

Brothers Came Back with Weapons

The Effects of Arms Proliferation from Libya

BY NICHOLAS MARSH

In November 2011, Mokhtar Belmokhtar of the North Africa-based al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) told the Mauritanian news agency ANI that “We have been one of the main beneficiaries of the revolutions in the Arab world...As for our acquisition of Libyan armaments that is an absolutely natural thing.”¹ His statement summed up the fears expressed by many commentators—to include the author of this article—that large quantities of arms within Libya were left in unsecured stockpiles and would be proliferated to terrorists and insurgents around the world.² Most vividly, in 2013 the UK’s Daily Mail newspaper, noted “spy chiefs” claim that Libya “has become the Tesco [supermarket] of the world’s illegal arms trade.”³

Large quantities of arms from Libya were illicitly trafficked to Gaza, Mali, the Sinai, and Syria. In Mali and Sinai transfers from Libya qualitatively enhanced the military capacity of nonstate opposition groups by supplying military weapons that had previously been unavailable or in short supply. Large quantities of arms were shipped to Gaza and Syria, but alternative sources of supply mean that Libyan weapons probably did not give groups there new capabilities.

The proliferation of arms from Libya abated after 2013. Since then a combination of national and international initiatives to prevent trafficking, and an upsurge in fighting in Libya have likely reduced illicit arms flows from Libya. Significant quantities of arms have not proliferated from Libya outside North Africa, Syria, and Gaza. Hitherto, proliferation of arms from

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Libya has been a regional problem that has partially been managed by states, and it has not been as destabilizing as feared.

Stocks of Arms in Libya Prior to the 2011 War

Prior to 2011 Colonel Qadhafi created arms and ammunition depots throughout Libya. This approach was likely intended to employ a “people’s war” strategy where after an invasion arms would be distributed to the militias and the general population (in 2010 the Libyan armed forces were relatively weak with an estimated 76,000 regular personnel).⁴ The government had 400,000–1,000,000 firearms (mostly Kalashnikovs) under its control at the start of the war, according to a

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2015 assessment by a Senior Researcher at the Small Arms Survey; and firearms in civilian possession were rare before 2011.⁵ Weapons were also supplied to opposition groups by states intervening in the 2011 war. It is likely that given the large stocks of infantry weapons amassed by the Qadhafi regime the external supplies were only a minority of the arms and ammunition circulating in Libya at the end of the 2011 war.

Trafficking from Libya

The Libyan civil war started in February 2011 and ended remarkably quickly in October. It

featured widespread loss of state control over arms depots that were appropriated by opposition forces. According to the UN Security Council (UNSC) panel of experts, “The western borders of Libya, from Tunisia in the north to Niger in the south, were the focus points for illicit trafficking from Libya quite early on in the uprising, with Algeria reporting its first seizure of weapons coming from Libya in April 2011.”⁶ Trafficking out of Libya mostly occurs in environments that are difficult for governments to monitor and control and there is a long history of smuggling goods across the Sahel.⁷ Trafficking routes are located in remote areas “which generally lack any kind of border control or institutional presence on the Libyan side and have generally weak control measures on the side of its neighbours.”⁸ Porous borders can be found throughout the region, the UNSC panel notes that most “regional State border control capacities are limited; the few official entry points are incapable of regulating the traffic and are therefore easily bypassed by illicit traffickers” and “cross-border security cooperation between these states remains very limited.”⁹

Press reports in English on 75 arms caches seized by government agencies in Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Libya, the Sudan, and Tunisia (the great majority from Algeria, Egypt, and Tunisia) provide an overview of trafficking from Libya.¹⁰ Overall, the annual volumes of seized caches presented in Table 1 supports the conclusions highlighted later that the largest outflow of arms and ammunition from Libya occurred in 2012 and 2013; and the importance of transfers of light weapons such as antiaircraft guns or rockets.

Table 1. Identified Reports of Illicit Arms Seized Annually by Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Libya, the Sudan, and Tunisia

Year	Caches	Firearms	Light Weapons	Ammunition Rounds
2011	4	--	--	--
2012	30	276	451	248,795
2013	20	306	71	3,827
2014	5	--	--	--
2015	10	10	24	43,000
2016	6	2	3	35,014
Total	75	594	549	330,636

Sources

This article is based upon an analysis of published research carried out in the region by UNSC panels of experts investigating sanctions violations, journalists, and research organizations such as Armament Research Services, Conflict Armament Research, and the Small Arms Survey; and from analysis of media reports of arms caches seized by states.¹¹ Much of the information is directly based upon interviews and fieldwork carried out by people researching arms proliferation, and this has been augmented by use of secondary sources—mainly press reports of arms seizures and Israeli assessments concerning Gaza, that provide insight where little or no fieldwork has taken place (such as Egypt and Algeria). Information from press reports should be used with caution since it may be biased—both whether the seizure was declared by the government; and whether it is subsequently reported in the media. In addition, details of the weapons seized may be misreported by those making a seizure or by a journalist, who did not always identify the numbers of weapons seized. Similarly,

assessments by officials based outside an area should be treated with caution, especially as they have not provided an account of methods and sources used. Use of secondary sources provides additional pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that would otherwise be missing, but they are less reliable than research based upon fieldwork.

