

Research Report

Special Conference on Peace and Justice 1
Peace and Justice amongst the Arab States
Breaking the link between the global illicit arms
trade and civil conflicts within Arab States



MUNISH



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Forum	Special Conference 1
Issue:	Breaking the link between the global illicit arms trade and civil conflicts within Arab States
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Introduction

The civil conflicts that have spread throughout the Arab region since late 2010, known collectively as The Arab Spring, have paved the way for significant political change in Arab nations. However, this change has come at a significant human cost, with violent confrontations still taking place throughout the Arab world today. With the Arab Spring seeing opposition groups and civilian militias arming themselves against governments, the events have caused a significant increase in the demand for illicit weapons, which in conjunction with the capturing of government weapons by opposition forces and regional instability have led to a flourish in the illicit arms trade. These unlawful acquisitions of powerful armaments have been the cause of significant international concern, as the greater number of weapons in circulation on the black market have led to instability within neighboring nations, as well as being a potential source of armament for terrorist groups. Furthermore, the issue of weapons proliferation through illicit channels casts further questions on whether foreign military intervention—in the form of arming opposition forces—will lead to a surge in regional and global insecurity.

Definition of Key Terms

Arab Spring

The term employed to collectively refer to the series of revolutionary demonstrations and civil conflicts that have been taking place in Arab states since late 2010.

Civil Conflict

A conflict between organized groups within a single nation. Also known as a civil war, this type of conflict has erupted throughout states of the Arab region over the past few years, often as a result of armed opposition groups attempting to depose national regimes.

Arab States

By definition of various United Nations organizations, the Arab States include 22 nations: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, the Palestinian Territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. These countries are located in Northern Africa and on the Arabian Peninsula, and are home to about 350 million individuals.



Map of Arab States (in green) Note: Malta is not included

Chemical Armaments

The Chemical Weapons Convention, the foremost international agreement on the regulation of chemical weapons, defines chemical armaments as “any toxic chemical or its precursor that can cause death, injury, temporary incapacitation or sensory irritation through its chemical action. Munitions or other delivery devices designed to deliver chemical weapons, whether filled or unfilled, are also considered weapons themselves.” Chemical

weapons, modern examples of which include nerve gas, are easily dispersed, and often affect civilians as well as their intended military targets as a result.

Small Arms and Light Weapons

For the purpose of this report, these two types of weaponry will be considered together. In broad terms, these types of weapons are armaments that can easily be transported and used by an individual or a small group of individuals. Examples of these weapons include pistols, carbines, assault rifles, rocket launchers, machine guns, grenade launchers, and anti-tank guns. Munitions for these weapons, landmines, and explosives are also comprised in this definition.

Stockpiling

Stockpiling refers to the stocking of weapons of any type that are in excess of what the nation needs at the time for its active military undertakings. These weapons are often kept in reserve for use in cases of shortage, and are stored in weapons caches.

Illicit Arms Trade

The illicit arms trade, also known as the international weapons black market, refers to the channels through which weapons are unlawfully sold to unintended and unlicensed recipients, a practice which is illegal on both national and international levels.

General Overview

The Arab Spring and Weapons Proliferation

The Arab Spring has paved the way for significant political change in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Yemen—nations that saw government overhauls as a result of the uprisings, as well as enabling less critical political change in a host of other Arab nations. Syria has been the scene of a full-scale civil conflict since mid-2011, which to this day sees opposition and governmental forces engaged in armed conflict. These happenings have been the cause of significant instability in the Arab region, with an ensuing breakdown in governmental and regulatory bodies that normally oversee the management of weapons. As a result, the Arab Spring has enabled weapons to leak out of conflict-ridden areas into surrounding countries, fuelling the black market arms trade and violence by non-state actors. At the time of writing this report, international concern rests with the spread of weapons from Libya and Syria. The spread of these weapons can occur in a variety of ways. The majority of illicit weapons are

