



# COUNTERING ILLICIT ARMS TRANSFERS IN THE MENA REGION: THE CASE OF YEMEN AND LIBYA

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## SUMMARY

This policy paper aims to explore the new flows and trade of illicit arms across the MENA region that have created and continue to feed ongoing conflicts, most notably in Libya, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. This situation threatens the human and national security of the region's nations. Combatting war economy activities in war-ridden countries will be a critical issue in the post-conflict context, and this pertains to countering small arms and light weaponry transfers that may reignite conflicts on both communal and ethnic levels. Examining illicit arms transfers in Libya and Yemen, the paper draws policy options that address the economic, social, and political aspects of this threat. Consequently, it will investigate the existing international legal framework and mechanisms employed by regional and international organizations such as the African Union (AU) and the UN, as well as how to fill the gap between them and the national authorities in charge of stemming out this threat.

## MAPPING OUT CONFLICT AND ARMS TRAFFICKING IN THE MENA REGION

Legal arms and weaponry owned by the state and law enforcement are essential to peace and stability. Illicit arms transfer is key to enduring conflicts, social strife, and crime, notably terrorism. Illicit arms transfer or arms trafficking can be defined as those arms and weaponry possessed, stored, traded, and used in clear violation of national and/or international laws and without official government consent or control; these transfers may involve corrupt government officials acting on their own for personal gain (see Small Arms Survey definitions). Basically, non-state actors, whether they are terrorist organizations, militias, or criminal gangs, are the most relevant to the illicit arms transfer; nevertheless, states are major players in this trade since they are the main manufacturers and suppliers of illicit arms. For example, while the arms trafficking black market is dominated by criminal and trafficker groups, the illicit grey market arms transfer refers to deals done by governments, or their clients and agents, exploiting loopholes or intentionally circumventing national and international laws governing arms trade.

By applying this understanding to illicit arms trade in the MENA region, this paper tends to focus on the implications of the arms proliferation of small arms and light weaponry (SALW) that refer to 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 missiles and rocket systems, etc. Therefore, proliferation in this regard does not include the use of non-conventional arms such as nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, which are subject to a different non-proliferation set of policies.

In the MENA region, illicit arms transfer is both a cause and effect of the unfolding armed conflicts that continue to rage on. While arms trafficking had been always around the corner before the Arab Uprisings in 2011, and mostly related to the state-softness and the states' clientelist political structure, the disintegration of the Arab states in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Libya gave rise to illicit arms trafficking and other criminal activities. Moreover, the rise of violent non-state actors and their trans-border networks, and the intensification of the regional geopolitical rivalries, namely between Russia, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt in addition to the EU and USA, turned the conflict into prolonged proxy wars where local and national warring parties are provided with arms and funds to gain political ground.

Setting aside direct military intervention by some of these powers in the conflicts of the four war-ridden countries, these interventions were in violation of the UN-imposed embargo designed to disarm the national conflict parties, be it national parties such as the Government of National Accord (GNA) and Libyan National Army (LNA) in Libya, the Assad Regime in Syria, or terrorist groups such as ISIS and Al Qaeda across the region. On the other hand, the

proliferation of arms, especially SALW, is perpetuating conflicts in many ways. It sustains the power balance between conflicting parties; and it entrenches war economy activities, such as human trafficking, drugs, and goods allowing local criminal organizations to become armed to the teeth. Additionally, it deteriorates social stability since it fuels communal and social strife, especially in sectarian, tribal, or ethnic conflicts, which is an underlying cause for most of the Arab civil wars. For these socio-economic and political reasons, disarmament and arms control is integral to post-conflict stabilization and regional security.

The new flows of arms trafficking in the MENA need to factor in the spike of “legal” arms flows into the region. Whether to meet the worsening security environment or to channel arms and military resources to proxies, the region’s powers have increased their military purchase exponentially. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, in its annual report released March 2020, claimed that Qatar increased its arms import by 631%, Egypt by 212%, Saudi Arabia by 130%, and imports increased by 61% across the region between 2015 and 2019 (Wesemann et al, 2020).