Effects of the Proliferation of Weapons from Libya

Proliferation of arms from Libya has had an important effect upon conflicts in Mali and Sinai, significant quantities were sent to Gaza and Syria, and arms have proliferated into the hands of nonstate groups in North Africa and beyond. A Malian Taureg spokesman summed up one of the origins of the 2012 rebellion when he stated that “The Libyan crisis shook up the order of things [...] a lot of our brothers have come back with weapons.”¹² The 2015 UNSC panel report similarly concludes that “arms originating from Libya have significantly reinforced the military capacity of terrorist groups operating in different parts of the region, including in Algeria, Egypt, Mali, and Tunisia in particular.”¹³ The consequences of the proliferation

of arms from Libya are assessed in the remainder of this article.

Mali and Niger

Mali

Mali offers the most clear-cut case of weapons proliferation from Libya having an effect upon conflict.¹⁴ Hundreds of ethnic Tuareg fighters left Libya during and after the 2011 conflict and drove across the desert to northern Mali, and took with them arms that had not previously been common such as anti-tank weapons, mortars, and heavy machineguns.¹⁵ They joined with local Tuareg separatists and in January 2012 started a rebellion. Within three months the government had lost control of large areas of northern Mali.¹⁶

The Malian armed forces were said to have been surprised by their opponents' armaments.¹⁷ An assessment by the Small Arms Survey in 2015 states that trafficking from Libya overcame a previously observed scarcity of heavy machineguns, 23mm canon, and associated ammunition, and the Malian Foreign Minister explained that "All of a sudden we found ourselves face to face with a thousand men, heavily armed."¹⁸ As found in other conflicts, 14.5mm heavy machineguns mounted on all-terrain vehicles formed a potent insurgent weapon that combined mobility and firepower.

Weapons continued to be transported from Libya to Mali. In 2012 a Malian official claimed that Mokhtar Belmokhtar had "been in Libya for several weeks, notably to procure arms" as AQIM prepared to expand its influence in Northern Mali.¹⁹ The 2014 UNSC panel report documents a "wide range of Libyan materiel" including rifles and two

SA-7b anti-aircraft missiles that had been definitively traced to prior exports to Libya, and rockets and ammunition that were assumed to have come from Libya based upon similar equipment found there.²⁰

Arms were reported to have been trafficked into Mali via Niger; via Algeria; and via Tunisia and then Algeria.²¹ In addition to dedicated arms traffickers, criminal groups engaged in smuggling drugs and other contraband were also reported to be involved in smuggling Libyan arms.²² The Tunisian army intercepted several convoys transporting military material reported to be destined for Mali; as did authorities in Niger and Algeria.²³ Libyan arms played an important role in the initiation of the fighting in 2012, but the role later should not be overstated. International intervention in 2013 most likely reduced trafficking from Libya. It also appears that arms from Libya were not the most important source sustaining the conflict after January 2012. Analysis of tons of material seized by French troops based in Mali shows that the main source of arms and ammunition for opposition fighters was from the Malian armed forces.²⁴ The initial defeat of the Malian army allowed the opposition forces to seize arms depots abandoned by fleeing soldiers, and this started a cascade, whereby each capture of weapons and ammunition strengthened the fighters and allowed them to capture more depots.

Fearing that opposition groups were in a position to threaten the Malian capital Bamako, in January 2013 France launched *Opération Serval*.²⁵ At its height the operation involved 5,000 French troops, plus aircraft, and armoured vehicles. The 2014 UNSC panel states that as a result of French and Malian military operations in 2013, "Arms

flows to northern Mali have been destabilized by those operations but have not disappeared."²⁶ In 2014 *Opération Serval* was replaced by *Opération Barkhane*, an ongoing anti-insurgent operation in the Sahel and based in Chad, which as of last January had 4,000 French troops, and cooperates with other UN and international forces in the region; one objective is to disrupt arms trafficking networks.²⁷

A 2014 analysis identified three chronological waves of arms acquisition: first of small arms and light weapons from Libyan stockpiles; the second wave of Malian army equipment from captured bases; third, after the French intervention limited further base captures and interdicted trafficking from Libya, fighters raised funds and purchased arms via illicit regional markets (including from Nigerians, Chadians, and Libyans).²⁸ The 2015 UNSC panel states that arms from Libya "destined for terrorist groups in Mali was seized or destroyed on several occasions in 2014 in Niger by the French-led *Opération Barkhane*."²⁹ Similarly, the 2016 UNSC panel report states that "transfers of arms from Libya to Mali and the Niger have decreased in intensity thanks in large part to *Opération Barkhane*" though seizures continued.³⁰ As well as preventing trafficking, it is likely that the French intervention prompted traffickers to use smaller convoys that are harder to detect.³¹

Niger

Niger has been affected as a transit route from Libya to Mali, and by weapons proliferating in the country. In particular, during September 2011 three convoys containing former members of the Libyan government and large quantities of arms were seized by Nigerien authorities.³² The Nigerien army

reported seizures during 2012 of 180 weapons and ammunition that were thought to have originated in Libya.³³

In October 2014 French troops in northern Niger intercepted a convoy bound for Mali of six all-terrain vehicles that had started their journey in Libya carrying several tonnes of weapons and ammunition, including antiaircraft missiles, 23mm cannon,

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machineguns, ammunition, and 100 anti-tank rockets.³⁴ A Conflict Armament Research report summarizes reports of six known convoys carrying arms passing through Niger on a traditional smuggling route between Libya and Mali during 2014–15.³⁵ It is very likely that arms trafficking from Libya to Mali continued through last year.

