Syria Studies

VOL 9, NO 2 (2017)
December 2017

The Day After

Post-Uprising Realities & Challenges

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Syria Studies

An open-access, peer reviewed, & indexed
journal published online by:
The Centre for Syrian Studies (CSS)
University of St Andrews

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Centre for Syrian Studies – University of St Andrews, 2017

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Preface

Omar Imady

We are presently entering what might be termed the 'Day After' phase (or phases) of the Syrian Uprising; a period when the uprising and all the wars it unleashed gradually give way to the harsh realities of demarcation lines, the challenges of reconstruction, and the astronomical bill of the war effort. The fact that this phase involves a regime 'victory' that could not have been achieved without the overwhelming support of Russia and Iran, means that the regime is unable to enforce its own conditions and must constantly negotiate with the Russians, and at times the Iranians, regarding the optimal way to exercise its authority. The US military presence which, at least presently, appears to be long term, adds additional pressure on the regime and restricts its capacity to expand its territory. In this issue of *Syria Studies*, we are pleased to share three studies that shed light on some of these complex layers of post-uprising Syria.

In *Syria's Reconciliation Agreements*, Raymond Hinnebusch and Omar Imady explore how the regime and the opposition interacted with the evolving idea of *musalahat* or 'reconciliations'. At first, when neither side could unseat the other, these reconciliations were in essence, truces which reflected the war of attrition. As the regime grew stronger, largely after the Russian intervention, the *musalahat* evolved into several more advanced types, all designed to break the rebels, yet significantly different in the extent to which the regime was willing to agree to a more balanced arrangement. Hinnebusch and Imady proceed to examine the more recent, and internationally sanctioned, 'deconfliction zones' and show how they are similar, and different, from previous arrangements. The critical trademark of all of this, from a governance perspective, is the fact that all these arrangements entail, in various degrees, the decentralisation of government authority. The paper ends with the ironic conclusion that the Syria that may emerge from all this extensive decentralisation may resemble in certain ways the very Syria the protesters back in 2011 were advocating.

In *Syria's Reconstruction Scramble* – Muriel Asseburg & Khaled Yacoub Oweis, focus on whether or not Europe should put aside its current reservations and become involved in the reconstruction effort. Asseburg and Oweis show that the realities of the post-uprising phase are in sharp contradiction with any meaningful attempt at reconstruction. Any involvement at this stage would amount to reducing reconstruction to the mere rebuilding of physical infrastructure even as actual fighting continues and without any prospects to a political settlement. The authors further conclude that Europe should instead "… play the long game and develop leverage to make future contributions serve state and peace-building purposes."

In *What the West Owes Syrians*, Diana Bashur explores another significant post-uprising reality, Syrian refugees and the costs involved in hosting them by Western countries. Here Bashur is seeking to draw our attention to an important, yet largely ignored, correlation between the profit incurred through arms sales by Western countries to countries that have provided support to the armed opposition and the costs involved in hosting Syrian refugees in the West. Bashur eloquently contrasts the extent to which the West was enthusiastic about the Arab Spring with the significant increase in arms sales to the region by EU and the US, 23% and 300% respectively. Bashur leaves us with the sobering probability that some European politicians "… may have opted for a tradeoff: making their taxpayers shoulder the short-term cost of hosting refugees in exchange for profits to the arms industry."

1
Syria's Reconciliation Agreements

Raymond Hinnebusch & **Omar Imady**

Local truces in the Syrian conflict, what the regime called reconciliation (*muslaha)* agreements and the great powers later termed de-escalation or deconfliction zones have varied, over time, largely according to the changing balance of power. They ranged from compromises in which after a cease fire opposition fighters remained involved in security and governance roles in their areas, to cases of virtual opposition surrender involving evacuations of fighters or even whole populations.

The Context Shaping "Reconciliation:" the Changing Balance of Power

The Syrian government and opposition forces had, from quite early on, negotiated truces in limited areas, but greater impetus was given to this by the growing incapacity of either side to win the war. The regime, facing manpower shortages that precluded the re-conquest of opposition areas, took the lead in trying, instead, to impose settlements piece by piece on the arenas on the margins of government controlled areas where opposition concentrations were most threatening. The truces reflected and formalized the reality of a war of attrition, in which advances were incremental and difficult to hold, tending to fragment control. Also, the failure of national level "top-down" political negotiations, notably Geneva II, led the third UN mediator, Stephan DeMistura to propose in November 2014 less ambitious bottom up local truces in order to reduce the violence and in the hope these would acquire momentum enabling the national level negotiations stalemate to be overcome (Beals 2017).

The shifting balance of power tended to determine the pace and kind of agreement. In the Damascus area, the

regime benefited from the opposition's fragmentation, inability to coordinate combined offensives and vulnerability to being picked off one by one. Populations became alienated as opposition fighters failed to shield people from the regime's sieges and air assaults as well as by their infighting over control of supplies and access points, personal power and doctrinal differences (among Islamists) (Glass 2017; Lund, 2017b). Another factor was the co-optation of opposition FSA forces by Jordan and Turkey, to secure their borders and fight IS and the PYD rather than Asad. Most notably, the Russian intervention, the fall of Aleppo and Turkey's realignment with Russia, giving up on the goal of overthrowing Asad, set up a certain bandwagoning toward the apparently winning regime side (Samaha 2017). When surveyed as to why the opposition was accepting deals with the regime, respondents cited relief from sieges, bringing security, declining prospects of military victory over the regime and an opportunity to re-coup arms. (Turkmani and Kaldor 2014). After years of unrest, massacres and deadlocks, public opinion seemed to shift in favour of the security and safety that the regime could possibly better deliver (Lakitsch 2017).

After its 2015 intervention, Russia's strategy started to dominate the settlement process. Moscow proposed "de-escalation/de-confliction zones" to contain the conflict. The medium-term goal would be something resembling post-civil war Bosnia, with government and opposition forces responsible for security in their own areas (Memorandum; Applying Bosnia Model). In the shorter term, getting the moderate fighters to accept de-escalation would in practice bring them to accept the Asad regime and, at times, allow them to be used against the jihadists. At the Astana meeting, 13 armed factions, having suffered battlefield losses, especially in Aleppo and loss of backing from Turkey, were brought, albeit unwillingly, into the negotiations over what became the Astana agreement, (AP 2017). It specified four de-escalation zones-- northern Homs, Ghouta, south Daraa/Quneitra and Idlib and parts of neighbouring provinces. Not only would fighting stop in these areas, but the government was obliged to allow humanitarian aid,

restore public services and allow refugees to return; also having little choice, Damascus said that although it would abide by the agreement, it would continue fighting "terrorism" –a label it applies to all armed rebel groups. Opposition militants recognized the agreement aimed to split the FSA from the jihadists, thus divide the opposition to Asad's benefit. Russia, Turkey and Iran were to provide forces to police the ceasefire, although agreement over the details was not reached. The Putin-Trump pact — detailed in a Memorandum of Principle for De-escalation in Southern Syria — was to establish a similar cease-fire between Syrian government forces and armed opposition in southern Syria that would maintain the existing division of control between the two sides, though, unlike Astana, it did not recognize any role for Iran, directly or indirectly (i.e. Hizbullah), in securing this agreement.

In essence, the military opposition has come to terms with the fact that it had to separate from the jihadist groups and come to terms with a heavy Russian role and presence because the alternative was Iran, and that changing the Asad regime was, at the very least, no longer achievable in the short run. The 'deconfliction zones' constituted the only tangible 'achievement' the opposition could claim on the ground, since they were in theory areas which were not completely under government control, and yet under some form of international protection. Because these zones were only clearly defined in terms of the areas they cover, rather than in actual nature, both the regime and the opposition would inevitably attempt to impose their respective modes of governance and security.

Regime Discourse

The Syrian government professed to follow a policy of dialogue regarding political reform with all domestic parties "which rejected foreign interference and violence, "while combating foreign-backed" insurgencies. Following the failed Geneva II conference in which it claims the "foreign – backed opposition" excluded itself from the reform process, internal dialogue was asserted to be the only viable peaceful

exit from the conflict. (SANA 2014; nsnbc international, 2014)

National reconciliation was a "strategic vision" articulated by President Bashar al-Asad (al-Baath Newspaper). The government established a Ministry of National Reconciliation in 2012 under Ali Haidar who claimed successful conclusion of 50 reconciliation projects as of September 30, 2015 (Stone 2016). The strategy was to separate the foreign fighters from Syrian fighters and the "terrorists" from moderate fighters who could be "brought to their senses" (Adleh and Favier 2017). He presented a benign representation of the process: the ministry selected influential local people to form a committee of reconciliation which contacted the fighters and offered safe passage out of the area for those fighters who refused reconciliation and amnesty for those who laid down their arms. The latter were invited to join the army and many, the regime claimed, did so. President Asad granted blanket amnesties eight times in the last five years for a total of about 20,000 former Syrian "mercenaries." In July 2016, Asad issued Legislative Decree No. 15, the legal basis for 'reconciliation,' which included amnesty for those who 'turn themselves in and lay down their weapons.' (Ezzi, 2017). Opposition supporters were guaranteed the right to work with the (unarmed) Syrian internal opposition. The Syrian media conveyed the view that the people in opposition controlled areas wanted (SANA, Oct 2015) to embrace national reconciliation, but were afraid of violent reprisal from terrorist organizations. Reconciliation would boost trust between citizens and officials, settle the legal status of youths who decided to lay down their weapons, address the issue of missing people, and enable humanitarian aid. "Reconciliations are doing very well now," said President Asad's adviser, Dr. Bouthaina Shaaban in 2017. "And there are many areas in the pipeline. We feel that this is the best way to end the war." (Glass 2017)

How does the regime see the cumulative outcome of reconciliation? Legislative Decree 107, on administrative de-centralization, has been said to provide a potential framework for a post-conflict devolution of political authority that would allow all sides of the conflict to retain some degree of control

over the areas under their jurisdiction; yet, it also grants wide powers and to a presidential appointed governor at the province level (Aarabi 2017). Giving the present alternatives, that may well be an ideal outcome allowing at least some power-sharing.

Regime Strategy

However, People's Assembly speaker Hadiyah Abbas gave a more realistic assessment in describing reconciliation as a way "to enhance the victories achieved by the Syrian Arab Army against the terrorist organizations." (SANA, Sept 2016). Indeed, sources close to the regime see reconciliation as part of a sophisticated regime survival strategy. This strategy combines negotiations with the opposition, with the unrestrained use of force, (relying on Russia for diplomatic protection at the UNSC against international reaction) reflecting the regime view that one can never negotiate from weakness. However, faced with manpower constraints, rather than risk significant regime causalities, the regime came to pursue a policy of siege and waiting until the villages or towns were finally ready to capitulate (which the older notables would pressure the fighters to accept.). The state security system, armed with intelligence files amassed over generations, knew its enemies and their vulnerabilities. Discovering that no tactic worked everywhere, the regime's negotiators offered different kinds of deals in different areas; for example, those that demonstrated high resistance in fighting the regime faced total population removal and safe passage to rebel controlled areas (i.e. the Idlib governorate) (Glass 2017). Many deals concentrated on the peripheries of Damascus where the regime gradually expanded against rebel concentrations that were a threat to its nerve centre, but also in Homs, Aleppo and elsewhere (Beals 2017).

The reconciliations were regarded from the very beginning as part of a war strategy rather than a genuine desire to move toward power-sharing: promises pertaining to administrative decentralization and the special privileges promised to notables of reconciled areas were reversed over time and loyalists were systematically reintroduced into these areas. Moreover, as the power

balance shifted its way, the regime's determination to bring all Syrian territory back under its rule has been renewed. Regime media boasts that until recently the idea of a military victory was regarded as impossible to achieve but is no longer so and a return to a centralised government will be achieved (over time); only when it comes to the Kurdish areas does the regime exhibit uncertainty regarding the extent to which it can restore the old status quo. In private, regime connected figures admit the regime is reconciled to a continuing long struggle. Having achieved the upper hand on the ground at great cost, Asad has no interest in the concessions needed for a negotiated political transition.

