Disarmament Commission

Preventing illegal arms trade in the Middle East

4th, 5th and 6th of March 2016
Introduction

On 19 October 2014 the US army dropped 28 packages with small arms and ammunition for Kurdish forces defending the city of Kobani from Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). ISIL claimed to have picked up at least one package and showed this in a video. The US government could do nothing, but confirm.

Illegal arms trade is a major factor in the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, of course the most obvious example is seen in the situation with ISIL. The trade in illegal arms, especially the trade of small arms, increases the violence and increases the chance of escalating in parts of the Middle East that are currently stable. Multiple actions have been taken by the international community in order to regulate the trade. Though it does not yet show much improvement. The main purpose of combating illegal arms trade is not to combat the illegal arms trade to citizens, but to terrorist organizations, criminal organizations or other destabilizing non-state groups. But the problem not only lies within the Middle East. It also passes seas and borders. It is a problem with causes all around the world.

Definition of Key Terms

Small arms

There is no official definition for small arms, but the generally accepted definition is: revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, assault rifles, sub-machine guns and light machine guns.

Heavy arms

Once again, 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 missile and rocket systems; portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems (MANPADS); and mortars of calibres of less than 100 mm.

The Black Market
The black market isn’t a single person or country, nor is it an organization. The black market is the illegal network of traffickers, terrorists and criminal organizations where the arms are sold. They are of course heavily involved, since a lot of illegal transactions take place via the black market.

General overview
The Middle East is a region that is known to be unstable. Throughout history there never has been a single moment, which can be regarded as peace. Currently, the most critical situations in the Middle East are the situation in Syria and the question of ISIL. Separate rebel or terrorist groups fuel both conflicts. The non-state parties that are fighting in the conflicts usually get their weaponry via the black market.

How legal arms turn illegal
To understand the problem, it is from the most utter importance to understand the idea of legal and illegal. There is a variety of different ways.

Legal firearms can turn illicit when a country or state pretends to be buying the arms for themselves, whilst actually planning to use the arms for illicit purposes. For instance: a company believes to be supplying arms to the police force in country A, country A however never has had the intention to use these arms in their own country, but gives the arms to rebels in country B, hoping to benefit from the outcome.

Furthermore, corruption is a big problem. The arms that are imported to a country may, at some point, get into hands of officials that are willing to financially benefit from it, they sell the weapons to an organization of some sort, just because they make a profit out of it.

Thirdly, the weapons may be stolen from stockpiles, and thus reach their way to an illicit organization.

Since the Arab Spring, there has been no sign of impact on the policies of the top exporters, ignoring the evidence that their export products are used for illicit purposes.
main exporters are the USA, Russia, China, Germany, France and the UK. Together, they have a market share of roughly 75%.

The black market is yearly makes about 1 billion dollars via arms trade each year. The market functions as a circuit, the goods go from one person to another, which makes them difficult to track. Traffickers often rely on counterfeit documents, or corrupt officials. They generally disguise their illegal goods as humanitarian products.

Corruption is a massive factor in the illicit arms trade: government officials often sell weapons, or aid traffickers. They are open to bribery and are willing to cooperate. Transparency International has made an index on the corruption of a state regarding arms trade, in the critical risk-category F, 50% are Middle Eastern countries. Corruption in arms trade makes up for about 40% of all corruption worldwide, and is thus extremely difficult to battle.

Big steps have been taken with the implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty in 2013, the treaty aims to “establish and maintain a national control system, including a national control list” and “designate competent national authorities in order to have an effective and transparent national control system regulating the transfer of conventional arms”\(^1\). It also prohibits transfers that do not follow the requirements in the treaty.

**Major Countries and Organizations Involved**

**The Middle Eastern governments**

The governments of the Middle Eastern countries are of course involved. They can’t battle the trade on their own, seeing that the roots often lie outside of their countries. The ongoing conflicts in the Middle East also heavily influence the trade, whereas more arms create more violence. The governments all have their own goals and do not always cooperate well. To tackle the issue, the governments will have to cooperate.

**The United States of America (USA)**

The USA is currently the leading exporter of weapons all around the world. With a market share of 31% it is rising together with the Russian Federation (27%) way above the other countries. Of course, the companies that export the arms don’t directly sell their goods to a criminal organization. However, it is often believed that these organizations do get their

\(^1\) [http://www.un.org/disarmament/ATT/docs/ATT_text_(As_adopted_by_the_GA)-E.pdf](http://www.un.org/disarmament/ATT/docs/ATT_text_(As_adopted_by_the_GA)-E.pdf)
hands on new equipment via the black market. The US government does have an interest in keeping the export, due to the fact that a part of the money earned goes into research and development.

**Timeline of Events**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description of event</th>
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<tr>
<td>July 20, 2001</td>
<td>Adoption of the Programme of Action</td>
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<td>August 31, 2001</td>
<td>First SC meeting on small arms</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 7, 2003</td>
<td>First SC resolution on Small arms</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 8, 2005</td>
<td>Adoption of the International Tracing Instrument</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 28, 2013</td>
<td>Arms Trade Treaty is created</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 22, 2015</td>
<td>Most recent resolution by the Security council created</td>
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**Relevant UN Treaties and Events**

- Security Council Resolution on the proliferation of small arms as a threat to peace and security in West Africa, 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)*
- Security Council Resolution on small arms that contained new provisions aiming to strengthen UN coordination and action on small arms, promote effective implementation of UN arms embargoes and support the Arms Trade Treaty, 22 May 2015, *(SC/RES/2220)*

**Previous Attempts to solve the Issue**

The question of illicit arms trade is an issue that has been rising the past few decades. Thus there are not a whole lot of previous attempts. The most important attempt is
the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), it is signed by 130 out of 193 member states, and is ratified by 79 countries. The treaty is a legally binding agreement that regulates the arms trade and that establishes standards for the international trade. Its aim is to require countries to regulate the flow of weapons across their border: “establish and maintain a national control system, including a national control list” and “designate competent national authorities in order to have an effective and transparent national control system regulating the transfer of conventional arms”. It also prohibits transfers that do not follow the requirements in the treaty.

Before the ATT there was a Programme of Action (PoA) by the General Assembly. This programme aimed to “Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects”. It was a multi-year action plan and it was meant to work for a long time. Every country had to report to the UN every year, the first few years this worked properly. But as time passed by, less and less countries submitted their report. In 2013 only very few countries submitted their reports.

Possible Solutions

In order to solve the issue at hand, delegates must realise how vastly spread the problem is. Delegates must realise that for some countries the arms trade is of high importance. A solution could be found in regulating the trade even more. When trade is regulated, it is easier to make sure that the weapons will not be used for illicit purposes.

Another possibility is the idea of marking the weapons, marking them in a way that when found to be used for illicit purposes one can find out as well as the exporter as the importing party.

Bibliography


**Appendix or Appendices**

Arms trade treaty, full text:  
http://www.un.org/disarmament/ATT/docs/ATT_text_(As_adopted_by_the_GA)-E.pdf

The first SC resolution on small arms:  

The original Programme of Action on Small Arms:  