A suicide attack took place in Niger in 2013, and one of the rifles was identified as likely coming from Libya.³⁶ There are also reports of criminals having obtained weapons from Libya, for example the 2012 UNSC report states that "cases of armed robbery have recently dramatically increased, particularly in northern Niger and northern Mali. Criminality is apparently rising in parallel with the influx of weapons."³⁷ The 2014

UNSC report also notes complaints from Nigerien officials that weapons from Libya were obtained by civilians.³⁸

Tunisia and Algeria

Tunisia

In 2015 authorities in Tunisia stated that “most military material used in terrorist attacks comes from Libya.”³⁹ A researcher for the Small Arms Survey who conducted field research in Tunisia suggests that the initial instances of trafficking occurred during the 2011 war when refugees from Libya sold personal possessions, including Kalashnikovs, after they arrived in Tunisia.⁴⁰ In particular, troops loyal to Qadhafi who left Libya with their families have been identified as a key source of arms smuggled into Tunisia during the civil war.⁴¹ Arms trafficking into Tunisia increased after 2011; but limited demand for illicit weapons in Tunisia means that there were probably fewer instances of trafficking

compared to Algeria, Egypt, Mali, and Niger.⁴² The UNSC panel highlighted two large caches located by Tunisian authorities in 2013, one containing eight complete SA-7b portable anti-aircraft missiles, which originated in Libya.⁴³

A summary of press reports of seizures of 11 caches in Tunisia from 2011 to September 2016 is presented in Table 2. Two of the caches were associated with smugglers, and two with opposition groups.

Analysis of reports of seizures supports findings from fieldwork that trafficking into Tunisia was limited (at least compared to other destinations such as Egypt or Mali).⁴⁴ The most likely explanation is a lower level of demand in Tunisia (related to lower levels of criminal and political violence) and Tunisian government attempts to prevent trafficking.

Algeria

Algerian government officials and media sources claimed that weapons from Libya

Table 2. Summary of Reported Seized Arms Caches in Tunisia, 2011–16

Description	Caches	Items Included	Amount
Identified as from Libya	2	Ammunition	> 10
		Explosives	--
		Kalashnikovs	--
Suspected to have come from Libya	3	Ammunition	> 20,000 rounds
		Explosives	--
		Kalashnikovs	--
		RPG launchers	--
Near the border with Libya	6	Ammunition	> 24,864 rounds
		Anti-tank mines	> 40
		Explosives	--
		Kalashnikovs	--
		Rockets	--
		RPG launchers	90

(along with Libyan uniforms and vehicles registered in Libya) had been used in a January 2013 crisis which involved hundreds of workers being held hostage at a desert gas facility, though the origin of the weapons was not confirmed.⁴⁵

The 2013 UNSC panel report published summary statistics of seizures by Algeria of arms originating from Libya during April 2011 to March 2012, which included 103 Kalashnikovs, 63 machineguns, 17 other firearms, 510 rockets, and 3 rocket propelled grenades.⁴⁶ The Algerian authorities reported to the UNSC panel that trafficking was carried out by both petty criminals and also “organized terrorist and criminal networks.”⁴⁷ Press reports from Algeria on arms seizures

show a similar pattern and are summarized in Table 3.

Three caches were identified as being en route to Mali—two in 2012 and another in 2014. Six caches were associated with armed opposition groups, three with smugglers or criminals, and one with an individual. More weapons were reported to have been seized in Algeria than in Tunisia, one explanation being that Algeria lies on a direct route between Libya and Mali.

Egypt, the Sinai, and Gaza

Trafficking into and through Egypt

Weapons have been smuggled overland through Egypt to the conflicts in the Sinai and

Table 3. Summary of Reported Seized Arms Caches in Algeria, 2011–16

Location	Caches	Items Included	Amount
Identified as from Libya	16	Ammunition	> 49,104 rounds
		Antiaircraft gun	1
		Antiaircraft missiles	≥ 43
		Anti-tank missiles	--
		Firearms	175
		Mortars	--
		RPG launchers	--
Suspected to have come from Libya	3	Explosive belts	2
		Guns	20
		“Heavy arms”*	52
		Shoulder fired missiles	--
		Surface-to-air missiles	6
		RPG launchers	3
Near the border with Libya	6	Ammunition	--
		Explosives	--
		Firearms	--
		Landmines	--
		Mortars	--
		Rocket launchers	--

