



Organization for Defending
Victims of Violence

Arms Race in the Middle East

Introduction

When there's talk about the Middle East, the thing that comes to mind more than anything is the ethnic and religious diversities and artificial borders that are the result of decades of colonisation and influence of the powers of the 19th and 20th Centuries. Perhaps each one alone can be a factor in the origin of problems and the conflicts in the Middle East. But putting these factors alongside the geopolitical status of the region, and the existence of vast energy sources, makes the Middle East situation more complex. The existence of huge oil and gas reserves and serious security challenges in the Middle East, also the undemocratic authorities, have turned most of the countries of the region into the main buyers of arms from advanced industrial nations which leads to spread and deepening of regional conflicts on a daily basis.

Under such circumstances, the regional countries see the purchase of arms as a vital factor for their survival, and changing the balance of power for themselves. Furthermore the arms race has encouraged weapons manufacturers to pour in more weapons to the region. With a look at the weapons economy in the Middle East crisis, the logic behind the military strength of the regional powers and also world powers can be better understood. Thus, Middle Eastern countries and countries outside the region who have direct or indirect presence in conflicts, in a way are fuelling the fire of war in the region, through selling and buying weapons. The victims are humans and human rights values.

a) Main Arms Exports in the World

1 – *The United States of America*

The main importers of weapons from America

1 – Saudi Arabia 9.7%

2 – United Arab Emirates 9.1%

3 – Turkey 6.6%

Having 33% of the arms exports market of the world between 2011 and 2015, the United States is the number one exporter of arms. Compared to the years 2006 to 2010, US arms exports have increased approximately by 27 percent. America has given main weapons to at least 96 countries from 2006 to 2015. This is while Saudi Arabia is the biggest importer of weapons from America, followed by the UAE and Turkey. Among the regions of the world, with a 41% of the total imports, the Middle East has the highest imports of arms from the United States. For example till the end of 2011 notable contracts have been written for the export of new generation weapons that include 611 F-35 fighters to nine Middle East countries.

2 – *Russia*

The main importers of weapons from Russia

1 – India 39%

2 – China 11%

3 – Vietnam 11%

Russia's main weapons exports between the years 2011 and 2015 increased by approximately 28 percent compared to the previous five year. Although arms exports for the years 2014-2015 are notably lower than 2011, 12 and 13. In the

years 2011 to 2015 Russia exported weapons to fifty countries. Three out of the fifty countries had more share of Russia's exports. India with 39 percent was the main importer of weapons from Russia, followed by China and Vietnam with 11 percent in joint second place.

Between 2011 and 2015, Russia shared 68 percent of its weapons exports to Asia and Oceania. Africa with 11 percent, the Middle East with 8.2 percent and Europe with 6.4 percent are the next destinations of Russian weapons. The European market increased by 264 percent, most of which were exports to Azerbaijan. Between 2011 and 2015 approximately 4.9 percent of the total Russian weapons exports compared to 0.7 percent between 2006 to 2010

3 – China

The main importers of weapons from China

- 1 – Pakistan 35%
- 2 – Bangladesh 20%
- 3 – Myanmar 16%

China's had the highest increase among weapons exporters. Between the years 2006 and 2010 and also 2011 to 2015, there was an increase of 88 percent in China's weapons exports. China's share of the export market increased to 5.9 percent from 3.6 percent in these years. China has been the main exporter of weapons to 37 countries in the years 2011 to 2015, but its main exporting market (75 percent) have been Asia and Oceania. The growth levels of main weapons exports of this region has also been higher than other places. This growth is 139 percent more than the export levels of this country between 2006 and 2010. Pakistan has been China's main customer with 35 percent, followed by Bangladesh with 20 percent and Myanmar with 16 percent.

4 – Western Europe

The top five countries in the arms exporters list in this region are as follows in order: 1 – France, 2 – Germany, 3 – Britain, 4 – Spain, and 5 – Italy, who in total have allocated 21 percent of the weapons export market to themselves between 2011 to 2015.