produced and acquired by their rightful recipients in fully legal and legitimate ways, but fall into the hands of illegitimate actors. During times of chaos and conflict, unscrupulous officials can divert weapons to unintended recipients with ease. While corruption is responsible for a large part of illegal weapons diversion, simple theft from weapons-storage facilities and weapons caches are carried out by gangs or terrorist organizations in times of instability, during which security of these arms is not fully assured. In addition, nations which undergo civil wars see opposition forces—which are often comprised in great part of civilians—arming themselves either through weapons donated by international supporters, or through the capturing of weapons belonging to government forces. In post-conflict situations, this results in a significant surplus of weapons in the hands of non-state actors, which often find their way into the illicit arms trade.

The Dangers of the Illicit Arms Trade

The majority of present-day conflict are fought with small arms and light weapons acquired unlawfully by militias and terrorist groups. The proliferation and use of small arms enables terrorism and the use of child soldiers, as well as promoting regional instability. Because most conflicts are fought using reused weapons—many dating back from the Cold War-era—it is of paramount importance that the flow of these arms is prevented, as they can significantly strengthen the operations of dangerous groups in the long-term. Furthermore, small arms and light weapons are the armaments of choice employed by gangs to terrorize populations and carry out a host of illegal activities of significant social and economic impact.

Libya

Impact of the Arab Spring

The ousting of former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi that occurred in late 2012 marked the end of the Libyan civil war, in which groups opposing the former regime went to arms with its supporters. The civil war was the recipient of significant attention from the international community, and led to the establishment of the National Transitional Council of Libya (NTC), the interim government of the nation, which was dismantled in mid-2012 in the wake of national elections. Throughout the civil war, government weapons caches were routinely captured by opposition forces, which enabled rebel militias to arm themselves with small arms, light weapons, and stockpiles of chemical weapons. Once in the hands of rebels, the tracking of these weapons—which was already insubstantial to begin with—was effectively brought to a standstill, and the whereabouts of thousands of arms suddenly became unknown to both the national government and international regulatory bodies. While these



weapons were primarily used for the purposes of the Libyan civil war, international organizations began voicing concerns in the aftermath of the conflict, during which large stockpiles of weapons remained unregulated and in the possession of civilians and militias.

Pre-Civil War Libyan Possession of Weapons

In order to fully comprehend the proliferation of weapons that ensued as a result of the Libyan civil war, it is essential to analyze the possession of weapons by the Libyan government prior the uprisings, as it is these weapons that are now in the hands of non-state actors. It is known throughout the international community that Gaddafi's government had been developing chemical weapons since the early 1980s, evidenced by the nation's refusal to take part in the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) of 1993—an international agreement that would pave the way towards preventing chemical weapon proliferation. However, after increasing international pressure, Libya relinquished its chemical weapons program in 2004, and ratified the CWC. However, while being a signatory of the convention would prevent Libya from developing additional chemical weapons, the nation was slow in destroying its existing chemical weapon stockpiles. By the end of the Libyan civil war in 2012, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), found that Libya still possessed 45% of its mustard gas supplies, and 60% of its stockpiles of precursor chemicals—chemical agents that are used in the production of chemical weapons. In addition, the OPCW found that the pre-civil war regime had hidden stockpiles of undeclared chemical weapons. However, numerous inspections by the international community have found strong evidence that none of these weapons have found their way into the hands of non-state actors. While the current Libyan government is actively cooperating with the OPCW in destroying and securing its current supplies of chemical weapons, instability in the nation still casts sinister doubts on the possibility of gangs, militias, or terrorist organizations illicitly acquiring these dangerous armaments.