Gaza. Widespread firearm ownership and smuggling by Bedouin through Sinai toward Gaza and Israel has long been reported; but it intensified with Libyan weapons after 2011.⁴⁸ According to an Egyptian author, between February to August 2011 “It became clear that Egypt’s poorly secured western border had turned from an amateur 9-millimeter pistol market into a fully-fledged arms trafficking hub” and two border crossings that had previously been “known for drug smuggling operations across North Africa, became the floodgates of heavier weapons including high-caliber anti-aircraft guns, rocket propelled grenades, and surface-to-air missiles.”⁴⁹ The smugglers avoided detection by transporting weapons through unpopulated desert areas.⁵⁰ Concerning political violence outside of the Sinai, the 2015 UNSC panel stated that “Libya is a pre-eminent source of arms used in criminal and terrorist activities in Egypt. Groups including Ansar Beit el Makdess receive support from some Libyan actors, including military material.”⁵¹

The most important economic demand for illicit arms was, and is, from Gaza where people were willing to pay high prices for smuggled Libyan weapons. A Bedouin arms smuggler was quoted as having said “The majority of weapons coming from Libya were already paid for by Palestinians and were just cutting through Egypt to reach the Gaza strip.”⁵² Arms trafficking to Gaza also led to a pool of weapons that were available for purchase by people involved in the conflict in neighbouring Sinai. The town of Rafah on the Egyptian side of the border with Gaza was said to be a hub from 2011–12 where Libyan weapons were purchased by people from the Sinai and Gaza.⁵³

Seizures of arms reported by Egypt corroborate the above picture. The 2013 UNSC panel report states that Egyptian authorities had seized “hundreds of small light and heavy weapons systems, hundreds of rounds of ammunition for heavy weapons systems and hundreds of thousands of rounds of ammunition for small arms and machine-guns.”⁵⁴ Similarly, in October 2011 an Egyptian Brigadier General was quoted as stating that in the Sinai “We’ve intercepted more advanced weapons, and these weapons aren’t familiar to the Egyptian weapons markets; these are war weapons.”⁵⁵

Analysis of press articles from 2011 to September 2016 shows reports of Egyptian authorities having seized 30 arms caches, of which six were reported to have been intercepted in transit on their way to Gaza, and two to the Sinai (see Table 4). The Egyptian response in 2011 to these arms flows was hampered by provisions of the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty, which imposed restrictions on Egypt’s deployment of armed forces in parts of the Sinai.⁵⁶ In addition, Egyptian police stationed in Sinai were reported to have fled their posts during the 2011 demonstrations that ousted Mubarak.⁵⁷ As the insurgency unfolded Egypt deployed personnel and major weapons to central Sinai in 2012 (resulting in an Israeli protest that the deployment into the demilitarized zone had not been coordinated) and it appears that overall Tel Aviv has accepted a de facto remilitarization of the Sinai.⁵⁸

In August 2012 Egypt took action to stop arms smuggling into Gaza (partly in order to also restrict supplies to the war in the Sinai), and a component of the 2012 ceasefire agreement that ended the brief war between Israel and Hamas was that Egypt would

prevent arms smuggling into Gaza.⁵⁹ One action was that in February 2013 Egypt flooded tunnels used to smuggle goods under the border to Gaza.⁶⁰ The 2014 UNSC panel report states that Israeli authorities noted that arms transfers from Libya to Gaza occurred, but “the shipments had slowed with an increased effort by Egypt to track and seize weapons.”⁶¹ It is likely that the largest arms supplies from Libya were delivered in 2011 and 2012.

Effects of the Trafficking in the Sinai

There have been several reports that trafficked weapons led to Egyptian security forces being “outgunned” in Sinai.⁶² For example, field-work conducted in the Sinai in 2011 showed that:

*Some clans reportedly smuggled 14.5mm antiaircraft guns and multi-barrel rocket launchers via Egypt’s Salloum crossing and, as in Libya, mounted them on the back of pick-ups. By mid-2011, tribal leaders claimed they had amassed sufficient weaponry—medium-range as well as light arms—to out-gun the army.*⁶³

The disadvantage experienced by the Egyptian army appears to be partly due to the restrictions on deploying major weapons in parts of the peninsula.⁶⁴ One Egyptian intelligence official is reported as stating that opposition forces “are not better equipped than the army, but they are equipped well enough to provide effective resistance.”⁶⁵ Examples include using a 14.5mm calibre machine gun to hit an army helicopter, mounting the guns on Toyota all-terrain vehicles and attacking army truck convoys, or using anti-tank missiles against army

vehicles.⁶⁶ Lightly armed multinational observer forces deployed near the Egypt–Israel border have also described themselves as being “outgunned,” and mortar attacks on bases prompted a withdrawal last year.⁶⁷ The arms flows are also reported to have increased the lethality of intra-tribal clashes in the Sinai.⁶⁸

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Effects of Libyan Arms in Gaza

