

Forum: *DISC (Disarmament and International Security Committee)*

Issue: The question of combating illegal arms trade in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region

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Introduction

Illegal arms trade is a major factor in the several ongoing conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa. The illicit arms trade, especially the trade of small arms, increases the violence and the chance of uprisings, conflicts, and escalations in currently unstable parts of the Middle East and North Africa region even more. The best-known example for the impact of illicit arms trade in The Middle East is the situation with the ISIL, a Salafi jihadist terrorist organization with the goal of creating a Sunni Islamic State. There are different ways terrorist organizations receive their arms, the most common being theft of supplies from governments in the MENA region, sales by often corrupt officials of governments or the black market. The black market is a grave threat regarding the issue, since it is happening all over the place and offers arms to, for example, terrorist organizations.

So far, the international community has taken multiple actions in order to regulate the trade, for example the Arms Trade Treaty in 2013, a multilateral, legally-binding agreement that establishes common standards for the international trade of conventional weapons and seeks to reduce the illicit arms trade.

Definition of Key Terms

Small arms

There is no official definition of small arms, but the mostly used definition is revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, assault rifles, sub-machine guns and light machine guns.

The Black Market

Illegal trade of arms takes place on the black market, violating price controls and rationing. Nevertheless, it is no official organization, nor is it one single person. It is a phenomena happening all over the place. It is structured as an illegal network of vendors and their customers, in the MENA region mostly terrorist organizations.

MENA region

There is no official definition the “ MENA region “. It is an acronym referring to the Middle East and North Africa region. Furthermore, it is a mainly Islamic region in which approximately six percent of the worlds population live.

Heavy arms

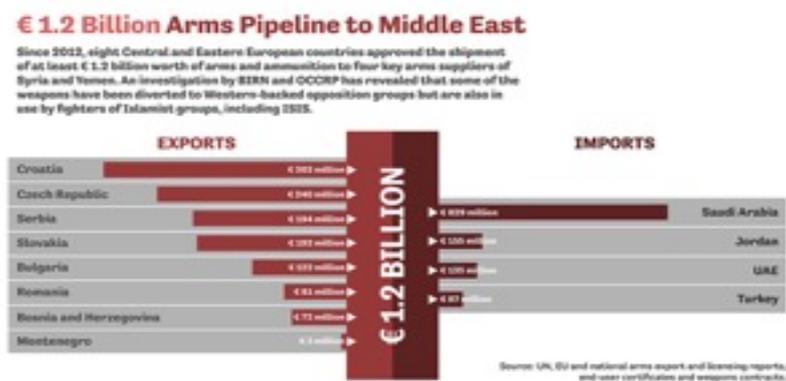
There is no official definition, generally accepted is: Heavy machine guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers of anti-tank missil and rocket systems; portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems (MANPADS); and mortars of calibres of less than 100 mm.

Illicit arms trade

Illicit arms trade is the transfer of or the trade with weapons in their entirety or in pieces in violation of existing national or international laws. This includes the illicit manufacturing and procurement as well as the unregulated distribution of arms.

Background Information

Over the last few years, the Syrian Civil War led to a huge increase in arms trade, in the Middle East and North Africa region. Not only the USA and other big nations exporting arms, sold weapons to Middle Eastern countries, which then again got sold by corrupt government officials or got stolen, and as result reaching Syria and North African countries, even the East European countries sold weapons in the value of 1 billion Euro to these countries.



Middle East

Saudi Arabia is one of the world largest arms importers in the Middle East. Therefore it has a big influence in the arms trade in the MENA-region. Eastern European countries and the other big export countries in arms trade, use to sell many arms to Middle Eastern countries, ranging from Assault rifles, like the AK-74, to tanks like the T-55. A common problem are the granted export licenses in these countries. Some countries assume that Saudi Arabia, provides Islamic groups with weapons. Despite of that, Saudi Arabia used to support their allies in Yemen with these acquired weapons, which then again commit international humanitarian crimes.