Illicit arms trade in the MENA before 2011 was limited in scope and channelled into specific conflict zones via state-sponsored routes. For example, Iranian arms were smuggled across the Iraqi-Iranian borders to militias and groups resisting the US occupation. In addition, arms and fighters smuggled into Iraq under the Assad regime watch; Iran and Syria collaborated in efforts to enhance the Lebanese Hizbollah’s strategic arsenal and to support Hamas in its several military confrontations with Israel. The scope and methods of arms trafficking have dramatically changed where routes and channels now extend from Libya to the Levant eastward, the West of Africa westward, and from Yemen to the African Horn. While smuggling across unguarded borders remains, maritime lanes are commonly used to channel Iranian arms into Yemen across the Arabian Sea. Additionally, the Mediterranean has been overtly used to pour Turkish arms and mercenaries into the Libyan conflict. Furthermore, it is worth noting that MENA’s conflict zones are not only receiving smuggled arms, but they also turned into a source of illicit arms and focal points of smuggling activities.

## THE FLOW OF ARMS INTO YEMEN

In March 2015, Saudi Arabia teamed up with its Arab allies to launch a military coalition in Yemen. Operation Decisive Storm, as it was called, included several air-strikes against the Iran-backed Houthis who had taken over the capital, Sana’a, along with the Houthi’s old foe, the late former president Ali Abdullah Saleh. As the conflict in Yemen rages on, Yemenis continue to be dragged through a proxy war fuelled by Iran and Gulf states. In just over five years, Yemen has seen government officials and their family members assassinated, the death of thousands of innocent civilians, and undoubtedly the most pressing humanitarian crisis in the past decade.

Much of this suffering is due to the 40-60 million weapons possessed by inhabitants, according to a 2018 UN estimate (DW, 2018); that figure makes Yemen the world’s second most heavily armed country after the United States (Horton, 2017). However, arms trafficking is hardly new to Yemen. Long before Operation

Decisive Storm and even before the uprising that led to President Saleh’s resignation in 2011, Yemen was already an arms-trafficking hub with well-established smuggling networks. What is new, however, is the types and quantities of weapons now being discovered across the country. Arms markets flood the streets of Yemen—from the Houthi-controlled capital of Sana’a to the provisional capital of Aden in an area now controlled by the Emirati-backed Southern Transitional Council.

Videos have surfaced showing various competing factions and militant groups in Yemen armed with American weaponry that had originally been sent to Saudi Arabia and the UAE (Elbagir et al, 2019). These included abandoned US army vehicles like Navistar multi-role armoured vehicles (MRAVs), made for the UAE, under the control of militias and even the Houthis. American anti-tank TOW missiles were also airdropped by Saudi Arabia into Yemen in 2015, but their end users are still unknown.

Another report also revealed the overwhelming presence of European weapons—also meant for Saudi Arabia and the UAE—in Yemen (DW, 2018). The report highlighted that Al Qaeda acquired German-made MG3 machine guns. Rocket launchers (RPG-32), which were assembled in Jordan in partnership with Russia and intended for use by the UAE, have also appeared in videos published by Al Qaeda. The Abu Al Abbas Brigade fighters are armed with HG 85 hand grenades made by Swiss producer RUAG Ammotec for the UAE. Austrian assault rifles (Steyr AUG) intended for Saudi Arabia have ended up in the hands of the *Al-Islah* Party, which has ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. The Belgian machine gun FN MINIMI has appeared among several factions. Interestingly, even the Houthi rebels had gained access to G3 assault rifles made by Saudi Arabia with a special license from German manufacturer Heckler & Koch. Saudi Arabia had airdropped these rifles into Yemen to support the ongoing battles. Sources from within the Yemeni Resistance Forces said that they would often sell their weapons when short on cash, since it was common for them not to receive their salaries.

These reports are worrisome for several reasons; they are responsible for prolonging the conflict in Yemen, and there are the obvious repercussions of these weapons falling into the wrong hands. They also show some of the GCC countries' indifference when it comes to international law. International arms transfers are traditionally bound by end-user certificates, which certify that the buyer is the sole user of the weapons and materials purchased. The transfer of any item within an agreement to third parties is categorically prohibited. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have been repeatedly accused of violating their end-user certificates by providing material and financial support—including U.S. and European military hardware—to members of their military coalition, President 'Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi's forces, and more notably the National Resistance Forces (NRF). The NRF consists of armed proxy groups such as the Giants Brigade and the Abu Al Abbas Brigade, a Salafi militia with ties to Al Qaeda. Interestingly, Saudi Arabia and the UAE had joined the United States in classifying the Abu Al Abbas Brigade as a terrorist organization in October 2017. Yet the brigade's spokesman, Radwan al-Hashidi, has declared that their relationship with Saudi Arabia has persisted despite this classification. Furthermore, the Saudi-led coalition is framing its actions as legiti-

mate since they claim they are acting on behalf of the exiled Mansour Hadi's government.