There is little direct information from Gaza on the types and quantities of arms from Libya that were smuggled into the territory. Groups in Gaza have displayed two models of rifle, a Belgian made FN 2000, and a Russian made AK 103, that were “quite specific to Libyan arsenals.”⁶⁹ However, research by Armament Research Services indicates that only a handful of FN2000s have been identified in Gaza, and only 57 AK 103s have been documented in the hands of Palestinian organizations.⁷⁰

Assessments by observers based outside Gaza (particularly by Israelis) have highlighted the importance of transfers of Libyan rockets and missiles to Gaza.⁷¹ In August 2011 Israeli officials claimed that “Palestinians in Gaza have acquired antiaircraft and anti-tank rockets from Libya” and that they had “detected an inflow of SA–7 antiaircraft missiles and rocket-propelled grenades.”⁷² In May 2012 the commander of the Multi-national Force and Observers monitoring the

Table 4. Summary of Reported Seized Arms Caches in Egypt, 2011–16

Location	Caches	Items Included	Amount
Identified as from Libya	17	Ammunition	> 214,967 rounds
		Anti-tank missiles	60
		Artillery	10,000
		Explosives	5 tons
		Firearms	87
		Grenades	--
		Mortar rounds	527
		RPG launchers	17
		Rockets	591
Suspected to have come from Libya	2	Surface-to-air missiles	50
		Ammunition	--
		Anti-tank missiles	--
		Explosives	--
		Landmines	--
		RPG launchers	--
Near the border with Libya	11	Rockets	--
		Ammunition	21,819 rounds
		Antiaircraft guns	6
		Firearms	61
		Grad Rocket warheads	108
		Rockets	34

Egypt–Israel border stated that Russian made antiaircraft missile systems that had been exported to Libya were being smuggled into Gaza through Egypt.⁷³ In 2013 SA–7 launch units were displayed in a parade in Gaza, though the origin of the equipment could not be confirmed.⁷⁴ In particular, an Israeli intelligence assessment summarising activity in 2012 states that hundreds of anti-tank and antiaircraft weapons and “long range rockets” were smuggled into Gaza from Sudan and Libya.⁷⁵ It has been claimed that “many of the rockets fired into Israel from Gaza [in 2012] were Grad rockets obtained from Libyan sources.”⁷⁶

Reports of Israeli assessments suggest that it is unlikely that arms from Libya led to a decisive qualitative improvement as Hamas already possessed the types of arms believed to have been trafficked from Libya.⁷⁷ Prior to 2011 Hamas and other groups in Gaza already had the capacity to fabricate rockets in workshops located in Gaza, and more importantly had long been the recipient of military weapons smuggled in from outside, especially via Iran and Sudan.⁷⁸

Syria

Large-scale transfers of arms are reported to have been sent from Libya to opposition

forces in Syria, which appear to have been motivated by a combination of high prices paid for munitions by the Syrian opposition, and (at least in 2012–13) sympathy in Libya for opposition fighters in Syria.⁷⁹ Two ships are reported to have attempted to transport hundreds of tons of arms from Libya to Syria; and it is likely that there were more.⁸⁰ The main route is said to be by sea or air to Turkey and then overland to opposition groups in Syria.⁸¹ Weapons identified as being sent from Libya to Syria included anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles, and known shipments appear to be mainly made up of ammunition for small arms and light weapons.⁸² A Russian-made Konkurs-M anti-tank guided missile system documented in Idlib Governorate in Syria had previously been exported to Libya in 2000; and photographs from Syria showed crates of Belgian NR 160 106mm recoilless projectiles with markings showing that they had been exported to Libya.⁸³

Importantly, the UNSC panel noted in 2015 that “While the Syrian Arab Republic was a significant destination for Libyan arms during the first two years of the conflict that trend appears to have faded in the past 12 to 24 months,” and a year later the panel stated that it “found no information relating to recent transfers.”⁸⁴ The shipments from Libya were unlikely to have led to a qualitative improvement in the weapons possessed by the Syrian opposition. Opposition forces in Syria had access to significant alternative arms supplies from defecting soldiers, capture of Syrian army arms depots and at least after mid-2012 significant donations from abroad.⁸⁵ However, opposition groups in Syria were described as facing shortages of military material, especially ammunition.⁸⁶

So the quantity of ammunition supplied in particular would likely have enhanced their military capacity. However, it is not possible in this article to disaggregate the effect of supplies from Libya compared to supplies from other sources.

The Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria, Somalia, and the Sudan

There are also reports of proliferation of arms from Libya into the Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria, Somalia, and the Sudan. With the exception of Chad, there have been few, if any, confirmed instances of arms from Libya having been smuggled in after 2011. A report by Conflict Armament Research last year shows that Polish-made Kalashnikov rifles with Arabic markings that are of the same type as rifles found in Libya had been identified in the CAR (2), Chad (3), Côte d’Ivoire (3), and in Mali (3).⁸⁷ A Libyan origin for the rifles is likely but has not been proven. In all five countries there are important alternative sources of munitions so any trafficking from Libya would have been unlikely to qualitatively enhance recipients’ military capacities.