Certainly, the opposition sees the regime's reconciliation strategy as far from benign. Reconciliation deals do not amount to "reconciliation" but are either surrenders or temporary truces of convenience. In its most alarmist version, they are nothing less a plan for demographic re-engineering of Syria. Riyad Hassan Agha, of the Syrian opposition's Higher Negotiation Committee (HNC), sees it in these terms: make 12 million Syrians (predominantly Sunni) become displaced or refugees and force the remaining Sunnis of Damascus and the coast to accept their reduced role as a wounded minority which must show full allegiance. In parallel Iranian backed militias are introduced into areas where Sunni fighters depart as a strategy of Shia-ization (All4Syria Archive).

"Reconciliation" in Action: Processes and Outcome Variations

We can get a better idea of both government intentions and the constraints it faces by surveying the processes by which reconciliation deals have been reached and what their outcome has been.

The negotiators for the government were army and intelligence officers as well as pro-regime residents of contested areas such as tribal or religious leaders, while the opposition side included fighters, council activists, religious leaders and notables. The regime could not simply dictate the terms: e.g. pro-Asad notables with roots in East Ghouta made repeated negotiating trips to Islam Army-held Douma (Lund 2017a). Negotiations often broke down because the

government insisted on surrender or if less was demanded, spoilers, those profiting from checkpoints on both sides, but especially the hard-line local regime militias grouped in the National Defence Force (NDF) sometimes defied deals reached by government officials. In one instance, a reconciliation committee authorized by the government was killed by an Alawite militia. Bad faith and non-implementation especially by the government deterred further agreements. Opposition groups might prolong the fighting to keep access to outside funding. When fighters were foreign or had no stake in the affected area, they were less responsive to civilian suffering and demands to end the fighting (Turkmani and Kaldor 2014). In 2016, the Russians set up their own Centre for reconciliation that claimed to broker 1479 truces, which, if true, marked a serious acceleration in their pace (Adleh and Favier 2017).

Kinds of Agreements

Kinds of agreement reflect not just the intentions of regime (and opposition) but the balance of power between them, and also factors such as whether a locale is strategic, its sectarian composition and the history of its role in the uprising.

***Type 1*:** The most unbalanced form of agreement leads to displacement of the entire population, (many of whom will have previously fled the area), perhaps in a population exchange such as occurred in the so-called four towns agreement wherein Shiite villages encircled by the opposition were evacuated in parallel to Sunni evacuations from the Kalamoun area, e.g. from Zebadani. This strategy, in opposition eyes, is based on forcing the inhabitants to relocate with a view towards creating demographic changes in a so-called "useful Syria." (Ezzi 2017)

In the case of Daraya, which was a platform for rebel attacks on regime-held Damascus and close to the Mezze military airport, not only was the population forced out, but also regime troops looted and razed the town. By contrast, the neighbouring town of Moadamiyah, which had been more defensive in the conflict, was treated more generously. Many Daraya fighters went to Idlib, but others relocated to a

new camp ten miles south of Damascus near Harjallah where new houses were built and free food, utilities, education and medical care were provided by the Red Crescent. Said one fighter: "We were given a choice. …when I came here, …everyone said the regime would take me to prison." Evidently, this did not happen (Glass 2017). In some places, a Sunni-Alawite sectarian faultline influenced the regime's approach: Homs centre city and al-Waer, rebellious Sunni areas, both suffered population evacuation, shifting the demographic balance in favour of Alawites.

Type 2*:* A somewhat less punitive deal required opposition fighters and activists to submit in return for lifting of sieges and restoring services but without large-scale population displacement. This version of 'reconciliation' was implemented in Qudsaya, Al-Hama, Al-Tal, Madaya, and the suburbs of eastern Damascus, among others. Anyone who was armed and did not accept government conditions was expelled. Submissive elements of the former armed opposition were absorbed into the regime's local militias. The opposition's local councils were dismantled since, offering an alternative to state institutions, they were seen as a threat to restoration of regime authority in rebel areas. Members of the reconciliation delegation, traditional dignitaries, merchants and clerics loyal to the official religious establishment become local leaders with temporary authority. Significantly, these deals allowed former Islamist clerics to be co-opted: e.g. in the town of Yalda in the southern Damascus countryside, the Imam of Masjid al-Saliheen after having been a judge in a Sharia court of the Islamist factions, joined the government side as did the Imam of the Beit Sahem Great Mosque, who was the commander of Liwa Sham al-Rasoul's Saraya al-Sham. Through the former Mufti of Rif Dimashq, Sheikh Muhammad Adnan Afiouni, a disciple of the late Shaikh Ahmad Kaftaru, the regime rehabilitated them and gave them guarantees that they would not be prosecuted in return for their support for the policy of 'reconciliation'. They were transformed into mediators between the people and the state. Although sieges were lifted in these cases, local humanitarian networks that

had hitherto channelled aid from abroad were dismantled, as the government considered such delivery of aid to opposition areas a violation of its sovereignty. Now aid flowed only through government-affiliated channels where it might be diverted to loyalist hands or lost through corruption. The regime sometimes reneged on its promises to deliver services; in Al-Tal, electricity was not restored and there were arbitrary arrests by the pro-regime Qalamoun Shield militia. The regime managed to co-opt some FSA fighters into its National Defence Forces, capitalizing on infighting and grievances between opposition groups. But in many 'reconciliation' areas, the regime began imposing mandatory conscription (Adleh and Favier 2016; Ezzi 2017).

Type 3: The third type of agreement was more balanced as dictated by a power balance between regime and opposition. Under this type of deal rebels maintained control of their areas in return for handing over heavy weaponry and halting attacks on regime forces; in return, sieges were lifted, return of the displaced and restoration of public utilities allowed (Hamlo 2015). The first agreement in Barzeh of June 2014 was along these lines and much more favourable to the opposition than other deals owing to the fact that it was a strategic location the government needed to recover but had not been able to do so militarily, suffering many casualties; as such, it pushed for a ceasefire to neutralize this front. FSA fighters remained in control of their area, nominally transformed into a regime-sanctioned "popular army" charged with maintaining security, and the army pulled back to allow civilians to return, with the road to Damascus being opened (Turkmani and Kaldor 2014). Later, however in May 2017, hundreds of rebels and their families were also evacuated after they decided to lay down their arms and leave to rebel-held Idlib province.

A similar deal was reached in 2014 in Jiroud, which thereafter remained peaceful. The deal was characterized by an opposition activist as a "temporary truce" that served the interests of the opposing sides. The government wanted to reduce the number of fronts in which it is engaged and the (pro-opposition) inhabitants of Jiroud sought to spare their

town. In his words, “The government will have to exercise self-restraint …because they cannot afford to reignite those fronts since the army is overstretched in such hotspots as Idlib, Daraa and Aleppo” (Hamlo 2015).

Al-Sanamayn in Daraa muhafazat was a model for how the regime sought to deal, at minimum cost, with the wider rebel-held south. It was strategic, being home to an important base of the Syrian army's 9th division and a gateway between Daraa and opposition areas of the Ghouta. Much of the town fell out of regime control and opposition local councils were set up, though most of the public services were still provided by the regime. The regime laid siege to the opposition-controlled neighbourhoods which was lifted under an agreement that the rebels would not attack regime positions or personnel. Some (not all) weapons were handed over but no fighters were compelled to leave. The regime's security forces did not intervene in security and criminal incidents in the town, allowing the armed factions to deal with these matters: if the regime arrested someone's relatives, that person would retaliate by kidnapping military personnel or firing on a military zone. With all clans armed for self-defence, there was much lawlessness. Rather than conscription, the regime tried to recruit to the new Fifth Corp by offering substantial benefits. Facing manpower shortages, the regime saw this as a model for how to deal with the South; but it would not work in areas with a strong jihadi presence (Tamimi 2017).

Type 4: A fourth type of agreement resulted where the opposition bargaining position rested on its control of a resource crucial to the government. In Wadi Barada, the truce stipulated that the government forces would not interfere in the town at all, in return for secure pumping of drinking water to Damascus from al-Fija spring; “The rebels cut off water supply to Damascus more than once, blackmailing the government until the latter agreed to their demands, which were mostly about releasing prisoners from the regime’s jails,” Eventually, however, the government invaded and took over the Wadi area. Similarly, rebel groups seized control of gas pipelines in the town of Mahsa, which supplied

power plants in Damascus, using it to extort money from the government or to win the release of prisoners. In Aleppo control of the city's thermal power plant was the object of practical agreement between regime and opposition (Hamlo 2015;. Turkmani and Kaldor 2014).

Consequences of the Agreements

Local reconciliation agreements have delivered humanitarian improvements and local peace that top down efforts failed to deliver. In the short term, Syrians accept them to get relief from war, but in the long term, obstacles to true reconciliation include government policies of forced conscription and displacement, loss of property of displaced, razing of informal settlements and lack of regime release of detainees (Adleh and Favier 2017).

Despite the regime's expressed aim of restoring centralized rule over Syria, this is impractical in the medium term, and indeed, even in government controlled areas, power has become de-centralized to local strongmen, in a way not too different from the 3rd and 4th type of agreements with opposition areas. The last six years have created a culture of self-governance not only in areas that were outside of regime control, but even in areas like the coast and Damascus; a culture which the regime will have to adapt to. Indeed, it is in areas that remained under regime control that the regime will find it the most challenging to restore (assuming it actually desires to) to pre-uprising modes of governance. Millions of Syrians learned how to carry out their daily lives during periods when the government was far too preoccupied to deliver its previous services. These new survival skills often meant the rise of new organizations that the government tolerates because they are not politicized and are focused entirely on fulfilling functions that the government is too over stretched to carry out.

Local agreements need, however, to be incorporated into a comprehensive peace settlement; otherwise they will be mere war tactics used to neutralize one area so fighting is easier elsewhere. (Turkmani) and will not deliver anything like reconciliation. Russian proposals seem to aim at just this and if they are realized would mean, in practice, a new more

decentralized but also more lawless order for the medium term. As the situation stands today, the regime appears to have not only proven it can achieve a partial military victory, but also that the only type of changes it is willing to tolerate are those decentralized forms of governance that are taking place within the framework of reconciliations. These changes, however, insignificant as they may presently seem, strike at the very nature of pre-2011 Syria, and hence, ironically, what appears now as evidence of government triumph may eventually prove to be the foundation of a Syria not too different than that which the initial protests aspired to reach.

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2
Syria's Reconstruction Scramble[1]

Muriel Asseburg & Khaled Yacoub Oweis

Introduction

In the second half of 2017, as the civil war abated and the so-called Islamic State (IS) was all but defeated, Moscow increased its efforts to reach what it regards as conflict resolution in several fora beyond the UN-led Geneva process. Moreover, as the US administration made it clear that it would not be engaging in reconstruction efforts, Russia has sought European financial assistance to help cover the costs of rebuilding the country, together with Arab Gulf states. Although the European Union had, in April 2017, ruled out support for reconstruction without a political transition, calls have now been mounting in Europe to accommodate Bashar al-Asad, help in the reconstruction of Syria, and send back refugees. Yet, the fighting is far from over. More importantly, the mere reconstruction of physical infrastructure would do little to instill stability, but would rather raise the risk of fueling new conflicts. Europeans should therefore make clear to Russia that they will stick with their own approach. They should play the long game and develop leverage to make future contributions serve state- and peace-building purposes. Meanwhile, they should focus on increased levels of humanitarian aid, early recovery measures, such as de-mining and restoring basic water and health infrastructure, building human capital in Syria and among Syrian refugee communities, in addition to concentrating on civil society and local governance support where they have credible partners.

