



AK-47

SOVIET FIREARM

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Alternative Titles: Avtomat Kalashnikova, Kalashnikov model 1947

AK-47, also called **Kalashnikov Model 1947**, Soviet [assault rifle](#), possibly the most widely used [shoulder weapon](#) in the world. The initials AK represent Avtomat Kalashnikova, Russian for “automatic Kalashnikov,” for its designer, [Mikhail Timofeyevich Kalashnikov](#), who designed the accepted version of the weapon in 1947.

Almost from the moment of its official adoption by the Soviet military in 1949, the AK-47 was recognized as being simple to operate, rugged, reliable under trying conditions, and [amenable to mass production](#). Built around a 7.62-mm round with a muzzle velocity of some 700 metres per second, it had a cyclic firing rate of 600 rounds per minute and was capable of both semiautomatic and automatic fire. A long curved box magazine held 30 rounds, and a separate gas-return tube above the barrel held a piston that was forced back upon firing to activate the mechanisms that ejected the spent [cartridge](#) and cocked the hammer for the next round. The AK-47 was manufactured in two basic designs, one with a wooden stock and the other, designated the AKS, with a folding metal stock. Beginning in 1959, the AK-47 was replaced in first-line Soviet service by the AKM, a modernized version fitted with longer-range sights and cheaper mass-produced parts, including a stamped sheet-metal receiver and a plywood buttstock and forward grip.



Kalashnikov, Mikhail Timofeyevich

Russian weapons designer Mikhail Timofeyevich Kalashnikov holding his best-known creation, the AK-47, 1997.

Vladimir Vyatkin/AP Images

Despite their obvious advantages, the AK-47 and the AKM were considered by the Soviet military to have problems with accuracy, mainly because of recoil forces generated by the powerful 7.62-mm round and other forces known as [blowback](#) that were generated by the weapons' heavy internal mechanisms. Those problems were partly addressed during the 1970s, when the AKM was replaced by the [AK-74](#), which adapted the basic Kalashnikov design to a smaller 5.45-mm round with a higher muzzle velocity of 900 metres per second. The most recent version of the AK-74, the AK-74M, is currently the main infantry weapon of the Russian army.



Viet Cong

Viet Cong soldier standing with an AK-47, February 1973.

SSGT Herman Kokojan/Department of Defense Media (DD-ST-99-04298)



After the 1970s, research continued into possible successors to the AK-47/74 series, most of them involving some means of reducing the effects of recoil and blowback. One candidate, the AN-94, allowed two rounds to be fired in rapid succession before recoil forces were generated. Other candidates, the AK-107 and AEK-971, introduced mechanical parts whose movements balanced those of the blowback-generating



AK-47 assault rifle

Kurdish soldier holding an AK-47 assault rifle.

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Kalashnikov assault rifles remain the basic shoulder weapons of many armies that once had political and military ties to the [Soviet Union](#), and they have long been the favoured weapon for many guerrilla and nationalist movements throughout the world. The symbolic value of the AK-47 to such movements is demonstrated by its presence on the [coats of arms](#) of numerous countries as well as on the [flag of Mozambique](#). It has been estimated that some 100 million AKs have been produced—fully half of them outside Russia, and many of those under expired Soviet-era licenses or no [license](#) at all. A full range of weapons that can trace their design history back to the AK-47 are produced by the Izhmash armaments company in [Izhevsk](#), Russia.



Mozambique

This article was most recently revised and updated by [Michael Ray](#), Associate Editor.

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Mikhail Timofeyevich Kalashnikov

Mikhail Timofeyevich Kalashnikov, Russian weapons designer (born Nov. 10,



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Visited on 10/02/2019