry. The winning design was going to be adopted by the Red Army. Kalashnikov's Automatic, [Avtomatni Kalashnikova](#) in their native tongue, won that competition. Immediately after, it received the military designation AK-47.

But contrary to what most people (even some self-confessed gun experts online) think, the original design wasn't anywhere near as reliable/low-maintenance nor was it as easy to manufacture as any of the AK-patterned rifle models we currently have on the market.

All the positive attributes the AK-47 is known for today resulted from years of countless testing, troubleshooting and fine tuning. Consequently, these strengths would lead to the rifle's unprecedented popularity (and its infamy, eventually) – chief among which is its ease of manufacture.

Fine-tuned to become an extremely easy-to-use and low-maintenance automatic rifle, the AK-47 has [fewer moving parts](#) especially when compared against its greatest rival, our very own AR-15. This makes for lower production costs and lower barrier to entry particularly in regard to mass production.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_eQLFVpOYm4

In the late 1950s, the Soviet started licensing other like-minded communist governments, providing them assistance for the manufacture of AK-47s and other derivative designs. A few years after this licensing, factories were churning out AK-47s non-stop.

The sheer number of manufactured rifles, coupled with the deliberate government corruption within the states stockpiling them and the eventual [dissolution of the Warsaw Pact](#) made it impossible to regulate distribution.

From the '70s to '90s, a huge amount of surplus AK-47s were stolen from military arms depots, some were smuggled to countries outside of the Eastern Bloc, and others were just given away to any group that wasn't friends with America or its anti-communist allied countries.

The AK-47 Today

The effects of the unregulated distribution of these surplus communist-manufactured rifles from decades ago can still be observed to this day.

Case in point, it's not uncommon to see [drug cartel members](#) in Mexico carrying AK-47s while going about their daily business. And going back to where this post started, members of Islamist terrorist groups ISIS and Al Qaeda also carry them.

What this all boils down to is in the end, it's the AK-47's strengths as a shooting platform that led to its negative reputation. If you're a responsible gun owner and you happen to own one, you're probably not affected by this.

But if you don't own an AK-47 and you're considering legally purchasing one but you're having second thoughts because of all its bad rap, keep in mind that in the end, a firearm is just like any other purpose-built tool that man can call upon, for better or for worse.