While the proliferation of chemical weapons through Libya poses only a looming threat, the possession of small arms and light weapons in the aftermath of the civil conflict is an issue of immediate importance, which continues to affect the stability of Libya and its neighboring nations. During the conflict, colossal amounts of these weapons were acquired by forces opposing the Gaddafi regime, through

purchases on the international black market and the capturing of government weapon caches. The Gaddafi regime possessed large amounts of small arms and light weapons—enough to supply and exceed the demand of its modern army. As a result, civilian opposition forces found themselves in possession of large amounts of weapons—which could no longer be adequately tracked. The end of the civil war marked a cessation of violent conflict; yet saw little to no disarmament of armed militias taking place. Consequently, these weapons were responsible for fuelling significant instability within Libya, as non-state armed militias continued to exist, and the vast majority of Libyan weapons were now in civilian hands. Combined with a struggling new government and a lack of enforcement and security, many of these weapons transited to other Arab states illegally.

Notable Effects of Weapons Proliferation

In addition to the previously discussed strengthening of militias and gangs, weapons which are not regulated by the government are, according to a United Nations Security Council report dating from April 2013, “spreading at an alarming rate” from Libya. The lack of adequate security forces, government regulation, and the permeability of the Libyan border in the wake of the civil war saw a large amount of these arms find their way onto the international arms black market. The illicit trade of these weapons served to fuel conflicts in neighboring regions, with arms finding their way into Mali, the Gaza Strip, and Syria. Weapons of Libyan origin were in great part responsible for fuelling the 2012 conflicts in Mali, between the Malian government and rebel groups. In October 2012, Israeli military officials noted that shoulder-launched anti-aircraft missiles were fired from the Gaza Strip in an attempt to shoot down an Israeli helicopter. It was the first time that a weapon of such sophistication—which was later found to have been smuggled from Libya—has been used by non-governmental groups, an occurrence which raises serious questions as to the possible modernization of the arsenals of dangerous terrorist organizations through the acquisition of these weapons.

Syria

Impact of the Arab Spring and Proliferation to Terrorist Organizations

The Arab Spring has led Syria to be the scene of a brutal civil war since early 2011, in which Syrian government forces, backing current President Bashar al-Assad, are to this day fighting militarized opposition forces. The Syrian civil war is the bloodiest conflict stemming from the Arab Spring to this date, and the escalating



violence of the conflict is becoming a great cause of concern for the international community, as questions are being raised on the possible terrorist affiliations of opposition forces, the arming of civilian militias, and the eventual aftermath of the conflict. The driving force behind Syria's opposition is the Free Syrian Army (FSA), a moderately organized group of rebel fighters. While the FSA is widely recognized by the international community as the legitimate representative of the Syrian opposition, a multitude of other—less reputable—groups have taken part in both opposing and supporting the Assad regime. Hezbollah and Jabhat al-Nusra, two groups recognized as terrorist organizations by the United States, have taken an active role in the conflict. The former is fighting alongside governmental forces, with the latter is opposed to the regime. As both sides continue to engage in violent armed conflict, it is becoming apparent that a risk of proliferation of weapons to these and other terrorist organizations is a very real threat. The Syrian government is in possession of large stockpiles of advanced chemical weapons, small arms, and light weapons, while opposition forces are acquiring similar weaponry through the capturing of weapons caches, and arms contributions by other Arab states.

The Situation of Syrian Weapons

Prior to the Syrian civil war, the Syrian government began developing chemical weapons in the 1980s, and just like Libya, refused to join the CWC. To this date, the nation has not become a signatory of the convention, and as a result possesses vast arsenals of chemical weapons, primarily composed of dangerous nerve agents such as Sarin gas and VX (an even more potent chemical agent). Syria has developed bombs, shells, and ballistic missiles that are capable of delivering chemical agents at great damage to human life. While these weapons have normally been stored in highly-secure weapons caches, the current instability raises questions about the regime's ability to control these stockpiles, and fears are emerging that terrorist groups could gain access to these weapons in the current chaotic situation. Furthermore, some nations and international organizations have voiced concerns that a desperate regime could transfer chemical weapons to Hezbollah, an allied terrorist organization, in the hopes of winning the conflict. Opposition forces are not known to have captured chemical weapons to this date, and have assured the international community that chemical weapons caches would be secured as soon as an eventual toppling of the Syrian regime occurred. However, the chaotic and escalating nature of the conflict is raising serious doubts about the viability of this plan. To deal with the situation, the United States and some Arab states have formulated plans to secure and destroy chemical weapons arsenals in case of an eventual regime collapse, to