The European Union's official website claims that "EU foreign and security policy seeks to preserve peace" and "develop and consolidate respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms." (European Union 2019) The EU's policy on arms sales, the 2008 Common Position, even entrusts member states with ensuring that countries receiving weapons transfers respect international human rights and humanitarian law, which Saudi Arabia and its allies have blatantly disregarded in Yemen. Still, weapon sales to the Gulf persist. On the other hand, Germany, France, and Italy have either limited or completely discontinued arms sales to Turkey for its actions in northern Syria. The lack of any similar action to Saudi Arabia has raised questions about the EU's double standards. After the murder of Jamal Khashoggi in October 2018, Germany finally reconsidered its position by slamming the brakes on a EUR 400 million arms deal with the Kingdom and put a moratorium in place.

In the United States, serious concerns have also been raised about military actions in the Arabian Peninsula and the massive US arms trade with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf allies. Senator Chris Murphy, the top Democrat on the Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Near East, South Asia, Central Asia, and Counterterrorism, has said that "the Saudis have been violating the rules of conflict for years now" by using U.S.-made bombs to "intentionally drop them on civilians." (Murphy, 2018) After all, the Saudi-led coalition has hit medical facilities run by Doctors Without Borders five times since 2015 and even bombed a school bus in *Dahyan* in 2018, killing at least 29 children and wounding 30. In July 2019, the Republican-controlled Senate voted in favor of blocking a USD 8.1 billion arms sale to Saudi Arabia and the UAE in a bipartisan effort, citing concern over Saudi and Emirati human rights abuses and their actions in Yemen. President Donald Trump vetoed the measure, and the Senate failed to reach the two-thirds majority needed to override the veto. Trump had also vetoed previous legislation to end U.S. military involvement in Yemen.

Ironically, the weapons that the United States sends to allies in the Gulf may well end up being used against Americans, considering that a significant quantity now lies in the hands of its enemies. That has not stopped the Trump administration from seeking out new multi-billion-dollar arms deals.



In May 2020, Senator Robert Menendez (D), a senior ranking member on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, revealed that the State Department was working on the sale of thousands of precision-guided bombs to Saudi Arabia (Cohen, 2020). Congress is unlikely to revamp efforts to halt arms sales to the Gulf, as the chances of garnering enough support across the aisle to prevent another presidential veto are slim.

On the other hand, Iran did not hold back any effort to pour arms into Yemen supporting the Houthis. Iranian arms were being transferred through Omani borders according to US sources. These shipments included anti-ship missiles, explosives, surface-to-surface short-range missiles and small arms, in addition to money and personnel (Bayoumi & Stewart, 2016). Iranian missiles were effective in giving the Houthis the upper hand against Riyadh and its allies. The Houthi movement used the missiles and drones to fire against some sensitive Saudi facilities such as Riyadh Airport in 2018 and claimed the responsibility for the Aramco Attack the following year. According to the Saudi-led coalition, Iran is accused of smuggling arms to the Houthis using the Hodeida port by the IRGC (Naar, 2020). Saudi media outlets accused Iran's major ally, the Lebanese Hizbollah, of trafficking Iranian arms to the Houthis mainly via maritime routes. There was no proof, however, to this accusation. However, Hizbollah rhetorically supports the Houthis and operationally provides train-assist-missions on a small scale, due to the limited needs of the already battle-hardened Houthis, who already have access to weaponry and expertise from the Yemeni military units that joined them (IISS, 2019).

The UNSC 2216 resolution, unanimously adopted in 2015, requires state members to take the necessary actions to prevent the direct and indirect supply or sale of arms to the Yemeni combatants including the Houthis and other militias (UN, 2015). In 2018, the UN panel experts report on Yemen concluded that Iran violated the arms embargo not by direct supply, but by failing to prevent the Houthis from obtaining Iranian missiles (Gladstone, 2018). The report served as a foundation to another resolution meant to pressure Iran to comply with the arms embargo; however, this attempt was aborted by a Russian veto. The veto led to the adoption of another resolution that omitted any mention of Iranian activities (DW, 2018). The arms embargo on Yemen and the measures taken to impose it are still subject to international stakeholder subjectivity, whether it's Riyadh's Western allies who condemn Iranian activities, while they themselves maintain arms deals with Riyadh, or whether it is Russia that capitalizes on the West's failure to end the human misery and the conflict in Yemen.