A New Phase of the Conflict

By late 2017, the Syrian regime and its allies had regained control over most of the urban centers in the country, and the

Caliphate proclaimed by the IS had all but lost its territorial base. The rebels had been mainly squeezed into several pockets but were still holding onto strategic junctures and main border crossings.[2] At the same time, ever since its direct military involvement in Syria, Russia has developed into the dominant military force. Moscow has been keen to translate that achievement into taking the lead on the diplomatic stage and acting as mediator in the conflict. Washington, whose interest in Syria since 2014 has been limited largely to combating the IS, has been unwilling to challenge the Russian approach. Nor has it shown willingness to contribute meaningfully to Syria's reconstruction after its heavy bombing of Syria's east. Russian bombardment, especially of Aleppo in 2016, caused wide-scale destruction, drawing strong EU condemnation for the "deliberate targeting of hospitals, medical personnel, schools and essential infrastructure" (Emmott, 2016). Yet, Moscow has turned to Europe for reconstruction support while chiding European countries for linking reconstruction to a political transition and predicted the conflict would soon be over. De-escalation was portrayed as having created the "de facto conditions" for full-scale reconstruction in Syria. Today's reality, however, looks different, with control still very much fragmented between a variety of forces on the ground in the deescalation zones, the territories liberated from the IS, the areas controlled by the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), as well as those areas under the control of the regime and its allies – with the fighting doing anything but drawing to a close.

De-escalation Zones

Moscow first used its military backing mainly to help the regime and its allies reconquer territories. Over the course of 2017, it aimed at reducing the levels of violence through a new approach that was to prepare the ground for pacification. In this vein, in the Kazakhstani capital, Astana, in May 2017, Russia agreed with Turkey and Iran on so-called de-escalation zones in regions held by various rebel forces. The deal was supposed to result in a halt to fighting in places where the revolt had not been crushed, offering the

possibility of sustained humanitarian relief and the restoration of basic services.

The Russia–Iran–Turkey deal stipulated ceasefires in four de-escalation zones, the halt of airstrikes, "rapid, safe, and unhindered" humanitarian access, the restoration of basic infrastructure, and the creation of conditions for the voluntary return of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The fight against jihadists would still continue in the zones, with attacks on the IS and HTS, an al-Qaeda offshoot, being exempted from the ceasefires. The zones comprise: 1. the north: Idlib province and parts of Aleppo, Latakia, and Hama governorates on the border with Turkey; 2. Homs: rural areas north of the city of Homs; 3. the Eastern Ghouta, i.e., the eastern suburbs of Damascus; and 4. a southwestern zone in areas adjacent to Jordan and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. Out of the four zones, the Damascus and Homs zones in the center of the country have been besieged by the regime. The three guarantors were to deploy military observers to see through the implementation of the ceasefire agreements (Syria's de-escalation zones explained, 2017).

In reality, the zones have evolved to present an array of local situations: from improved living conditions to the continued siege and massive carnage caused by the regime's and Russia's bombings of civilian targets in areas that Moscow had marked as being part of the de-escalation zones. For Asad, the zones were considered to be a temporary arrangement, if at all, and were to follow the path of other besieged areas that the regime had captured after "terrorists" (which is the regime's term for all rebels) were given the chance to disarm and "return to the bosom of the state." By early 2018, the Eastern Ghouta and Idlib de-escalation zones had effectively broken down.

Makings of a Mini-recovery

At the same time, bombing and sieges on areas in other zones abated, most notably in the countryside near Homs and in the southern governorate of Daraa. The window of temporary stability spurred fairly brisk activity in the private construction sphere. For example, some residents in rural Homs moved back to their hometowns from camps in nearby

farmlands and started to repair or rebuild their houses. Mud is reportedly being used instead of concrete, as prices for construction materials imported from regime areas remain high. The cost of most other goods and staples, such as sugar and rice, has fallen since the de-escalation deal came into effect in August 2017, breaking the monopolies of local traders, who had enjoyed a captive market. Two crossings with the regime opened, increasing the overall level of supplies. An export market slowly opened, too. Rebel areas sent sheep and cattle to regime areas, and the number of farmers who planned to plant crops increased, as they expected large enough sales to make a profit.

The potential of improved access could also rejuvenate the local councils, which activists had set up during the revolt to replace the regime's administration after Asad's forces withdrew from rebellious areas. The councils in rural Homs are now seeking to link up with donors and with the opposition's interim government. At the same time, the siege of the region may have been a blessing in disguise for the local structures, isolating them from outside meddling. In the southern governorate of Daraa, local activists see the reach of Jordan and other Arab countries as having tainted local governance structures. Figures linked to third countries penetrated or took over many of the local councils, undermining their merit and competence.[3]

Al-Qaeda Lurks

Apart from continued regime bombings and the threat of the regime attempting to reconquer further rebel areas, the highest hurdles to potential reconstruction in the de-escalation zones come from within. By August 2017, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS, or the Association for the Liberation of the Levant) – an offshoot of al-Qaeda and successor of the Nusra Front – all but finished off its Salafist rival, Ahrar al-Sham, and took control over most of the Idlib province.

The area of influence of HTS also included the main border crossing with Turkey, through which flows humanitarian aid and infrastructure supplies. Borrowing from Lenin's dictum of "peace, land and bread," HTS took

over the bakeries in the various towns across Idlib, many of which relied on Western programs for wheat supply. Keen to build up legitimacy with the local population and be seen as succeeding in governance, HTS indicated that it would not prevent outside assistance to Idlib (Bulos, 2017).

At the same time, the group had its hand in many of the local administrative structures, as well as schools, charities, and refugee camps, without necessarily staffing them outright with its members or conspicuously patrolling them. HTS also dissolved local councils or ousted council members who were critical of the group. In addition, they co-opted existing supervisory bodies, such as the Idlib Administrative Board, or nudged civilian allies to set up new ones. Among them is the so-called Syrian Salvation Government, formed in November 2017, with the apparent aim of displacing the opposition's interim government. Many qualified cadres in the various local administrations of Idlib remained in their posts despite their distaste of HTS. They preferred to hold onto their jobs and their links to donors to keep aid deliveries going.

Western support for Idlib's population, in contrast, abated markedly after HTS' takeover, as foreign donors were anxious about indirectly supporting the group or its front organizations. Activists had hoped that the entry of Turkish troops into Idlib in October 2017 would roll back HTS. The Turkish show of force was mandated by the implementation of the northern de-escalation zone foreseen in the Astana agreement. Yet, it was aimed at the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) militia, which is linked to the PYD, a Syrian offshoot of the Turkish Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in the nearby region of Afrin; this was done with the goal of preventing a contiguous Kurdish self-administration zone along the Turkish border.

The risk, however, of renewed warfare in the zone remained high, with Turkey and Iran raising the tone of their assertive rhetoric. Ankara, boosted by its newfound understandings with Russia, said it needed to clear Afrin of the YPG and started another military operation dubbed "olive branch" in January 2018 after the US government had announced it would help set up a border force manned

by 30,000 Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) fighters. Earlier, in December 2018, the Asad regime had started a military campaign in Southern Idlib and Hama provinces, aimed at reconquering strategic assets from the jihadists there.

The mostly Kurdish Afrin region has an estimated 300,000 inhabitants living in 20 cities and towns, whereas Idlib province has an estimated two million people, of whom one-third have been displaced there from other provinces. They settled in Idlib after fleeing fighting elsewhere in the country because Turkey had closed its border to refugees. Also, thousands of rebel fighters, their families, and other civilians were transported to the province in the regime's "green buses," which became synonymous with the population transfers that accompanied rebel surrenders in besieged areas under so-called reconciliation agreements.

Kurdish Expansion

Signs have emerged of an overreach by the PYD, in particular after the United States encouraged the capture of mostly Arab inhabited territories in eastern Syria from the IS by the SDF, which are dominated by the YPG, the PYD's fighters. In addition, the PYD's declared goal of linking two contiguous self-rule areas (the so-called cantons of Jazeera and Kobanê) with the Afrin canton also appeared to be farfetched. By late 2017, it became clear that the United States (and Russia) would not back the Syrian Kurds' political ambitions against Turkey beyond combating the IS; nor would Russia prevent the regime from recapturing territories liberated from the IS.

The PYD has set up local governance structures in these areas. Although these structures of "people's democracy" are nominally independent and inclusive, the PYD remains the power behind the scenes. One such arrangement has been installed in the mostly Arab town of Manbij, which the YPG captured from the IS in August 2016. The PYD appointed Farouk al-Mashi, a tribal figure, as the joint head of the Manbij City Council. The appointment invited scorn by opposition activists on social media, who compared the

PYD's methods of coercion and control to that of the regime. They also pointed out that al-Mashi was the son of Diab al-Mashi, a member of the rubber stamp Syrian parliament from 1954 till his death in 2009.

Pay-up Time for the Regime

Even though the Asad regime by no means controlled the entirety of Syria's territory, it sensed the winds in its favor. It sought to employ reconstruction to placate its constituencies and compensate for the thousands who had died fighting for Asad. At the opening of the Damascus International Trade Fair in August 2017, an Asad aide said Syria had "made a U-turn" and was on the path of rebuilding (Reuters, 2017). The regime portrayed reconstruction as a done deal and announced that no contracts would go to countries that had supported what it regards as terrorism.

Domestically, the authorities indicated that the rebuilding effort would reward mainly Asad's loyalists; it was not an attempt to mitigate the grievances that had fueled the revolt by addressing issues related to institutional legitimacy and capacity, justice, and political and social inclusion. At an official rally in November 2017 – held to mark the coup that brought Hafez al-Asad to power more than four decades earlier – a senior Baath Party operative boasted that Syria would be "built with the hands of its honorable sons" (SANA, 2017). The rally was held in Homs, from which the regime and Iran-backed militias had displaced hundreds of thousands of mainly Sunni inhabitants as they crushed the rebellion there. Of the 8 billion Syrian pounds ($15.5 million) that the government announced in July 2017 would be allocated to projects in Homs governorate, most of it went to Alawite and Christian communities as opposed to Sunni areas destroyed by regime bombing.

So far, the regime has, at least on paper, awarded projects to its cronies and struck initial agreements with Iran (Sharafedin/Francis, 2017) and Russia. The deals range from residential towers and a shopping center to be built on bulldozed homes in Damascus that had belonged to pro-democracy demonstrators, to a cellphone license and oil

refinery in Homs, and energy and mining concessions in eastern Syria. The regime apparently hopes to play the external powers against each other in the hopes that they will cough up the cash for hardcore infrastructure projects requiring long-term investment.

International Blueprints

As the civil war in Syria was seen as coming to an end, UN agencies, development organizations, and international finance institutions have drawn up a wealth of reconstruction blueprints for the country.[4] According to UN estimates, reconstruction would cost at least $250 billion (UNOG, 2017). What unites most of these plans is that they deal with reconstruction mostly as if it were a technical issue, whereas not much attention is being paid to the kind of governance system under which it is supposed to take place. Rather, a competent central authority oriented toward the public good – able and willing to engage in an equitable restoration of human capital and the social fabric – is just assumed.

Also, these plans do not detail how a competitive business environment would be instilled – under the same regime that deprived most Syrians of equal opportunity for decades. With the courts and bureaucracy beholden to the kleptocracy, foreign companies have barely been able to operate in Syria or to win or execute major contracts without partnering with the ruling elites or their agents. If anyone who is not in league with the regime comes close to winning a tender, rules are arbitrarily changed and they are disqualified. Cartels and rackets run by the top tiers of the security apparatus abound. The judiciary and regulatory bodies are massively rigged. Ministries and the central bank act as private instruments for the Makhloufs, who are Asad's cousins on his mother's side. The Makhloufs and two other branches of the Asad family have the public tenders and procurement system locked up between them.