The Central African Republic

North Korean-manufactured rocket propelled grenades and Yugoslav-made mortar bombs that had very likely been previously exported to Libya were found in the CAR.⁸⁸ However, it is not certain that they were trafficked after the start of the 2011 war (as opposed to having been supplied by Qadhafi at an earlier date). Nevertheless, the effects of trafficking from Libya appear to be marginal, as Conflict Armament Research puts it, “Materiel from Qadhafi-era Libyan stockpiles does not

appear to account for a significant proportion of weapons or ammunition used by the former Séléka coalition” in the CAR.⁸⁹

Chad and the Sudan

Chad is reported to have been a route through which arms transited, especially in 2011 and the first half of 2012.⁹⁰ Authorities in Chad seized arms being trafficked from Libya during 2011 and 2012; however, the trade is reported to have diminished since then.⁹¹ Material trafficked into Chad is reported to include assault rifles, heavy machineguns, antiaircraft missile systems, recoilless 106mm guns, mines, and ammunition.⁹² The 2013 UNSC panel noted information that officials in Chad had located 30 antiaircraft missile systems.⁹³ Arms have also been reported to be trafficked through Chad and into Sudan, or directly into Sudan from Libya.⁹⁴

Nigeria

There were several reports from 2013 and 2014 that arms from Libya had been trafficked to Boko Haram in Nigeria via Niger and Chad.⁹⁵ However, it is notable that the reports from Nigeria have not highlighted the seizure of weapons confirmed to come from Libya. For example the UNSC panel has stated that it was unable to verify media reports of such trafficking, nor was it able to examine arms seized in northeastern Nigeria to assess whether any were of Libyan origin.⁹⁶ Given the extensive trafficking networks in the region it is possible that Boko Haram received some arms that came from Libya, but the quantities remain unknown. There is though clear evidence that Boko Haram captured very large stocks of weapons and ammunition from the Nigerian police and

army, so any trafficked arms from Libya may well not have decisively enhanced its military capacity.⁹⁷

Somalia

The UNSC panel received evidence of ammunition crates discovered in Somalia that had originally been delivered to Libya in the 1970s–80s.⁹⁸ However, the period during which the transfer from Libya took place is unknown and given Qadhafi’s propensity to supply arms across Africa the ammunition could have left Libya prior to 2011.

Of Particular Concern—MANPADS

Man-portable air-defence systems (MANPADS) have long been a key proliferation concern for the United Nations, national governments, and civil society, and after the onset of the Libya war in 2011, many commentators were alarmed at the prospect of MANPADS being smuggled out of Libya and used to shoot down a civilian airliner.⁹⁹ An authoritative review published by the Small Arms Survey in 2015 indicates that prior to 2011 Libya had imported an estimated 18,000 short-range surface-to-air missiles (most likely several missiles per launcher), nearly all of which were Soviet models produced in the 1970s–80s.¹⁰⁰ A frequently misquoted U.S. assessment from 2011 estimated that after the war there were around 20,000 *major components* of portable antiaircraft missile systems in Libya—e.g. missiles, launch tubes, batteries, and gripstocks used to fire the missile.¹⁰¹ The number of potentially complete missile systems would then be many fewer.

A 2015 Small Arms Survey assessment of seized missiles and components of launchers confirmed by the UN panels as having come from Libya shows that 64 items were seized

during 2011–14 in the CAR, Lebanon, Mali, and Tunisia.¹⁰² Importantly, the seized items were mostly of a variety of components rather than complete systems: 24 launch tubes (that may have contained missiles), 29 batteries, 4 gripstocks, and 8 missiles (that were not seized with the launch tubes). Similarly, the 2013 UN panel report notes that a seized shipment to Syria contained “SA–7b man-portable air defence systems without batteries.”¹⁰³ There have also been unconfirmed reports of Libyan missiles or launchers in Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Gaza, Lebanon, Niger, and Syria.¹⁰⁴ A separate Conflict Armament Research analysis of the manufacture year and of production lot numbers similarly suggests a common origin of missile launch tubes found in Lebanon, Libya, and Mali.¹⁰⁵

The worst fears of large numbers of usable MANPAD systems proliferating out of Libya evidently have not been realized. It is likely that by October 2011 there were far fewer working missile systems than had originally been imported because of: possible transfers out of Libya or use of missiles prior to 2011; attrition because of systems exceeding their expected service life and poor storage; and airstrikes and other damage to arms depots during the 2011 civil war.¹⁰⁶ Multinational teams operating in Libya after the 2011 war collected an estimated 5,000 missiles and components.¹⁰⁷ Guidelines suggest that gripstocks should be stored separately from other components to make it more difficult to obtain a complete system; and a journalist who examined arms bunkers in Libya during July 2011 found that launch tubes, missiles, and batteries were stored together in crates but gripstocks were not present.¹⁰⁸

Summary: The Effects of and Decline in Arms Proliferation from Libya

Arms trafficking from Libya, especially during 2012–13, significantly enhanced the military capacity of armed opposition groups in Mali and Sinai by providing them with types of weapons that were previously rare or unavailable. Significant supplies of arms and ammunition were transferred to Gaza and Syria, but groups in both were already able to obtain large quantities of weapons from other sources and so supplies from Libya augmented their military capacity but probably did not represent a qualitative improvement. Trafficking from Libya provided arms to smaller nonstate groups in Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Niger, and Tunisia. Weapons from Libya have been transported further afield, for example to the CAR, but those supplies are unlikely to have significantly improved the recipients’ military capacities.