## **ARMS FLOW IN LIBYA: DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN FACTORS**

Following the collapse of the Gaddafi Regime in 2011, Libya turned out to be a hotbed for illicit economic activities including weapons, drug, and human trafficking and smuggling goods (Basar, 2012; Bromley et al, 2018; Shaw & Mangan, 2014). While the Gaddafi regime had permissive policies towards these activities, the collapse of its political power and the failure of the state-building process created decentralized and pervasive war economy activities and networks that go beyond Libya's borders connecting the Sahara with the southern shores of the Mediterranean (Shaw & Mangan, 2014). Of all these illicit activities, arms transfer is the most vital and dangerous. Weapons trafficking took prominence due to the fragile economic and political situation characterized by the prolonged civil war between the GNA and the LNA, tribal and inter-city hostilities, the diffusion of militias and organized crime, in addition to the increasing military and economic intervention of foreign powers. It is weaponry, in these circumstances, that have been critical to buying protection, threatening others, and holding control over illicit markets required to fund continued military dominance and influence (Bromley et al, 2018).

Before the conflict in Libya 2011, the country was one of the largest and most diverse owners of conventional weapons in Africa and had one of the world's highest rates of civilian gun ownership. Even before 2011, Libya was one of the main sources of illicit arms transfer to its neighbouring states. This trade was largely controlled by the groups operating under the consent and the oversight of the Gaddafi regime. While this trend complicated political and societal tensions, it also integrated the private arms culture within Libyan society (Bowsher et al, 2018). During the civil war between Ghaddafi's regime and the rebels, and under the NATO operation's watch, countries like UAE



and Qatar provided the necessary arms to the rebels to topple the regime without observing end-user protocols (Das, 2019). The deteriorating security situation after the defeat of the regime was enough of an incentive for the ordinary citizen to pile up arms under the pretext of defending their homes. The situation on the ground now is no different from 2011.

To draw a clear picture of the flow of arms into and across Libya, we suggest clustering two common sources of flows: diversion of legal arms stockpiles and transfers to non-state actors.

Regarding the former, the poorly guarded stockpiles of the Gaddafi regime were systematically looted and diverted to the rebels and city-militias across the country. In addition to the huge number of small arms and light weaponry (SALW), arms leaks included heavy weaponry and ammunition (Bromley et al., 2018; Kartas, 2013). Visual evidence circulated after the collapse of the central authority and the disintegration of the police forces suggests that carrying weapons and seizing tanks and military vehicles was routine in post-Gaddafi Libya (Basar, 2012).

The country also witnessed competition between militias over the seizure of the stockpiles, which led to catastrophic consequences. Needless to say, a large number of SALW were diverted to terrorist groups such as *Ansar Al-Shari'a*, which was responsible for the murder of the US ambassador to Libya in September 2012 (Bade, 2016). The incident caused an outcry within and outside of Libya and shed light on the issue of arms diffusion in Libya. The transitional government called for collecting leaked arms from militias and integrating them into a national army; however, very few condoned the call. Most of the militias worked autonomously and with impunity (Habboush & Shuaib, 2012). This exacerbated the political situation and greatly contributed to the current unfolding situation.

The conflict in Libya became more internationalized in its second stage since 2014, while the UNSC arms embargo on Libya has been ineffective (Kiam & Schultz, 2018). Successive UN expert reports indicate that main regional and international players, namely the UAE, Qatar, Turkey, Egypt, Russia, and France are providing their allies and their affiliated groups, the GNA and LNA, with heavy artillery, anti-tank missiles, drones, and other heavy weaponry to influence the military situation on the ground (Robinson, 2020).

After limiting the presence of ISIS groups, the introduction of security contractors (the Russian Wagner group and the Turkish Sadat groups) and Syrian, Sudanese, and Chadian mercenaries dominated the Libyan scene as of late 2019. Arms and human transfers have become a subject of legal controversies where each warring party is claiming legitimacy and claiming to be a state actor. Nevertheless, both the UN-recognized GNA and LAN are operating in a coalition with illegitimate militias. The GNA forces, for example, lack a structured military hierarchy and are composed of city-based militias whose leaders are sanctioned and involved in the illicit trafficking of drugs, humans, and arms. The House of Representatives affiliated with LNA is also working with similar groups, but with more control (Lacher, 2019). As a result, most of the weaponry poured into Libya by other actors fall into the hands of these non-state actors – mainly profiteers of war economy activities who are more interested in perpetuating the conflict than in ending it.