France's weapons exports for 2006 to 2010 and 2011 to 2015 have dropped by 9.8 percent. Between 2011 and 2015 France exported weapons to 78 countries. 28 percent of France's weapons

exports have been to Asia and Oceania, and 27 percent to the Middle East, 18 percent to Africa and 15 percent to other countries in Europe. France's efforts to increase its arms exports resulted in the signing of several important deals in 2015, which included two corporate deals for 24 Rafael fighters for Qatar and Egypt.

Germany's main weapons exports for the years 2006 to 2010 and 2011 to 2015, decreased by 51 percent. Germany is the provider of main weapons to 57 countries for the years 2011 to 2015. The most important importers of German weapons are the rest of European countries at 29 percent. After Europe regionally speaking, America, Asia, Oceania and the Middle East, each had 23 percent of German imports.

In the years 2006 to 2010 and 2011 to 2015, Britain's weapon exports increased by 26 percent, also an increase of 55 percent for Spain and 48 percent for Italy. The most important receivers of weapons from Britain over the last ten years are in the following order: Saudi Arabia 46%, India 11%, and Indonesia 8.7%. For Britain the most important importers of British weapons were Australia 29%, Saudi Arabia 12% and Turkey 8.7%. For Italy, the most important importer of its weapons were, the UAE 10%, India 8.8% and Turkey 8.2%.

b) Main Weapon Importers of the World

1 – India: main weapons exporters to India are 1 – Russia 2.70%, the United States 3.14% and Israel 4.5%.

2 – Saudi Arabia: main weapons exports to Saudi Arabia: 1 – the United States 46%, Britain 30%, and Spain 5.9%.

3 – China: main weapons exporters to China: 1 – Russia 59%, 2 – France 15%, and 3 – Ukraine 14%.

4 – United Arab Emirates: main weapons exporters to the UAE: 1 – the United States: 65%, 2 – France 8.4%, and 3 – Italy 5.9%.

5 – Australia: main weapons exporters to Australia: 1 – the United States 57%, 2 – Spain 28%, and 3 – France 7.2%.

6 – Turkey: main weapons exporters to Turkey: 1 – the United States 63%, 2 – South Korea 9.5%, and 3 – Spain 8.9%.

7 – Pakistan: main weapons exporters to Pakistan: 1 – China 63%, 2 – the United States 19%, and

3 – Italy 4.6%.

8 – Vietnam: main weapons exporters to Vietnam: 1 – Russia 93%, 2 – Ukraine 2.6%, and 3 – Spain 0.9%.

9 – The United States: main weapons exporters to the US: 1 – Germany 21%, 2 – Canada 11%, and Norway 8.1%.

10 – South Korea: main weapons exporters to S. Korea: 1 – the United States, 2 – Germany, and 3 – Sweden 2.2%.

c) The Middle East and Weapons Importers

In the years 2006 to 2010 and 2011 to 2015 weapons imports in the Middle East have approximately increased to 61 percent. In the years 2011 to 2015, 27 percent of the arms deals in the region have been towards Saudi Arabia. Following Saudi Arabia, the UAE with 18 percent and Turkey with 14 percent are the next highest. Military interventions which took place by some Arab nations in 2015, created the environment for a huge influx of arms imports to the leading aggressor countries. They included Egypt, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In the years 2011 to 2015 weapons imports to Saudi Arabia have increased by 275 percent compared to the previous five year period. In spite of the concerns for Saudi's airstrikes in Yemen, the huge flood of weapons exports continued to the country. The weapons sent include 150 fighter jets, thousands of surface to air missiles and anti-tank missiles from the United States and 14 fighter jets from Britain and an unknown number of armoured vehicles from Canada, and bulletproof vests from Belgium.

The UAE has continually imported a high volume of weapons since 2001. The weapons imports of the country in the years 2006 to 2010 and 2011 to 2015 have increased approximately by 35 percent. Weapons imports of Qatar for the years 2006 to 2010 and 2011 to 2015 have increased by 279 percent. These imports have strongly increased the aggression power of Qatar. The weapons include 24 military drones, 9 anti-air defence systems, 3 aerial early warning systems from America, 24 military planes from France and 52 tanks from Germany.