Overall, Libya has not lived up to the fears that as a “Tesco [supermarket] for Terrorists” countries near and far from its borders would be flooded with arms. Arms trafficking from Libya has abated. The summary of seizures and above mentioned assessments on arms flows to Mali, Gaza, Sinai, and the Syria all point to weapons trafficking from Libya having declined after 2013. Libya is also not the only source of weapons trafficked in the Sahel, or into Gaza, the Sinai, or Syria. A 2016 fieldwork-based report on arms trafficking in the Sahel by Conflict Armament Research finds that:

Illicit weapon flows in the Sahel since 2011 have not stemmed exclusively, or even predominantly, from Libyan sources.

*The profile of illicit weapons in the region reflects the consequences of other state crises, particularly in Mali, and of weak control over national stockpiles in the Central African Republic and Côte d'Ivoire.*¹⁰⁹

It has not been possible to locate evidence of significant flows of arms from Libya beyond its immediate neighbours, and to Gaza, Mali, and Syria. Despite the existence of large numbers of people being smuggled from Libya into Europe, significant flows of arms from Libya across the Mediterranean have not been detected. In spite of its proximity to Libya, trafficking into Tunisia appears to have been relatively limited. Reports of Libyan arms in Somalia, Nigeria, and the CAR concern few weapons, some of which may not have proliferated

The worst fears of large numbers of usable MANPAD systems proliferating out of Libya evidently have not been realized.

from Libya after 2011, or unconfirmed reports. While small-scale movements of arms are always possible, there is no evidence of significant flows of arms from Libya into conflicts further afield; in West, Central, and East Africa; and in Yemen. Surface-to-air missile systems from Libya have only been used in a few conflict zones.

The potential for further proliferation from Libya remains; especially if a future reduction in violence releases new arms supplies to cross-border traffickers. It is important that, as has occurred elsewhere, future peace agreements between armed

factions in Libya should include elements of disarmament and small arms and light weapons management, including the safe storage and disposal of surrendered weapons. States and organizations involved in enforcing the arms embargo on arms transfers to and from Libya, and bringing peace to the country, need to continue to prioritize preventing arms trafficking.

Explaining the Decline in Trafficking from Libya

There are two explanations for proliferation from Libya being less of a problem than feared in 2011. First is that neighbouring governments and a wider community of states and international organizations took action to prevent trafficking from Libya—initiatives ranged from teams in Libya collecting portable antiaircraft missiles, through to deployment of troops into the Sahel (see the earlier discussion on international intervention in the section on Niger) and naval patrols in the Mediterranean.¹¹⁰ The concentration of illicit arms trafficking from Libya into a few countries is in line with previous research that emphasizes that arms trafficking is embedded in regional and local networks and conflict economies.¹¹¹

Second, in Libya there was a lull in violence during late 2011 to 2013, but fighting increased from 2014 onwards.¹¹² The increase in fighting in Libya led to greater demand for arms and ammunition within the country by parties directly engaged in the fighting, and by other members of society obtaining arms for self-protection. In 2016 researchers monitoring gun prices traded online and bought and sold in Libya noted relatively high prices of \$1,300 for a Kalashnikov, \$5,900 for a heavy machinegun, and \$4,000

for a recoilless gun.¹¹³ Such prices are not indicative of Libya being affected by a glut of weapons (instead arms available after the 2011 war were likely absorbed by Libyans who anticipated needing to use them).

Libya has imported large quantities of weapons. European authorities have intercepted several large-scale shipments of arms being smuggled into Libya; for example, in December 2015 Greek authorities seized a shipment of 5,000 firearms and 500,000 rounds of ammunition, and in October 2016 Spanish authorities seized 11,400 firearms and over a million rounds.¹¹⁴ States also notified the United Nations that prior to August 2014 they had lawfully supplied Libyan authorities with “60,000 handguns, 65,000 assault rifles, 15,000 submachine guns, and 4,000 machine guns of various calibres, as well as more than 60 million rounds of ammunition for small arms and machine guns.”¹¹⁵ The large-scale imports by Libya and reports of high prices paid in the country suggest that domestic stocks of arms were insufficient to meet domestic demand, making illicit exports less attractive. PRISM

Notes

¹ Boaz Ganor, “The Challenge of Terrorism,” in *The Arab Spring, Democracy and Security: Domestic and International Ramifications*, ed. Efraim Inbar (London: Routledge, 2013), 93.

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³ Ian Drury, “Don’t Turn Syria into a ‘Tesco for Terrorists’ like Libya, Generals tell Cameron,” *Daily Mail*, June 17, 2013.

⁴ International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2010* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 262–63.