The spill-over effect of the Libyan conflict has allowed it to embroil neighbouring regions (White, 2014). Several reports indicate that leaked Libyan arms were used



extensively in the conflict in Sudan, the insurgency in Sinai, and were found to be used as far as Syria and Gaza. Moreover, due to uncontrolled borders, leaked Libyan weaponry fed the conflict between the Tuareg and the state of Mali and reached the shores of West Africa, and were used by terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Boko Haram in the Sahel. The Eastern border with Algeria and Tunisia (Kartas, 2013) also witnessed several Libyan refugees carrying personal arms that were leaked.

In addition to the chaotic situation, the online market introduced a new platform for trading leaked Libyan arms. According to the Small Arms Survey report (2016), SALW manufactured in 26 countries were offered for sale or trade-in on the illicit online market in Libya. Most of these arms had been imported by the Gaddafi regime and were listed as part of its arsenal. Most trades are conducted under the context of sport, hobbies, self-defence, or with commercial benefit in mind. But some participants involved in the illicit online arms trade have strong ties to Libyan militia groups (Small Arms Survey, 2016). Remarkably, most of the purchasers and traders involved in online trafficking are private individuals aged between 16 and 30 from different backgrounds and who are actively using social media platforms to carry out these deals. Reportedly, most of these dealers express a sense of social distrust towards the police, warring factions, militias, and local chieftains as a solid reason to seek private arms (Jenzen-Jones & McCollum, 2017). Needless to say, the continuing conflict in Libya is steadily descending into a stalemate and chaos is deepening this sense and threatening post-conflict stabilization.

## **INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL REGIMES FOR ARMS CONTROL**

Despite the absence of a regional security architecture, the region is not lacking legal mechanisms to guide and to report the control of conventional and SALW flows into conflict zones in Libya, Yemen, Syria and Iraq. The UN program of Action on SALW (UNPOA) in 2001 and the 2013 Arms Trade Treaty are the most important tools in this regard. These instruments, combined and put into force, can effectively control manufacturing, storing, trading, and transferring conventional arms and SALW. In addition, they connect the regime in control to broader concerns of maintaining human rights, international (humanitarian) law, and conflict prevention.

Furthermore, the Middle East and North Africa are also covered by regional control frameworks designed by the League of Arab States (LAS) and the African Union (AU). Since early 2000, the LAS was active on arms trafficking issues, and it supported the UN POA and adopted the Arab Model Law on “Weapons, ammunition and hazardous material” in 2002. The LAS also participated actively in the regional dialogue with the EU and Mediterranean countries concerning security cooperation including controlling SALW trafficking.

The AU has developed very advanced frameworks on arms control and conflict prevention due to the long legacy of conflict and peacebuilding on the continent. The 2000 Bamako Declaration was the first common position taken by the whole continent on illicit proliferation, circulation, and trafficking of SALW. It was reinforced by the 2011 “AU Strategy on Control of Illicit Proliferation, Circulation and Trafficking SALW,” which includes effective mechanisms of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR), information exchange, and capacity building of state agencies. The declaration of the AU’s “Silencing the Guns Owning Future” initiative in 2016 was another attempt to end all forms of conflict and violence in the continent by 2020. While it is an ambitious plan, it is far from being implemented given the unfolding conflicts and civil wars, in Libya and the Horn of Africa in particular.

Notwithstanding these frameworks, regional and international actors do not tend to pursue any control over arms flows. It is in the best interest of the world’s biggest exporter of arms to maintain a high demand for arms. For the US, Russia, China, and other superpowers, the region is an ideal market for concluding arms deals. Between 2012-2017, of the world largest importers of arms, five countries were in the MENA. The volatility of regional security and the pervasiveness of actual and looming conflict support these mechanisms.



In this context, observing final-user-certificate regulations is a critical factor. A 2018 SIPRI report shows that during the Arms Trade Treaty Negotiating Conference (ATT), while some countries pushed for using a language that outlaws any arms transfer without the approval of both the importing and exporting states, others, notably the US, blocked such clauses because they wished to maintain supply of arms to their allies that included rebel groups (Bromley et al., 2018). This attitude, replicated by other regional powers such as the UAE and Turkey, was mostly understood in the context of the Syrian war, where Washington designed intelligence programs to fund and to arm so-called moderate Syrian rebel groups. A considerable sum of these arms and militia members reportedly joined militant groups.

In addition to being a tool for foreign intervention, illicit arms trade has become an integral part of the war economy structure in conflict-ridden countries in the region. The Libya and Yemen cases show that as the central government bodies collapsed, new trafficking networks have taken over to sustain local economies and to replace the formal economic and administrative structures. In both cases, ownership of guns and rifles is part of the local culture and resulted from the endemic weakness of the central state due to corruption and crony networks.