What is more, most of these plans assume that Syria would work as a unitary state and do not account for the fragmentation that has resulted from the civil war. The fluidity of local dynamics, the emergence of new power brokers, and militia rule are all ignored. Among the forces

that emerged during the civil war is a new breed of crony capitalists, shaping the business environment and poised to obstruct – together with more established regime business figures – any reconstruction that is not in their favor. Also linked to the war economy are jihadists and other militia seeking to maximize their returns. In regime areas, organized crime and gang violence linked to various pro-Asad militia have spiked. Loyalists have targeted other loyalists in their quest for loot while cutting off roads and imposing tolls.

Third parties' motives

International reconstruction blueprints also take for granted cooperation between third countries for the good of Syria. In reality, however, many of the regional and international players see reconstruction as a means to consolidate their presence in Syria in the long term and as a tool to assert their (vital) interests in the broader power struggles of the Middle East (Berti, 2017). They also tend to focus on their immediate interests, such as quick financial returns or alleviating themselves of Syrian refugees.

The regime reportedly promised at least one Russian company linked to Russian security contractors a quarter of the oil and gas in the fields captured from the IS (Kramer, 2017). Iran has encouraged private investment in real estate in Syria and signed memorandums of understanding for reconstruction in Aleppo as well as the restoration of mobile communications, which would bring in revenues and give them a surveillance edge. Ankara, officially shut out by the regime, has repaired basic infrastructure, schools, and a hospital in the Turkish-controlled enclave of al-Bab (Khatib, 2017). Along with the more crucial absence of airstrikes, the rehabilitation has contributed to the return of some of the population into the small enclave. China has said it would also get involved in reconstruction, but it has not provided any specifics.

The European Union and the United States have invested billions of dollars in humanitarian aid and stabilization in opposition-held areas. The Europeans see their work in Syria as being different from that of the Americans, in that they generally aim at building

streamlined institutions across a multitude of regions and support civil society, whereas the United States prefers to work with individual actors to set up and test organizations that would act as a role model to be followed in other areas.

Outlook, Risks, and Dilemmas for the EU

Under various short- to mid-term scenarios (Mejnders/van der Lijn/ van Mierlo, 2017), the violence is not expected to halt, and militia rule and the war economy are set to remain entrenched. Still, European policymakers are under pressure to focus on what can be done immediately to help foster a settlement and stabilize the region, not least in view of the urgency they feel due to rising populism in the EU and the pressure to repatriate refugees.

Asad will happily take more freebies from the EU. For the regime, reconstruction is to serve, first and foremost, its own consolidation as well as ensure the permanence of social and demographic shifts and strengthen the loyalty of its citizens. A view espoused by the Asad regime and echoed in international aid meetings warns that Europe will lose out to Moscow and Tehran unless European nations help in the reconstruction of Syria.

In April 2017, the EU ruled out engaging in reconstruction "until a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition … is firmly under way" (European Council, 2017). Still, in practice, the European approach has been inconsistent – European countries have financed UN rebuilding programs that work in collaboration with the regime. The programs are ongoing or slated to start in regions where the dust has barely settled on forced population transfers, such as in Homs. No safeguards were devised to ensure the right of return for the original inhabitants, the halt of the falsification of public records, or a reversal of the regime's confiscation of property in rebel districts it had captured. Also, the EU has not made the departure of Asad a precondition for engaging in reconstruction efforts. Rather, EU member states' representatives have increasingly acknowledged that Bashar al-Asad might well play a role in the transition period, and even beyond. EU member states have been divided between

those taking a stance against any cooperation with what they regard as a regime that cannot be reformed, and those willing to placate Asad in the hope of quick stabilization or of opening a supposedly lucrative reconstruction market to their companies and development agencies. Consequently, the EU has shied away from spelling out if a genuine transition would be possible if Asad and his immediate entourage were to remain in power.

Reconstruction thus poses a dilemma for the EU and its member states, as the chances for any real change to Syria's authoritarian and repressive system are fading. Indeed, the Russian approach and the emergence of an emboldened Asad regime have complicated the realization of a European strategy on reconstruction. Moscow has portrayed its activities as being complementary to the UN Special Envoy's efforts at achieving a negotiated conflict settlement based on the 2012 Geneva Agreement and UN Security Council Resolution 2254 of December 2015. But the Russian way has undermined the approach and list of priorities agreed upon in Resolution 2254 (UNSC, 2015), the centerpiece of which was supposed to be a transitional governing body – comprised of regime and opposition representatives – with full authority. Rather, Russia has sought legitimization of the Asad regime by leading a process of limited reform legitimized by a Conference of the Syrian Peoples or national dialogue conference held in late January 2018, followed by elections.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Russian-dominated conflict-settlement approach and the expected continued presence of Iran-backed militias is unlikely to bring about even a minimum of the security, administrative, and economic reforms that would address Syria's deep-rooted socio-economic and sectarian imbalances. Reconstruction cannot, as Russia implies, be reduced to the physical reconstruction of infrastructure and economic recovery. Rather, measures to safeguard citizens' security, establish effective governance, and lay the ground for reconciliation are key for peace-building.

Experts widely agree that the following conditions need to be fulfilled to allow for reconstruction that serves peacebuilding: 1. an effective division of power with functioning checks and balances; the establishment of effective economic and administrative oversight bodies; 2. large-scale demilitarization; an end to militia and warlord rule; establishing army and security services loyal to the state and its citizenry, not to the regime; comprehensive disarmament of militias; 3. addressing forced displacement and expropriation of property; allowing for social reconciliation; 4. an inclusive constitutional process in which majority and minority rights are respected; a political climate in which free and fair elections are possible, political rights are guaranteed, and civil society can operate.

In the absence of reforms leading to such favorable circumstances, European involvement in reconstruction runs the risk of feeding destructive dynamics and foregoing incentives for political settlement (Heller, 2017). The Europeans should therefore stick to the approach outlined in the April 2017 strategy, and clearly say so. They should also gauge when to throw around their weight and leverage their diplomatic, financial, and technical support to achieve conditions under which reconstruction would serve long-term stabilization rather than lead to renewed violent conflict and radicalization.

At a later stage – and because of the sheer amount of investment needed – the regime will not be able to depend only on its allies, as it has boasted. Rather, it might be forced to turn to Western, Gulf, and international sources of financing. That might be the starting point for pushing toward the realization of measures aimed at building credible institutions. One should not exaggerate the chances of success (Heydemann, 2017): Such a development is by no means guaranteed, as the regime might choose to continue defying European conditionality, even if it comes at the cost of massive North Korean-style human suffering.

In the near future, some of the de-escalation zones could become the settings for larger European efforts at recovery – under the condition that the arrangements stick, which is more likely for some areas (in the south and north of Homs)

than for others (Eastern Ghouta and Idlib). The challenge in these zones is that some of the areas are controlled by forces that cannot be partners in reconstruction, such as al-Qaeda linked groups, meaning that support can only be administered through civil society organizations rather than the local councils and the interim government. Also, the rebels are often so fragmented in terms of actual control that no zone-wide de-escalation projects can be administered.

Europeans will therefore have to look for tailor-made approaches, depending on the conditions and partners available in each of the areas. These approaches should focus on humanitarian aid, early recovery, and support for non-violent community-based organizations – not least to counter jihadists' propaganda and influence – as well as continued support for local governance, where possible. It is far-fetched to believe that with such kinds of support, one would be able to create "islands of stability," which could be the basis for nation-wide stabilization. But Europeans should still strive toward helping local civilian and governance structures survive.

Humanitarian aid, the provision of basic services, and support for civil society should also be the focus of European support in the PYD-controlled areas, where repression of opposition forces and independent activists and forced recruitment have become major problems, despite the progressive and inclusive image projected by the PYD.

Last but not least, rather than thinking about sending refugees back to situations where their lives and existence are threatened, Europeans should focus more on building Syria's human resources in the neighboring countries and among the refugee communities across Europe.

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Endnotes

[1] An earlier version was published as Asseburg, M. / Oweis, K. Y. (2017). Syria's Reconstruction Scramble. In a Game Fraught with Political Risk, Europe Should Aim for Long-term Stabilization. Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, December 2017. Retrieved from: https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2017C51_ass_ows.pdf.

[2] See for example the maps of territorial control at Omran for Strategic Studies, 2017.

[3] Information provided in these paragraphs based on authors' interviews with local activists.

[4] For an overview and analysis of some of these documents see Cordesman, 2017.

3
What the West Owes Syrians: *US and European Arms Sales to the Middle East 2011-2014*[1]

Diana Bashur

While the last two years have seen heated discussions in Europe and the US about the costs of hosting Syrian and other refugees, debate is lacking about another aspect of Western countries' involvement in the region's conflicts: the extent of arms sales to the Middle East. Between 2011 and 2014 - based on conservative estimates - Europe earned €21 billion from the arms trade with the Middle East while it spent €19 billion on hosting approximately one million Syrian refugees. During that same period, the US earned at least €18 billion from weapons sales, while accepting only about 11,000 Syrian refugees.

This study aims to address, as much as data availability allows, the balance between Westerns countries' income from official weapons export to the Middle East and the cost of hosting Syrian refugees fleeing a conflict that has witnessed imbrications of most of the region's countries. Accordingly, we will assess the value of official weapons sales between arms producing countries and the Middle East between 2011 and 2014. The focus will be on trade with Jordan, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Turkey (abridged as JUQKKT), countries that have close links with the Syrian armed opposition. We then compare arms sales revenues with the cost of hosting Syrian refugees seeking protection in arms-exporting countries[2] - while taking note that comparing earnings from the arms trade with the costs of hosting refugees does not address or

assume away the immorality of weapons sales. We grouped weapons manufacturers and transfer countries under the 'Friends of Syria' banner – in reference to the group formed in 2012 by former French President Nicolas Sarkozy composed of France, UK, US, Germany, Italy, Turkey, UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt - and the rest under Eastern Europe. We assess JUQKKT's entire weapons purchases consisting in both the build up of their national militaries as well their weapons imports intended for delivery to the war in Syria. In our view, it is as important to consider the replenishment of JUQKKT's national arsenals, which are key to the repressive regimes contributing to the wars and crackdown campaigns of the region. Indeed, over the 2012-2016 period, there has been an unprecedented build-up of the military arsenal of Gulf countries and Turkey with investments significantly increasing the capabilities of their armed forces.[3]