prevent theft and proliferation onto the international illicit arms market. Similarly to occurrences during the Libyan civil war, opposition forces have also armed themselves with small arms and light weapons. *Note: due to the rapidly changing situation of Syrian chemical weapons, it is recommended that delegates consult news sources prior to the conference, as the information contained in this research report, written in June 2013, may no longer be up-to-date.*

Aftermath of Conflict

Serious concerns exist with the eventual aftermath of the Syrian civil war, in which great amounts of weapons will be in non-state actors' hands, which along with a chaotic national scene will prove favorable to many of these uncontrolled weapons being illegally sold to terrorist organizations, gangs, or armed militias to fuel conflicts in neighboring regions.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

United Nations Security Council

The United Nations Security Council has been actively involved in tracking the illicit flow of weapons out of Libya, and is especially concerned with the current situation in Syria, and is drafting measures for potential intervention in a post-conflict situation in order to seize or destroy weapons caches.

Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)

The OPCW is particularly concerned with preventing the proliferation of chemical weapons, and shares its expertise in the detection and proper disposal of chemical weapons with other United Nations bodies and national governments, as well as monitoring and inspecting nations' stockpiles of chemical weapons.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

NATO is currently working in conjunction with the United States and Arab states to monitor the transit of weapons in Syria, ensuring plans are in place to seize these weapons before they enter the illicit weapons market.

International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL)

INTERPOL has enabled United Nations member states to access shared databases on weapons, enabling international cooperation in the prevention of illicit weapons trading, as well as providing states with the tools to monitor and track the movement of arms.

United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA)

The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs has repeatedly pushed for increased legislation to prevent illicit weapons trading, in addition to carefully monitoring the state of weapon stockpiles around the world. Recently, it has been attempting to ratify the Arms Trade Treaty among UN member states, which would enable better tracking of weapons transfers, as well as curbing diversion of weapons.

Syria

With civil conflict having raged in Syria since early 2011 between government and rebel forces, it is becoming apparent that a risk of proliferation of weapons non-state actors and terrorist organizations is a very real threat. The Syrian government is in possession of large stockpiles of advanced chemical weapons, small arms, and light weapons, while opposition forces are acquiring similar weaponry through the capturing of weapons caches, and arms contributions by other Arab states.

Libya

Throughout the Libyan civil war of 2012, government weapons caches were routinely captured by opposition forces, which enabled rebel militias to arm themselves with small arms, light weapons, and stockpiles of chemical weapons. While the current government is cooperating with international regulatory bodies in order to destroy and regulate its stockpile of weapons, instability in the nation still raises concerns about the possible illicit proliferation of weapons to non-state actors.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1980s	Libya and Syria Begin Developing Chemical Weapons
January 13, 1993	Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) First Signed by UN Member States
July 9-20, 2001	United Nations Conference on Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons
February 4, 2004	Libya Relinquishes its Chemical Weapons Programme and Signs the CWC
February 15, 2011	Beginning of the Libyan Civil War

March 15, 2011	Beginning of Syrian Civil War
October 23, 2011	End of Libyan Civil War, National Transitional Council Takes Power
August 8, 2012	Libyan National Transitional Council Hands Power to Elected National Congress

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- United States Non Proliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining and Related Program
- Chemical Weapons Convention of 1993
- UN Conference on Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons of 2001
- European Union Code of Conduct on Arms Exports
- United Nations Program of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects
- UN Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition
- Towards an Arms Trade Treaty, 6 December 2006 (**A/RES/61/89**)
- General and Complete Disarmament, 10 January 2002 (**A/RES/56/24**)
- Addressing the negative humanitarian and development impact of the illicit manufacture, transfer and circulation of small arms and light weapons and their excessive accumulation, 6 January 2006 (**A/RES/60/68**)
- Assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and collecting them, 8 January 2003 (**A/RES/57/70**)