Therefore, what the region lacks to curb the flows of illicit arms transfer and all forms of violent and illicit economic activities is an integrative approach and regional, collective political mechanisms that put those legal instruments into practice. This integrative approach shall take off from the fact that illicit arms trade is a multifaceted problem including cultural, political, social and economic dimensions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In both Yemen and Libya, the uncontrolled flow of arms is indeed an imminent threat to any actual or possible effort to stabilize the two countries. Even if controlling heavy weaponry by a national central power and armed forces is possible, the proliferation of SALW is exacerbating the physical safety of the population. It is also increasing the chances of retaliation between tribes, clans, and cities, and, in the case of the deteriorating law and order, maintaining the networks and flows of criminal activities (Bowsher et al., 2018). Therefore, controlling and curbing the flows of arms transfer should be an integral part of the post-conflict stabilization endeavours in Libya and Yemen and an integral part of a security plan for the region.

The collaboration of the regional and international powers is essential. However, with the unfolding geopolitical dynamics and an economic clash of interests, their role in controlling arms flow may prove problematic. To begin with, we suggest that the regional and international concerned organizations such as the UN, AU, and LAS pave the road to more effective arms control by taking the following measures:

- Press the involved international and regional powers to take serious steps in enforcing the arms embargo in Yemen and Libya. This is an essential measure to end these conflicts. Most of the peace negotiation in both cases have failed to address the illicit arms transfer issue. Negotiations focus on a political settlement driven by the notion of power-sharing. It was the Berlin conference on Libya in early 2020 that shed light on this aspect in the context of the Turkish intervention in Libya and the need to disarm the fighting militias. At this stage, mobilizing regional and international efforts to press the issue and to motivate the involved parties to stop trafficking should be the cornerstone of the UN and the EU. Germany, as a neutral peace partner and sponsor of the Berlin Process, and the AU can play a major role in allocating the necessary resources and mobilizing the concerned parties to uproot illicit arms transfer.
- Support the reconstruction of the security sector in the war-torn countries. This is the core of state-rebuilding after a conflict in the region. The erosion of the state's authority was embedded in less effective and more oppressive law and order agencies, the armed forces and the police. Therefore, establishing such agencies on a national and inclusive basis might reinforce state authority as the sole legitimate actor

of possessing and using arms to maintain peace and security within the country under the rule of law.

- Provide essential assistance for the DDR process. It is imperative to curb the need for arms and it is most relevant to re-establishing the national security sector. Disarming ex-militia members, file and ranks, demobilizing them, and re-integrating them into the national army will by design transform the illicit arms proliferated over the country into legal arms possessed and controlled by a legitimate authority. This process is complicated and its measures and results vary from one case to another. However, over the past decades, the UN peacekeeping operations and the AU concerned agencies have developed manuals and guides that can be used in the Arab countries' context. Following the collapse of the Gaddafi regime, the UNSMIL sponsored a DDR process (2012-2013), but the resumption of political violence aborted it (Sawani, 2017). Studying this experience and extracting practical lessons can improve any DDR measures in the future.
- Involve civil society organizations and local communities in the DDR. Creating a partnership with these grassroots bodies can dramatically reduce the demand for arms in several ways. For example, local tribal leaders can play a vital role in social reconciliation from bottom to top and solve feuds between clans, tribes, and cities. Also, they are essential in

changing the cultural norms of firearms. Relatedly, national and local media is integral to such schemes. Although NGOs in both countries are restrained by the security situation, political struggle, and social unrest, encouraging these grassroots organizations and including them in the peace processes can significantly change their prospects in the post-conflict stabilization phase. For the time being, NGOs such as ADALH or MWATNA in Yemen or the Defender Center for Human rights in Libya can spearhead local efforts to mitigate communal feuds and to rehabilitate former militia members.

- Provide technical assistance needed to monitor and control the borders and seaports. This may attract more collaboration from neighbouring states, such as for instance the EU and NATO monitoring operation in the Mediterranean in the case of Libya or the AU, LAS, USA, Egypt; and in the case of Yemen, whose seaports and straits are important to the world maritime navigation.
- Enhance information exchange between the concerned parties about leaked SALW, ammunition, and stockpiles. Information exchange is a part of capacity building for national agencies. In this regard, exporting countries can provide information on exported items before and after 2011, so diverted arms can be easily traced and confiscated.

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