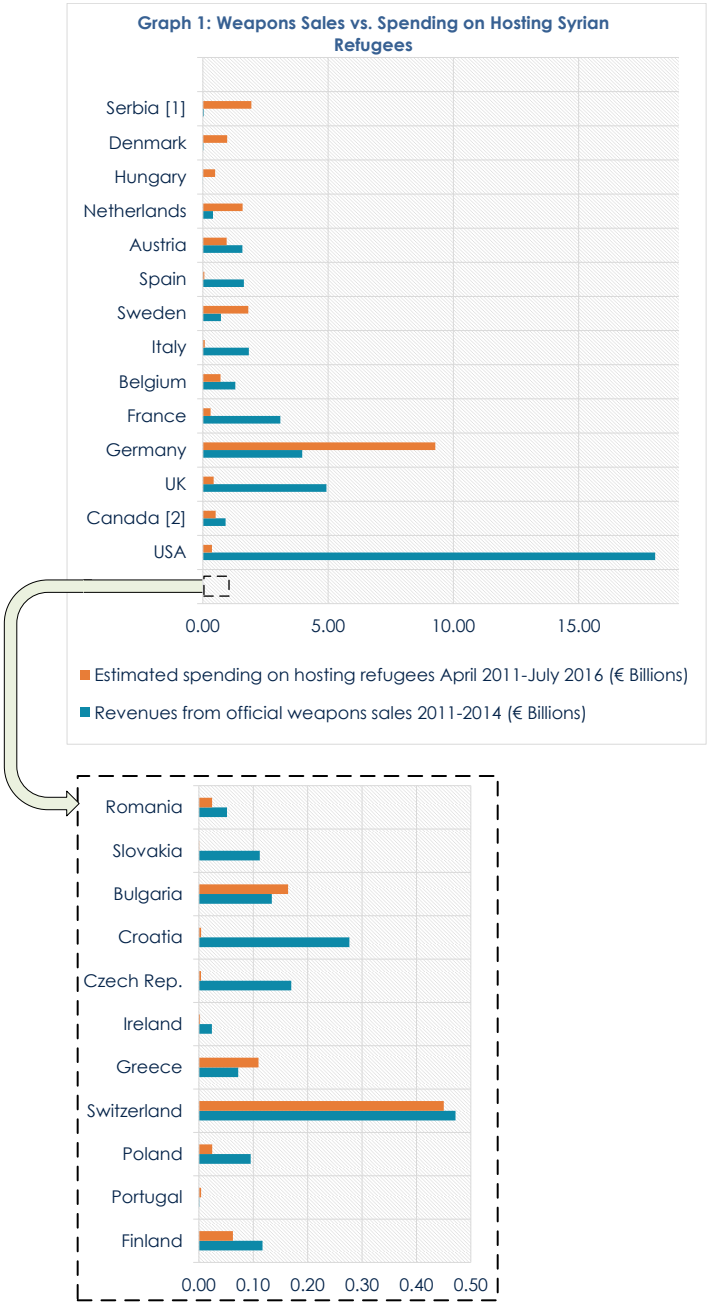
The focus on Western countries does not imply that they are the only weapons exporters to the region. However, reliable data on arms exports from China, Russia and Iran are not readily available. Nevertheless, we do try to provide some plausible estimates based on the very limited data available.[4] While this prevents us from including these three countries in our calculations, it does not impact our main premise of the indirect but foreseeable link between Western arms transfer to the Middle East and the wave of refugees.

We based our findings on official national reports, which record approved weapons export licenses rather than actual weapons shipped to the importing country (except for the case of Canada where records reflect actual weapons exports). The difference lies in that while export licenses may be approved in a given year, delivery may only occur several years down the line due to extended production cycles of military equipment. By extension, this also indicates that, even if export licenses cease to be approved today, weapons will continue to flow to the region for years to come. Furthermore, we note that official arms sales figures are conservative estimates knowing that at least

2%[5] of the arms trade is unaccounted for and is conducted through behind-the-door deals. As we will also show, there is strong evidence of countries exporting to JUQKKT without it being reflected in their national records.

In calculating the cost of hosting refugees starting from April 2011[6], we assumed that governments have continued to support refugees from the time of their asylum applications up until the end of the period under study (July 2016)[7]. Also, for countries where specific data on the cost of hosting refugees is not available, in particular East European countries, we used Spain's per capita cost as a proxy given closer costs of living in southern Europe to those in Eastern Europe.[8]

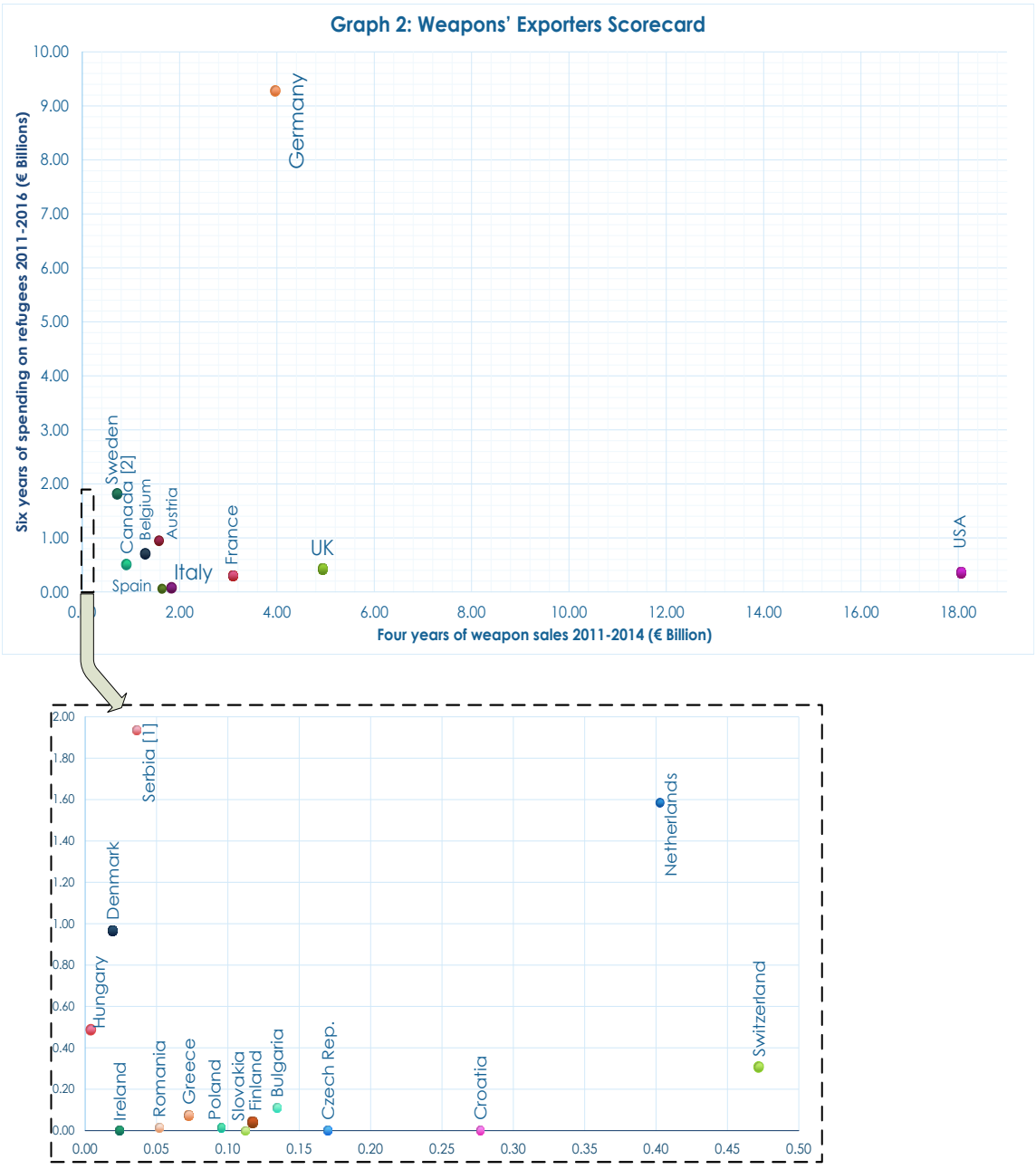
The following table, graphs and Appendices developed by the author will form the basis of our discussion.[9]


Graph 1: Weapons Sales vs. Spending on Hosting Syrian Refugees
Serbia [1]
Denmark
Hungary
Netherlands
Austria
Spain
Sweden
Italy
Belgium
France
Germany
UK
Canada [2]
USA
0.00
5.00
10.00
15.00
Estimated spending on hosting refugees April 2011-July 2016 (€ Billions)
Revenues from official weapons sales 2011-2014 (€ Billions)
Romania
Slovakia
Bulgaria
Croatia
Czech Rep.
Ireland
Greece
Switzerland
Poland
Portugal
Finland
0.00
0.10
0.20
0.30
0.40
0.50

Country	Number of Refugees	Income from Weapons 2011-2014 (€ Billions)	Ratio of Income from Weapons vs Cost of Hosting Refugees	Ratio including 2015-2016 RRPs cf. Footnote 9
Slovakia	64	0.11	283.56x	81.88x
Croatia	448	0.28	100.22x	100.22x
Czech Rep.	417	0.17	66.07x	39.55x
USA	11,883	18.05	49.58x	8.29x
Spain	9,562	1.64	27.81x	22.08x
Italy	3,291	1.83	24.10x	19.05x
UK	9,897	4.93	11.52x	4.87x
France	12,142	3.09	10.03x	7.83x
Poland	787	0.10	5.72x	5.72x
Finland	1,752	0.12	2.74x	1.56x
Belgium	16,384	1.30	1.84x	1.65x
Canada [2]	25,000	0.91	1.78x	1.24x
Austria	40,949	1.58	1.66x	1.62x
Switzerland	13,282	0.47	1.54x	1.32x
Bulgaria	18,167	0.13	1.20x	1.19x
Greece	12,138	0.07	0.97x	0.97x
Germany	401,018	3.97	0.43x	0.38x
Sweden	109,044	0.72	0.40x	0.40x
Netherlands	32,289	0.40	0.25x	0.22x
Denmark	19,738	0.02	0.02x	0.02x
Serbia [1]	314,327	0.04	0.02x	0.02x
Hungary	79,116	0.00	0.01x	0.01x

Table 1: Country Ranking

Ranking of countries in terms of ratio of income from the arms trade vs. spending on refugees. Countries included in this table are those with more than €100 million in weapons exports or with more than 10,000 asylum seekers. Most countries earned several times more from the sales of weapons than they spent on refugees: the highest profits go to Slovakia which made 283 times more, while the US earned 50 times more and Spain 28 times more. Greece broke even and others such as Sweden, Slovenia and Portugal spent slightly more on refugees.[10]


Graph 2: Weapons' Exporters Scorecard
Six years of spending on refugees 2011-2016 (€ Billions)
Four years of weapon sales 2011-2014 (€ Billion)
Germany
Sweden
Canada [2]
Belgium
Austria
France
UK
Italy
Spain
USA
Serbia [1]
Denmark
Hungary
Ireland
Romania
Greece
Poland
Slovakia
Finland
Bulgaria
Czech Rep.
Croatia
Netherlands
Switzerland

Based on our calculations, since 2011, Europe, the US and Canada have spent around €20.1 billion to host approximately one million Syrian refugees over five years. At the same time, Western arms manufacturers are benefitting from an increase in military equipment supplied to the Middle East, a considerable number of which has ended up in the war in Syria. Comments by UNHCR's Europe Director are quite telling: the weapons industry "kills and creates refugees"[11].

"Friends of Syria": Traditional proponents of the weapons industry

The primary source of weapons to the Middle East remains by far the United States, which has historically - at best - misassessed the consequences of its foreign policy across the region. Leading European democracies are second to the US in arms trade to the region (until 2014) and are quick to entertain the largest Middle Eastern arms purchasers. Looking closer at governments' policy in terms of the arms trade, it seems that international law and national regulations become malleable.