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

While a variety of international treaties have paved the way for preventing the proliferation of weapons, attention has only recently begun shifting towards ensuring the prevention of weapons proliferation from civil conflicts in Arab states. Methods that have been used in other conflict zones, detailed in the “Possible Solutions” section of this research report, such as the post-conflict disarmament of civilians and militias, increasing the traceability of



weapons, and the ratification of international weapons treaties have all proved effective in preventing weapons proliferation in the past, and may be effective in curbing weapons proliferation from Arab states.

Possible Solutions

Post-Conflict Disarmament of Civilians and Militias

The post-conflict disarmament of civilians and militias is of enormous importance in ensuring that the weapons they acquired during times of war do not remain in the hands of non-government actors, where they are at great risk of entering the weapons black market. Due to the unstable condition of national governments and security forces, and well as the breakdown of regulatory bodies in post-conflict situations, international intervention can be of great benefit to ensuring the disarmament of the civilian population. This can be done through weapons collection campaigns—which may offer monetary compensation in exchange for weapons—and willing cooperation from civilians and militias. However, some form of sanctions or military intervention may be required in cases where large armed non-state groups refuse to yield the weapons they acquired during the conflict. Furthermore, the international community should ensure that weapon surpluses are destroyed in the aftermath of civil conflicts, to prevent the theft of weapons by unlawful groups.

Weapons Accountability from Peacekeeping Forces

International peacekeeping forces that are deployed to areas of civil conflict are also at significant risk of weapon theft and diversion, as effective methods of accounting for lost weapons and ammunition are not in place. Furthermore, more effective methods for monitoring weapons should be developed to ensure that weapons belonging to peacekeeping forces are continuously monitored throughout their deployment, and that any losses of weapons are accounted for—resulting in the eventual recuperation of these weapons.

Increasing the Traceability of Weapons

While a few international databases and tracing mechanisms already exist to monitor the origin and location of weapons, more needs to be done on the grounds of international cooperation. The traceability of all legally-produced weapons would enable the easy detection of weapons diversion, as well as enabling law enforcement agencies to trace back the last legal owner of the weapon, who could then be held accountable for any unlawful



deeds committed with those weapons—a step which would greatly reduce the incentive for corrupt industry, government, or military individuals to knowingly allow weapons diversions.

Strengthening Border Controls in Times of Crises

During times of civil conflict, weapons flow through a vulnerable nation's scarcely-guarded borders with ease. To prevent this from occurring, other states with direct borders to the nation in question should seek to strengthen border controls in order to prevent the unlawful transport of weapons across borders.

Ratification and Enforcement of Illicit Weapons Trafficking Laws

Many Arab nations continue to have loosely regulate private sector arms sales, which allows dishonest arms brokers to divert or sell weapons to unintended parties. While this would in large part be curbed by the increased traceability of weapons, strong national legislation also needs to exist to punish those guilty of illegal weapons trafficking—both in nations undergoing civil turmoil, and in neighboring states—to ensure that criminals who partake in the illegal trade can be adequately punished, and that the weapons they were in the process of selling are destroyed.

Ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty

The Arms Trade Treaty is an international agreement of tremendous importance to the issue of illicit arms trading, which is at the time of writing still being discussed by the United Nations, and has not yet been ratified. The Arms Trade Treaty would include strong measures against the selling of arms to illicit traffickers, as well as requiring nations to keep open and up-to-date databases on arms transfers. In addition, the treaty stipulates that nations enhance control systems on a national level, by increasing security of weapon-storage facilities and requiring increased checks and assurances during transfer processes. Furthermore, signatories to the treaty would be required to ensure appropriate measures are taken to ensure that diverted weapons, or weapons that appear to go missing are found and accounted for.

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