Egypt's weapons imports for the years 2006 to 2010 and 2011 to 2015 have increased by 37 percent. Weapons imports in Egypt have taken

place continually and had a big increase in 2015 in particular. Egypt has received 12 warplanes from America. And within a few months an agreement was signed with France for the purchase of a warship. In 2014 and 2015 Egypt signed several agreements for the purchase of weapons from France, Germany and Russia.


Weapons imports for Iraq for 2006 to 2010 and 2011 to 2015 have increased by 83 percent. ISIS took a lot of Iraqi forces weapons in 2014, or destroyed them, but the flood of weapons exports to the country began in 2003 and has continued till 2015. These exports include armoured vehicles from the United States. Iraq's air power has notably increased in the years 2014-15, particularly with receiving 18 warplanes from the United States and 21 military helicopters from Russia.

d) The Major Conflicts in the Middle East

The important event that has occurred in the Middle East over the recent years is the spread of conflicts in this chaotic region. Following the fall of the Soviet Union, and America's supremacy in the international arena, the presence of this country and its allies have become more highlighted in the Middle East. In fact what we are witnessing in the Middle East today is the outcome of the presence of big powers, particularly the United States, and the formation of sectarian identities to fight foreign powers in the region. Following 9/11 and America's attack against Afghanistan and Iraq, sectarianism and fundamentalism in the region have greatly grown. The appearance of Taliban, ISIS, Al-Nusrah and other armed groups have caused serious armed conflicts in the Middle East region, which led to an increase in the weapons imports particularly by the Arab countries.

The conflict in Iraq has drawn other parties into it. Russia and the United States have directly taken part in airstrikes in Iraq and Syria. Governments and religious movements in Turkey, Saudi Arabia and a number of Persian Gulf countries support various militants such as ISIS and the Taliban. On the request of the Iraqi government, the Islamic Republic of Iran sent military advisors to advise the Iraqi forces in the fight against ISIS.

In Syria we see similar alignments too. Iran has taken an advisory role for the Syrian government forces against ISIS. This has been with the backing and support of Russia. Furthermore, Assad's



opponents and supporters of ISIS have formed a joint front against the government. The United States, Saudi Arabia and a number of Persian Gulf states, Turkey and European countries including Britain and France support some armed opponents in Syria. Meanwhile, existing evidence show the hidden support of Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Persian Gulf countries, as well as a number of western countries for ISIS and Al-Nusrah and other extremist groups in Syria.

The conflict in Yemen is clearly a conflict between Saudi Arabia and Persian Gulf countries against the Huthis in Yemen, who have diplomatic support from Iran. Throughout this conflict the use of heavy weapons by the Saudi and Emirati governments have been so extensive in the airstrikes and missile strikes in the country, that have raised international human rights and community's heavy criticisms. The mortality rates of civilians in the airstrikes of the Saudi led coalition have turned this conflict into a huge catastrophe in the region, which unlike Syria and Iraq the aggression is committed by foreign countries.

In comparing the geopolitical map of the Middle East conflicts with the volume of weapons imported by each of the countries involved in the ongoing conflicts the role of each of the countries involved in escalating the wars can be better understood. As the world's major seller of weapons, the United States provides over 50 percent of the weapons in the Middle East most of which are sold to Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Turkey. The former two customers are using American supplied weapons in Yemen, and Turkey in Syria. These three countries are accused

of indirect economic support and suppliers of weapons to extremist groups that include ISIS and Al-Nusrah Front in Syria and Iraq.

Alongside the United States, Britain and France are also major exporters of weapons to the Middle East. Through selling the most weapons to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the United States, Britain and France have direct accountability in the crimes against humanity taking place in Yemen. It seems that human rights standards are never considered in arms exports to the Middle Eastern countries. The one dimensional view of Europe and the United States and preference towards economic interests as opposed to human rights priorities, have not only escalated the violence in the region, but also the national security of these suppliers are threatened.

As the figures show, the United States, Britain and a number of European countries are the major exporters of weapons to the Middle East. Even though the exporters clearly know the usage of weapons by the importers, but nonetheless they continue to export weapons to these countries. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Turkey are on top of the list of importers of weapons in the Middle East, and by being directly involved in wars and proxy wars in the Middle East, they still continue to claim to human rights in international circles and organizations. These claims are at times supported by exporting countries in international organizations.

Source:

Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2015, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, www.sipri.org