With the onset of the 'Arab Spring', Western governments and think tanks were enthusiastic about the prospects of democratization in the Middle East. Nevertheless, one year after the 'Arab Spring', EU and US licensed arms sales to the region increased by 22%[12] and 300%[13] respectively.[14] Several Gulf regimes, troubled by the tide sweeping the region, launched a counter-revolutionary campaign. The West played right into this campaign through, among other ways, the supply of military equipment. Arms imports by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait increased respectively by 212%, 245% and 174% between the periods of 2007-2011 and 2012-2016; UAE's purchases increased by 63% with continuous high levels of imports since 2001.[15] The war in Syria represents an extension of this trend: since the start of the conflict, Western-made weapons have been transferred to various Syrian opposition groups fighting the Syrian regime as well as each other.[16]

The Obama administration's involvement in the Syrian war has been criticized for being 'hands off'. At the same time, official involvement includes direct delivery of non-lethal weapons to rebel groups. Evidence indicates that Washington also seems to relinquish the transfer of lethal equipment to its Arab allies, yet tacitly approves Syria as final destination.[17] Evidently, US manufactured TOW missiles,[18] previously sold to Saudi Arabia and Turkey, frequently appear in videos shot by Syrian rebels. We would thus argue that America's imbrication in the war is rather substantial: in February 2017, the Financial Times reports[19] of a Syrian rebel commander who was on the one hand coordinating weapons transfers and salary payments to the Free Syrian Army (a loosely defined group) in Syria while also acting as a CIA informant. The commander explains that regular planning meetings with US and other representatives were held at the covert operations room in Turkey known as Müşterek Operasyon Merkezi, modeled after the one in Jordan. There, commanders "regularly inflated their forces' numbers to pocket extra salaries, and some jacked up weapons requests to hoard or sell on the black market. Inevitably, much of that ended up in ISIS hands. Other groups cut in Jabhat al-Nusra on deals to keep it from attacking them." According to the now unemployed commander, the CIA and everyone else was aware of such practices, which were "the price of doing business."[20]

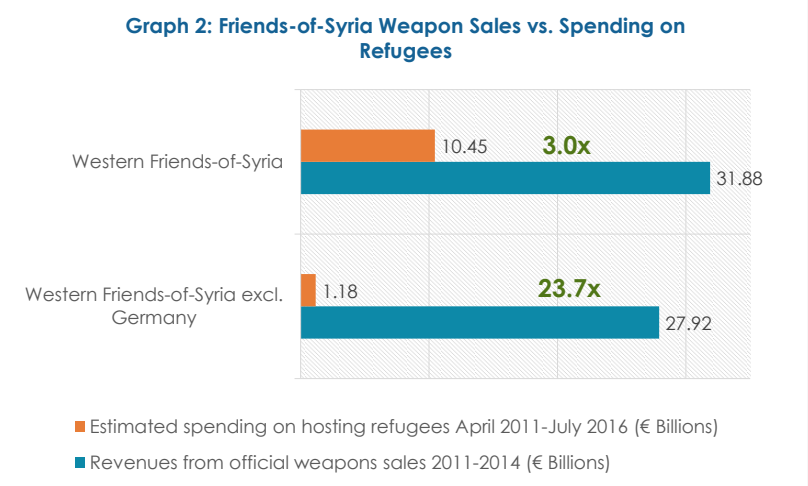
Furthermore, one of the latest revelation of US contribution in sustaining the war comes in the form of a leaked audio recording[21] of former Secretary of State John Kerry who acknowledged "putting an extraordinary amount of arms in [rebel hands]" before noting that the US could send even more weapons but that it could be destructive for the armed opposition as it would drive "everyone [to up] the ante". In addition, the war has benefited US weapons industry: at an annual conference, Lockheed Martin's Executive Vice President Bruce Tanner is recorded[22] explaining the benefit from the war in Syria where he highlights the 'unexpected' upsurge in demand for support of the F-22 Raptor aircraft and other products in follow-up to the

shooting down of the Russian aircraft by the Turkish air force. He added that Lockheed Martin, through its equipment, aims to heed the consequent increase in danger for US over-flights of Syrian territory. He also underscored that the company's increase in earnings is due to UAE's and Saudi Arabia's involvement in the war in Yemen.

Along the same lines, reports surfaced in 2012 that Syrian rebel groups[23] used Swiss-made hand grenades initially sold to the United Arab Emirates. As a result, Bern decreased its arms exports to UAE from €132 million in 2012 to €10 million the following year, yet increased it again to €14 million in 2014. Weapons produced in Belgium were also transported[24] to the various warring factions in Syria. Switzerland, which prides itself in being a harbinger of peace, earned between 2011 and 2014 from weapons sales to the region 1.5 times what it spent on hosting 13,000 Syrian refugees. Similarly, while Belgium's revenues from arms sales to Saudi Arabia and UAE amounted to €1.18 billion, it spent €0.71 billion on hosting 16,000 Syrian refugees. For other arm producing countries, these ratios are astoundingly higher as will be shown below.

We note here that the EU implemented an arms embargo as well as other restrictive measures on Syria from May 2011 to May 2013, with several amendments and extensions[25]. Its aim was mainly to prevent the export of equipment used in the violent repression by government forces while allowing the supply of non-lethal equipment to the Syrian National Coalition for Opposition and Revolutionary Forces. The European Council declared in May 2013 it would review its position before 1 August 2013, which however never took place. We note that this arms embargo was quite lax in nature, as it has been continuously breached. Based on an interview with the former Head of the European Union Delegation to Syria from 2013 to 2016[26], the EU decision not to reconvene on the subject points to a tacit policy of consent on the status quo of weapons deliveries to the Syrian National Coalition and their armed affiliates on the ground. Also, according to the former official,

the embargo's two-year timeframe at the time of adoption was set based on the misguided perception of the imminent fall of Bashar Al-Asad.



Based on our findings, 'Friends of Syria' earned €31.88 billions in weapons sales to JUQKKT and spent €10.45 billions on hosting Syrian refugees. Discounting Germany's numbers, the US, France, UK, and Italy made €27.92 billion in sales versus €1.18 billion spent on refugees, i.e. they earned 23 times more from weapons sales.

Western European and US officials defend weapons sales on various grounds. For the German Chancellor, the market is strategic: the Merkel Doctrine[27] defends the export of weapons as an *essential instrument for peacekeeping* in countries where Germany is not directly active but has vested interests. Accordingly, the Chancellor calls for sustained arms deliveries in order for partners to carry out common objectives. This included a 2011 deal, unthinkable under previous governments[28], selling 270 modern tanks to Saudi Arabia, with tacit Israeli approval. Furthermore, German commentators may worry that were Germany to refrain from exporting weapons,

others counties will not hesitate to. German journalist Jürgen Grässlin argues[29] however that the opposite is in fact true: when the Dutch parliament refused to export used Leopard tanks to Indonesia, Germany jumped in and approved the same deal. In the meantime, German opposition groups have called for a blanket ban on arms sales to Saudi Arabia over its human rights violations. This drove the Chancellor and Economy Minister Sigmar Gabriel to "critically review" arms sales to Riyadh and decided in 2015[30] to focus exports to Saudi Arabia on "defensive" military gear, including all-terrain armored vehicles, aerial refueling systems, combat jet parts, patrol boats, and drones. Still, German exports to Saudi Arabia increased[31] from €179 million to €484 million in the first half of 2016. While Germany has been applauded for taking in the majority of Europe's Syrian refugees (about 400,000), it should be pointed out that Germany's weapons industry has and continues to profit from conflicts in the Middle East prolonged by arms exports. One could argue that Germany's perceived generosity in hosting refugees comes at a high cost to Syrians.

Other arguments for military exports advance *threats to the domestic labor market* in case of implementing restrictions on the weapons industry. As such, not only industry-affiliated think-tanks but also mainstream media explicitly endorse the sale of weapons: long-time CNN news anchor, Wolf Blitzer[32] expressed concern about the possibility of halting sales to Saudi Arabia. In his view, the consequent risk of job losses across US defense contractors by far outweighs the moral argument of supporting Saudi war crimes in Yemen. Beyond the moral aspect, Wolf Blitzer overrates the industry's job creation potential. In many countries in fact, the arms industry is a dying sector in need of government subsidies: in Germany, the industry employs 100,000 people while the renewable energy sector, where skills could be transferred, is currently creating 300,000[33] jobs yearly. In the case of the US, allocating national spending to the clean energy, health or education sectors would create between 50 to 140%[34] more jobs than spending it on the military.

Other officials counter-intuitively advocate for Western weapons sales based on *humanitarian grounds*. UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said[35] that were the UK to stop supplying Saudi Arabia, "other Western countries […] would happily supply arms with nothing like the same compunctions or criteria or respect for humanitarian law [as the UK]". Some UK ministers have also said that Saudi Arabia, which has cleared its own military from any violations in the war in Yemen, is best placed to investigate its own alleged war crimes with Boris Johnson adding "the Saudi government has approached this matter with great seriousness[36], and the seriousness it deserves". Moreover, the UK's former business secretary Vince Cable recently said he was mislead[37] by the Ministry of Defense in signing off on the sale of laser-guided Paveway IV missiles to be used in Saudi Arabia's bombing of Yemen. Cable initially blocked the export license due to concerns for civilian deaths, yet was promised "oversight of potential targets" which the Ministry now denies.

Lastly, for some politicians, the case for weapons exports is made on a *purely monetary* basis. Former UK Prime Minister David Cameron boasted[38] of his efforts to help sell "brilliant things" such as Eurofighter Typhoons to Saudi Arabia, on the same day the European Parliament voted for an arms embargo on Saudi Arabia over its bombardment of Yemen. His successor, Theresa May carried over a position in defense of weapons exports and said that London's close relationship with Riyadh played a vital role in the fight against terrorism and that the Saudi regime's co-operation was "helping keep people on the streets of Britain safe."[39] Ironically, politicians who are the most candid about using the threat of refugees as a scaremongering tactic are also the most ardent defenders of the weapons industry: UKIP's Nigel Farage is a case in point.

In the case of France, ties with Saudi Arabia seem at an all time high[40] with President Hollande awarding Crown Prince Mohammed ben Nayef the Légion d'Honneur for Riyadh's efforts 'fighting terrorism and extremism'. With over €3 billion

in sales to Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Jordan and Turkey, France[41] has spent ten times less (€0.31 billion) on hosting approximately 12,000 Syrian refugees. For Italy, Prime Minister, Matteo Renzi, propones exempting defense equipment manufacturers from paying VAT[42] and allowing the industry to apply for EU research grants. Italy made an astounding 24 ratio in arms sales compared to its spending on 3,300 Syrian refugees.

The majority of Western leaders in countries with powerful military industries defend their weapons manufacturing companies. They seem to however disregard any correlation of their national arms exports with refugees fleeing conflicts. Rather, for the most part, they express a varying range of contempt, disdain, or increasingly, xenophobia towards the waves of people seeking refuge. In countries welcoming asylum seekers, refugees are expected to assume the mantel of indebtedness towards their hosts, despite the fact that they are asylees by necessity and in part as a consequence of their hosts' economic gains.

New kids on the block: Revival of E. Europe's weapons industry

Through the recent boost in arms trade to the Middle East, East European countries have opened the doors to weapons stock from former Yugoslavia and have revived their domestic weapons industries. At the same time, refugees on their soil are treated with considerable levels of discrimination.

An investigation[43] published in July 2016 by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) and the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project indicates that eight East Europeans countries (Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Montenegro, Slovakia, Serbia and Romania) have since 2012 approved weapons and ammunition exports in value of just under €1.2 billion to Saudi Arabia (€806m), Jordan (€155m), UAE (€135m) and Turkey (€87m).

As indicated by the investigation, Saudi Arabia, the largest purchaser of these deals, does not count East Europeans

countries as a traditional source for the replenishment of its military arsenal – it rather opts for more modern US equipment[44] such as the Abram battle tank. Yet, since 2012, there is a surge of arms exports from Eastern Europe to Riyadh, which arguably is not intended for the country's national forces. In fact, the BIRN report indicates that these East European exports, mainly destined for Syria, are distributed by Saudi Arabia to its regional allies, Jordan and Turkey[45] who steer two command hubs transferring the weapons by road or through airdrops into Syria. Gradually, ex-Yugoslav-made weapons started appearing[46] in the hands of a plethora of armed groups around Syria's battlefields. This has been documented by Eliot Higgins, an investigative journalist and researcher specializing in open-source investigations, writing under the name of Brown Moses[47], who has mapped the weapons' spread throughout the conflict.