North Africa

With the appearance of ISIS, but nevertheless the presence of the Islamic Terrorist Organizations Boko Haram and Al Qaida, the governments of North Africa, have to deal with the illegal arms trade in their countries due to the problems in the Middle East and the increase in Islamic radicalism. Many countries in these region have problems with radical Islamic extremists, which play a big role in the illegal arms trade, for example Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Libya. Main reasons for the radicalization of these people are poverty and high unemployment rate. These things leaves the people without anything but their hope and their religion. Due to this circumstance, people tend to radicalize in their religion in order to fulfill their hopes and get out of their misery. These Extremist engage then in Arms trade to fight the government, which is from their point of view the causer of their misery. Nevertheless, civil wars in South Sudan and Libya led to illicit arms trade, because of problems inside the government or rival groups in countries which seek the control of this territory. Since the fall of the former leader Mummer Quaddafi, Libya possesses many weapons, which have been sold by radicals Islamists to terrorist organizations in the Middle East or even to neighbour countries, which get destabilized.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

United States of America

The USA is the biggest arms exporter in the world. It is responsible for 33% of worldwide exports. Many of these weapons end up in illegal arms trades through the black market and might also get into the hands of criminals in the end.

MENA region

Countries like Jordan or Saudi Arabia get weapons from other countries to deal with problems within their territory, but it is assumed that some corrupt government officials tend to sell these weapons to merchants, which act within the Black Market, to gain benefit from this.

Eastern European countries

These countries sell arms to Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Turkey to help against the Syrian civil war and of course make money. Nevertheless they ignore the risk, that these countries might resell this arms to Islamists groups.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
October 7 th , 2001	USA engages in the Afghani War
March 20 th , 2003	U.S. Invasion of Iraq
December 17 th , 2010	Beggining of Arab Spring through protests in Tunisia, which spread to neighboring countries
October 20 th , 2011	Mummer Quadaffi gets killed and a turmoil begins in Libya
February 23 th , 2013	Influx of weapons to rebels
March 3 th , 2013	Conquest of Raqqa through Islamic Jihadist militants from Al-Nusra Front and other groups like the Free Syrian Army,etc..
March 28 th , 2013	UN's Arms Trade Treaty is created, which regulates the international trade of conventional weapons

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

Please do use either British or American spelling throughout your Research Report. When listing past UN Resolutions, it is suggested that you make use of bullet points and the specified format below:

- United Nations Arms Trade Treaty, 28 March 2013, **(A/CONF.217/2013/L.3)**
- Security Council Resolution on the proliferation of small arms as a threat to peace and security in MENA Region, 7 March 2003 **(SC/RES/1467)**
- Security Council Resolution on Question of Small Arms, Light Weapons, 26 September 2013, **(S/RES/2117)**
- Report of the Secretary General on Small Arms, 22 August 2013 **(S/2013/503)**

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

One of the most important attempts to solve the problem of illegal arms trade was the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) from March 2013. Today it is signed by 130 out of 193 member states and was ratified by 79 of them. Goals of the Treaty are the establishment of highest possible standards and regional control systems for regulating the international trade in conventional arms and the prevention against their illegal trade and diversion (Article 1). This should encourage international and regional peace, security and stability and reduce human suffering in the active zones (Article 1). Before that smaller Attempts were signed and ratified. For example the “Program of Action” (PoA) had the same goals, but only for small weapons. The Program was designed for a long term; in detail it says that the member states should report back their results each year to the United Nations. The Nations did not do mostly this, but there were no consequences or subsidies if the Treaty was not respected.

Possible Solutions

The conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa no matter which kind are always complex and solutions are not always easy to find. This lies justified in unstable political systems and ruling terrorist groups. Many nations, especially in weaker financial regions, are dependent on trading weapons to boost their domestic economy. Possible solutions could be a closer collaboration of governments by banning or controlling the trade of certain weapons to certain areas or stabilizing the region affected by illegal arms trade, e.g. by making the economy less independent from illegal arms trade. Economical support programs or humanitarian missions in the active zones, bound by the United Nations, could achieve this. Other solutions are stricter controls and punishments when member states break an engagement like the Arms Trade Treaty or allow companies to trade in certain regions, which are either not declared as safe or stable.

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