⁵ Widely cited estimates of 20 million small arms in Libya are not based upon a study that has methods or sources; Aaron Karp, *Metaphor for Chaos: Libya’s Alleged 20 Million Small Arms* (Unpublished manuscript, 2015). Salah Mansor and Zuhir Bodadal, “The Impact of the Method of Gunshot Injury: War Injuries vs. Stray Bullets vs. Civilian Fighting,” *Journal of the College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan* 25:4 (2015), 281–285.

⁶ United Nations Security Council (SC), “Final Report of the Panel of Experts Established Pursuant to Resolution 1973 (2011) Concerning Libya,” (New York: United Nations S/2013/99, 2013), 25.

⁷ For a history of trafficking in the region see: Judith Scheele, “Merchant Circulations in the Sahara: Between Licit and Illicit,” *Hérodote* 142 (2011): 143–62; and Baz LeCocq and Paul Schrijver, “The War on Terror in a Haze of Dust: Potholes and Pisalls on the Saharan Front,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 25:1 (2007): 158–59.

⁸ UNSC 2013, 26.

⁹ United Nations SC, “Final Report of the Panel of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1973 (2011) Concerning Libya” (New York: United Nations, S/2012/163, 2012), 16.

¹⁰ The author of this article runs a project that systematically monitors international media for report on arms trafficking. All of the sources are available in an online archive, and the summary table is available on request. The media articles are archived at <http://

nisat.prio.org/Document-Library/>. Information for the other tables in this article was collected from media reports; lack of number does not imply lack of arms seized, and some reports (especially for 2011 and 2014) only stated the type of arms seized and not the number of units; available at Norwegian Initiative on Small Arms Transfers, <<http://nisat.prio.org/Document-Library/>>. In this article, the term *firearms* concerns hand held weapons that use an explosive charge to fire a projectile from a barrel. The term *light weapons* refers to crew served weapons that are man-portable or can be mounted on a light vehicle, such as anti-tank rocket or missile launchers, heavy machineguns, grenade launchers or mortars. The term *heavy arms* was not defined in the source for Table 3 but given the context it likely concerned what are identified as light weapons elsewhere in this article—e.g. mortars. Heavy arms was likely used to distinguish the equipment seized from firearms.

¹¹ The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Camelia Fatema, Ishtiaq Khan, Shara Khandakar, Farzana Mir and Alavi Ahmed Mirza in collating and analysing source material; and thanks to Matt Schroeder and Holger Anders for peer reviews, Jacob Høgilt for insightful comments, and the editors at PRISM. All errors are the responsibility of the author.

¹² Adam Nossiter, “Qaddafi’s Weapons, Taken by Old Allies, Reinvigorate an Insurgent Army in Mali,” *New York Times*, February 5, 2012.

¹³ United Nations SC, “Final report of the Panel Experts established pursuant to resolution 1970 (2011) concerning Libya,” (New York: United Nations, S/2015/128, 2015), 47.

¹⁴ See Salim Chena and Antonin Tissero, “Rupture d’équilibres au Mali Entre instabilité et recompositions,” *Afrique Contemporaine* 245 (2013) 71–84.

¹⁵ For a summary see: United Nations SC, “Final report of the Panel Experts established pursuant to resolution 1973 (2011) concerning Libya,” (New York: United Nations, S/2014/106, 2014), 30–31; Nossiter, “Qaddafi’s Weapons.”

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¹⁸ Holger Anders “Expanding Arsenal Insurgent Arms In Northern Mali,” in Glenn McDonald et al eds. *Small Arms Survey 2015 Weapons And The World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 176; Nossiter, “Qaddafi’s Weapons.”

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²⁰ United Nations SC, “Final Report of the Panel of Experts Established Pursuant to Resolution 1973 (2011) concerning Libya,” (New York: United Nations, S/2014/106, 2014), 30–32.

²¹ UNSC 2013, 31; UNSC 2013, 27.

²² UNSC 2014, 35.

²³ UNSC 2013, 27; UNSC 2013, 31.

²⁴ See Holger Anders “Expanding Arsenal Insurgent Arms In Northern Mali,” 174–180; Conflict Armament Research and the Small Arms Survey, *Rebel Forces In Northern Mali Documented Weapons, Ammunition And Related Materiel* (London and Geneva: Conflict Armament Research and the Small Arms Survey); and UNSC 2014, 30.

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³⁰ United Nations SC, “Final report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 1973 (2011) concerning Libya,” (New York: United Nations, S/2016/209, 2016), 43.

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³² UNSC 2012, 27.

³³ UNSC 2013, 26–30.

³⁴ Holger Anders “Expanding Arsenal Insurgent Arms In Northern Mali,” 175.

³⁵ Conflict Armament Research, *Investigating Cross-Border Weapon Transfers In The Sahel* (London: Conflict Armament Research, 2016), 19.

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³⁷ UNSC 2012, 34.

³⁸ UNSC 2014, 35.

³⁹ UNSC 2015, 125.

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⁴⁴ For fieldwork in Tunisia see Moncef Kartas, *On the Edge?*

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⁸² UNSC 2013, 77.

⁸³ UNSC 2014, 43.

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