Accordingly, Belgrade, Zagreb, Bratislava and Sofia have become main export hubs to the Middle East. Specifically, in 2015 Serbia agreed to €135 million of arms[48] export licenses to Saudi Arabia. Back in 2013, Serbia had rejected similar requests for fear weapons would be diverted to Syria; these were worth $22 million based on Serbia's national reports.[49] Also in 2013, the Serbian government denied four arms and military equipment import applications from the United Kingdom, Bulgaria, Belarus, and the Czech Republic. These import worth $9.9 million were intended for re-sales (in the form of exports) to Saudi Arabia.[50]At a press conference in August 2016 following the BIRN investigation, Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic said that, while he was defense minister in 2013, he "probably received" intelligence that arms could end up in Syria. "Do not ask me what has changed. In 2015, I was not defense minister and I can't know [what happened]. I will take a look," he said. Vucic was candid about the benefit of the arms trade and said at the 2016 press conference: "I adore it when we export arms because it is a pure influx of foreign currency."

Serbia's involvement in the seemingly lucrative production and transfer of weapons to the Middle East is also attracting new partnerships[51]: in 2013 UAE invested $33 million in the first phase of a joint development project of the Advanced Light Attack System missile system, one of the most modern land forces. The project will consist of a total of $220 million invested over a period of four years. Moreover, and as an additional point of interest regarding the indirect forces at play in the Syrian theater, a Serbian-owned consortium,[52] CPR Impex, one of the region's most important arms brokers,[53] and Israel's ATL Atlantic Technology bought Montenegro Defence Industry (MDI) in February 2015. Since August 2015, MDI arranged export deals of 250 tons of ammunition and 10,000 anti-tank systems to Saudi Arabia in value of over €2.7 million. At the time of writing, MDI is under investigation by Montenegro's special prosecution for organised crime and corruption over it's alleged arms trading with Libya, Ukraine and Saudi Arabia, and the credibility of the end-user certificates, especially with countries under an international arms embargo.[54] We note that prior to 2015 and since 2006[55] (availability of reports), Montenegro had not conducted any significant arms trade with the Middle East except for Israel, where the end user country was stated to be Afghanistan, Iraq or USA, and with Yemen in 2010. We also highlight here that the recent rapprochement between Serbia and the UAE has been achieved thanks in part to the close involvement of Mohammed Dahlan,[56] a former Palestinian official close to UAE's top leadership, who facilitated the arms trade between both countries. In 2015 Mohammed Dahlan and his family (as well as his political connections and business partners) were awarded Serbian citizenship as a "sign of gratitude for" the rapprochement with UAE. Dahlan and his wife were also awarded Montenegrin citizenship in 2010.[57]

In Bratislava, public broadcaster Slovak Radio and Television reported that in 2015 Slovakia exported to Saudi Arabia 40,000 assault rifles, more than 1,000 mortars, 14 rocket launchers, almost 500 heavy machine guns and more than 1,500

RPGs. The Prime Minister defended the arms deal noting "if we don't sell [arms], somebody else will, but don't come crying to me if a lack of arms deals causes the loss of jobs for our people."[58] Slovakia welcomed 64 Syrian refugees costing Bratislava €400 thousands, translating into a 284 ratio of weapons sales to cost of hosting refugees.

For Croatia, data indicates that in 2013 and 2014 Zagreb sold over €155 million in ammunition to Saudi Arabia and €115 million to Jordan.[59] We note that such deals do not follow regular trade patterns as, specifically for Jordan and based on official reports, there is little history of weapon exports between Zagreb and Amman: previous arms deals consisted of fifteen pistols worth USD $1053 sold to Jordan in 2001. More recently, the OCCRP reports that in December 2012 alone, exports to Jordan amounted to over USD$6.5 millions.[60] The New York Times also reported 36 round-trip flights conducted between Amman and Zagreb from December 2012 through February 2013 where Jordanian cargo aircrafts airlifted a large Saudi purchase of infantry arms from Zagreb to Amman.[61] As Croatia's national reports do not indicate any exports to Jordan in 2012 one can safely assume the existence of under-the-table deals, which go unreported. A considerable amount of Croatian-made weapons has been documented in the hands of rebel groups such as the Al-Nusra affiliated Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement. More recently Elliot Higgings confirmed that both ISIS and Jabhat Al-Nusra are using Croatian-made weapons, although "how they acquired them is unclear. They could have been looted from other groups, sold between groups, or provided directly."[62]

As for Bulgaria, the largest state-run arms producer, VMZ-Sopot has also hit the jackpot: after being insolvent in 2008, the plant has been working at full capacity since 2015.[63] It paid off around €11 million in debt and has created 1,200 new jobs. Furthermore, sales growth went from around €19 million in the first half of 2015 to around €86 million in the first half of 2016. VMZ Sopot's net profit surged to around €600,000 from a net loss of €35 million in the same period. While Bulgaria took in

18,000 Syrian refugees, a 2015 report by the German Pro Asyl foundation entitled "Humiliated, ill-treated and without protection" provides shocking accounts from asylum seekers in Bulgaria.[64] Refugees are subject to inhumane and degrading treatment by police and prison guards including extortion, abuse as well as torture.

Based on reports by Balkan Insight, Bulgaria's government issued export permits for munitions and military equipment sales worth €85.5 million to Saudi Arabia in 2014 — including ammunition worth €65.4 million, large caliber weapons valued at €12.5 million and small calibre weapons (€5 million).[65] According to Ben Moores, a senior analyst at defence consultancy IHS Janes, such type of weapons were "very unlikely to be used by the Saudi military" but are very heavily used in Yemen, Iraq and in Syria. The director of the British-based consultancy group Armament Research Services also confirmed this in pointing to "notable quantities of arms and munitions produced in Bulgaria […being] documented in Syria."

As is the case with Croatia, Saudi Arabia has not been a major customer for Bulgarian weapons until 2014. According to a former Bulgarian military officer, the flights between Sofia and Tabuk, Saudi Arabia transported Bulgarian weapons, which were shipped by land to a distribution center in Jordan for Syrian opposition forces. In a BBC interview in late October 2015, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir openly acknowledged his country's supply of arms to Syrian opposition fighters aimed at "[contributing] to changing the balance of the power on the ground." Furthermore, Bulgaria was considerably involved in the US "Train and Equip" program intended to ready Syrian rebels whom Washington vetted as "moderate" for battles against the Syrian regime and ISIS. The US Special Operations Command, in charge of the US military support to Syrian rebels contracted a Bulgarian based company for over €24.6 million in December 2014 to supply foreign weapons and ammunition.

Through indirect transfer of considerable weapons quantities to rebel factions, East European countries have acquired an unexpected but important role in the war in Syria, one driven by monetary benefits. Nonetheless, East European countries are quick to encourage and push Syrian refugees towards continental Europe while accepting a symbolic number of asylum seekers. We note that this block of countries does not hold known political or strategic interests in the Middle East, neither now or in the past when they have been historically absent from the region's major conflicts.

With regards to Russia, Moscow has historically been a major weapons supplier to the Syrian government – despite limited availability of data – we know that at least 10% of its arms exports went to Syria. "Russia reportedly has $1.5 billion worth of ongoing arms contracts with Syria for various missile systems and upgrades to tanks and aircraft, reportedly doubling that investment in small arms sales since the beginning of the Syrian civil war". Furthermore, military training provided by Russia since the beginning of the conflict ought to also be quantified. Despite the very direct role Russia has played in the Syrian war, the country has currently only accepted 1,395 Syrian refugees on temporary asylum and has even deported one Syrian refugee.[66] Still, Russia's armed forces benefited from the war in Syria: in his February 2017 speech at the Lower House of Parliament, the Russian defense minister, Sergei Shoigu, reported that 162 samples of modernized armament have been tested during the war in Syria, including new jets - Su-30SM and Su-34 - as well as Mi-28N and Ka-52 helicopters.[67] Syria also has been the testing ground for high-precision munitions, sea-based cruise missiles, used for the first time in combat. Furthermore, the defense minister noted that close to all of the flight personnel of the Russian Aerospace Forces, 86% of them, including 75% of the crews of long-range aviation, 79% of tactical aviation, 88% of military transport and 89% of army aviation, have received combat experience in Syria.

Cases of one-time weapons exporters & regular component suppliers

In the previous sections we have highlighted how Middle Eastern countries have purchased record high amounts of weapons from traditional and non-traditional arms manufacturer and directed considerable amounts of those to their allies in Syria. In this section, we will aim to provide a brief overview of some covert transfers and flows of weapons into Syria. Such an overview will be non-exhaustive by definition given the underground nature of and limited availability of sources on the subject. We note that such transfers are not accounted for in national export figures and form a significant part of the illicit weapons trade sustaining the war in Syria. This further underscores the premise of the conservative estimate of national arms trade figures, which we relied upon for our study.

Transfers by third party states under civil strife

There is evidence of weapons transfer from countries with ongoing conflict where government authority is limited and exports controls are lackluster. As such, Libyan missiles, looted during the 2011 upheaval were reportedly bound for Syria through Lebanon: according to an investigation by the UN Panel of Experts on Libya, Lebanese authorities seized on 27 April 2012 a shipment of various arms and ammunition on board the Letfallah II cargo ship near the port of Tripoli, Lebanon. The Panel concluded that Belgian-made FN Herstal FAL rifles found on the ship are "likely to be part of materiel deliveries made by Qatar during the uprising [in Libya]" which had "since been illicitly transferred out of Libya, including towards other conflict zones". According to the Panel, these rifles were loaded with a type of Pakistani ammunition that had been previously supplied by Qatar to Libya and had also been found on board the Letfallah II. Knowing that Syria did not purchase Belgian FN Herstal FAL rifles after 1969, the use of post-1969 models by the Syrian armed opposition groups and ISIS fighters suggests they may have come from an external source.[68]

Similarly, according to a 2014 study conducted by the Small Arms Survey on the proliferation of Man Portable Air Defence Systems in Syria[69], some MANPADS in rebel hands were smuggled into Syria, including Chinese FN-6 systems not known to be exported to the Syrian government. Sudan was identified as a possible source of such missiles, which were reportedly purchased by Qatar and shipped through Turkey. Sudan is in fact among a handful of known importers of FN-6 MANPADS and in view of the widespread proliferation of Sudanese weapons and ammunition among armed groups. Similarly, the Conflict Armament Research (CAR) report of February 2015 documenting material seized from ISIS during the battle of Kobane between 2014-2015 provides evidence of Chinese rifles, which had their identification obliterated.[70] The same configuration of weapons had been found in South Sudan.

IED components consistently supplied to ISIS

According to Amnesty International, the majority of weapons seized by ISIS originate from looted Iraqi government stock. Still the group's large arsenal seems to originate from 25 different countries.[71]

Following two years of investigation into ISIS' weapons in Iraq and Syria, Conflict Armament Research revealed in its February 2016 report that Turkey is the most important source of components used to manufacture the majority of ISIS' improvised explosive devices (IEDs).[72] These consist of chemical precursors including a mixture of aluminum and nitrate-based fertilizer such as ammonium nitrate, as well as containers, detonating cord, cables, and wires. The investigation found that such elements were manufactured by or sold through 13 Turkish companies/intermediaries before being acquired by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. CAR notes that most of the companies involved serve the Turkish market and do not export goods to Iraq or Syria. The report also highlights the speed at which ISIS forces acquire IED materials, at times as little as one month following their lawful supply to commercial entities,

which speaks to the lack of monitoring by national governments and of companies alike according to the report.[73] While the trade itself is conducted lawfully, it is the smaller commercial entities transferring the materials to groups affiliated with ISIS forces, which "appear to be the weakest links in the chain of custody." Additionally, in a related report on ISIS' weapons manufacturing in Mosul, CAR research "provides stark evidence of an extremely robust procurement network" with consistent acquisition of identical products from the same sources, "almost exclusively from the Turkish domestic market."[74]

Private individuals trading weapons

News articles abound with evidence of arms also being smuggled into Syria through private deals. Balkan Insight reported on one such case: Bulgarian weapons were reported to be trucked into Homs in August 2012 and paid for by a Syrian businessman in the amount of €1.4 million for AK-47 rifles, grenade launchers and ammunition.[75] A former Syrian opposition fighter said he was involved in 12 transfers of Bulgarian weapons as of 2013, the largest of which was worth €6.4 million. The shipments were delivered at the Turkish-Syrian border in two trucks and were arranged by Syrian and Turkish nationals with connections to Bulgarian arms dealers.

Transfers possibly in breach of international weapons embargos

The Conflict and Armament Report of 2015 documented various Iranian cartridges, which the People's Protection Units (YPG) ceased from ISIS forces in Kobane. Most of these cartridges have been manufactured in 2006, with some as recently as 2013. Their presence outside Iran may indicate a violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1737 (2006), which prohibits Iranian exports of weapons and related products to all countries.[76]

In addition to weapons transfers sanctioned by national governments in support of rebel factions in Syria, arms and

component smuggling and transfer from private groups and companies into Syrian territory add to the plethora of entities with stakes in the war in Syria. The acknowledgment of these illicit activities by governments and halting the flow of weapons and funds sustaining the war would be the first step in containing the drain of Syrians from Syria.

A Dishonest Debate – for the most part

Weapons industries are by and large applauded for turning the wheels of the economy at home. Little scrutiny is however carried out over the consequences it is creating elsewhere in the world. In the last few years, with unprecedented quantities of weapons sold to the Middle East including those transferred to Syria, the conflict has driven millions of Syrians to seek refuge in Western countries. Aware of the consequences of weapons proliferation, European politicians may have opted for a tradeoff: making their taxpayers shoulder the short term cost of hosting refugees in exchange for profits to the arms industry. With reality of wars hitting closer to home, time may be opportune for a different debate in Western capitals.

According to the former economic adviser to the president of the European Commission, Philippe Legrain, refugees are in fact unlikely to decrease wages or raise unemployment for native workers. Most significantly, calculations indicate that while the absorption of so many refugees will increase public debt for the EU by almost €69 billion between 2015 and 2020, during the same period refugees will help GDP grow by €126.6 billion.[77] In fact, a €1 investment in welcoming refugees can yield nearly €2 in economic benefits within five years. Legrain also highlights how refugees could solve an impending demographic challenge in Europe. Along these lines, Portugal considers the refugee influx as an opportunity to revive some regions of the country.[78] Lisbon is in fact offering to welcome up to 5,800 more refugees in addition to the 4,500 it already agreed to take in as part of the European Union's refugee quota system. Portugal has 'only' sold €500,000 worth of weapons to the Middle East.

We thus deem the debate over the flows of refugees and the heavy burden on societies as flawed. Some European and North American societies unjustly blame refugees for fleeing war and seeking stability. By hosting them, they draw asylum seekers into financial and/or emotional indebtedness towards these societies. Yet these same societies, for the most part, disregard Western countries' complicity in cashing in on the wars refugees are escaping. Even more so, the question remains as to the distribution of profits from the global arms trade between national governments brokering the deals and arms manufacturers, knowing that it is the former who covers the cost of resettling refugees.[79] Rather than at refugees, anger and protest should thus be directed towards the weapons industries and the revolving doors linking them to policy makers. The latter ought to face greater opposition to the war-profiting policies they espouse.

While this study focused on the case of Syrian refugees and the war in Syria, other conflicts in the Middle East deserve as much scrutiny. Arms sales by the US, Canada, Germany, UK and France feeding conflicts in Iraq, Yemen and Libya should also be taken into account in calculating the debt the West has towards the Iraqi, Libyan and Yemeni people. The sole reason keeping Yemenis from joining Syrian refugees in Europe and beyond is that Yemen is landlocked by Saudi Arabia on the one hand and by a naval blockade on the other. Over 3 million Yemenis are currently internally displaced and over 14 million are food insecure.[80]

The sustained economic, political and military support of Western democracies to Arab rulers of the Middle East, ranging from the repressive, autocratic and most regressive regimes, remains the main guarantor for drawn-out wars and sustained impoverishment of the region's populations. Such continuous support trumps any inherent cultural or religious characteristics, which may be advanced as endogenous reasons for the Middle East's seeming inability for progress. Western military equipment guaranteed to the Gulf is an essential element of the

Gulf-led counter-revolution aimed at repressing citizens and residents of these countries. The concentration of national resources in the military industry and away from more productive sectors limits the advancement of these societies. Such militarization is both fueled by and feeds the region's escalating power interplays and contributes to the cycle of violence and subjugation, ensuring an omnipresent -or at minimum- looming threat of war. As we have outlined, there is considerable monetary return from the military aspect of such support. Still, the West and its local clients seemingly agree on the ensuing political benefits which remain as important: citizens of Gulf countries do not get to question the standing of their rulers and the unabated flow of oil to the West, while the deep-rooted support of the Palestinian cause against Israeli occupation and oppression remains subdued.

Endnotes

[1] This paper is an expansion on an article by the same title, initially published on Jadaliyya.com

[2] Our analysis relies on research of open-source data and includes news articles, official EU and OECD data and analysis as well as research by think tanks and NGOs dedicated to the study of the arms trade. We welcome any further information by readers, which may not be available openly to the public.

[3] "Trends in International Arms Transfers 2016", Factsheets, *SIPRI*, February 2017, p. 10

[4] We note that Russia and China's main export destinations since 2011 and until 2016 are, respectively, India, Vietnam, China, and Pakistan, Bangladesh and Malaysia. The Middle East accounted for 8.1% of total Russian exports over the same period and 1.7% of China's over 2012-2016. Iran's weapons imports remained at a very low level between 2012 and 2016 due to partial arms embargo imposed by the United Nations as well as economic pressures. The first significant import of major arms by Iran since 2007 was in 2016: Russia delivered four air defense systems, which does not fall under the UN arms embargo. "Trends in International Arms Transfers 2015" and "Trends in International Arms Transfers 2016", SIPRI Factsheets, *SIPRI*, February 2016 and 2017, http://books.sipri.org/files/FS/SIPRIFS1602.pdf and https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/Trends-in-international-arms-transfers-2016.pdf

[5] "Angela Merkel hat Deutschland zu einem führenden Waffenexporteur gemacht", *Abendzeitung Muenchen*, Adrian Prechtel, 23 September 2015

[6] Start of UNHCR data availability on Syrian asylum seekers in Europe.

[7] Please refer to Appendix 2 for detailed calculation. We note however that countries vary in the provision of financial support to refugees. As an example, the strongest discrepancy is between the US and European countries: in the former, refugees receive government financial support for the first few months of their resettlement, while it lasts for several years in the EU once asylum is awarded.

[8] Spain's cost of €3329 for hosting one refugee for one year was thus applied to Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia.

[9] On the question of including Western countries' contributions to RRPs: RRPs refers to the yearly UN Regional Response Plan, which is an inter-agency plan to cover the needs of refugees fleeing Syria and people in host communities in Syria's neighbors (Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt) who together took in over 4.8 million refugees. Reliable and consistent data is limited on actual RRPs disbursements (versus pledges) for all donor countries under study and for the entire 2011-2016 period. For reference, we included actual disbursements available on OCHA's Financial Tracking Service for the RRPs of 2015-2016 in Table 1. This limitation in data does not impact our analysis as our calculations aim to address the question of hosting refugees in arms exporting countries rather than in Syria's neighbor countries. While taxpayer money is the source of both (support of refugees at home and in countries around Syria), the question of financially supporting Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt for hosting Syrian refugees has not been an issue of debate in Western capitals. In this sense, this study rather aims to contribute to the Western debate over the wave of refugees at home.

[10] Notes from table: [1] Looking at UNHRC refugee figures Serbia has registered in an outstanding 300,000 asylum applications between 2011 and 2016. Belgrade's situation seems to represent a special case however as it so happens that, when neighbors such as Hungary and Croatia – located along the refugees' route to Western Europe - sealed off their borders, Serbia had little choice but to accept refugees present on its territory hoping to cross the border. In comparison, according to Serbian Interior Minister Stefanovi, *"only 500 refugees requested asylum in Serbia, and 250 refugees stayed."* Yet, Amnesty International reports that the number of people apprehended crossing the Serbia-Hungary border has risen by more than 2,500% between 2010 and 2015 (from 2,370 to 60,602). This has resulted in a sharp jump in the number of asylum seekers in Serbia. As a result, the EU announced it will provide Serbia with over €3.8 million for expanding temporary shelters and addressing waste disposal, sanitary and other needs.

More recently, Serbian President Tomislav Nicolic said that Serbia is looking to host between 5,000 to 6,000 migrants (all nationalities combined), while noting that if the EU was not *"angry with Hungary for the way they treated migrants, it will not be angry with Serbia either".* Based on these discrepancies in information, the 300,000 registered refugees figure does not seem reliable, and we choose to depict Serbia as an outlier in the study. Sources: "Serbia happy to help EU, ambivalent about refugee hub status", *Euractiv.rs*, Smiljana Vukojcic, 10 September 2015; "Fears of humanitarian crisis in Serbia as refugees stream in", *Euractiv.rs*, 31 July 2015; "Nikolić: Serbia may shut its border as well", *B92.net*, 3 October 2016.

[2] For Canada, official data reports the value of actual military equipment exported as opposed to licensed goods destined for export. This reflects lower numbers in comparison to other countries. Canada in fact became the second largest exporter to the Middle East in 2015 after the US. Source: "Canada now the second biggest arms exporter to Middle East, data show", *The Globe and Mail*, Steven Chase, 14 June 2016

[11] Tweet by UNHCR Europe Bureau Director on 28 July 2016 in a comment on the publication of BIRN's investigation: https://twitter.com/cochetel/status/758767140803604480.

[12] "European arms exports to Middle East reach record high in aftermath of Arab Spring", *CAAT*, 28 January 2014

[13] "U.S. Arms Sales Make Up Most of Global Market", *The New York Times*, Thom Shanker, August 26, 2012

[14] We note that Iran is not included in this grouping. According to SIPRI, "Due to a partial arms embargo imposed by the United Nations as well as economic pressures, Iran's arms imports remained at a very low level in 2012–16, at 1.2 per cent of total arms transfers to the Middle East. The delivery by Russia in 2016 of four air defence systems, which do not fall under the UN arms embargo, was the first significant import of major arms by Iran since 2007." Source: "Trends in International Arms Transfers 2016", Factsheets, *SIPRI*, February 2017, p. 11

[15] "Trends in International Arms Transfers 2016", Factsheets, *SIPRI*, February 2016, p. 11

[16] According to SIPRI, the Syrian government's imports between 2012 and 2016 were very low, "with the regime having to rely on stocks of major arms supplied before the war started in 2011". "Trends in International Arms Transfers 2016", Factsheets, *SIPRI*, February 2016, p. 11

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[24] "Saudis Step Up Help for Rebels in Syria With Croatian Arms", *The New York Times*, C. J. Chivers and Eric Schmitt, 25 February 2013

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[28] "Tank Exports to Saudi Arabia Signal German Policy Shift", *Der Spiegel*, Holger Stark, 14 October 2011

[29] "Angela Merkel hat Deutschland zu einem führenden Waffenexporteur gemacht",

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[34] "Don't Buy the Spin: How Cutting the Pentagon's Budget Could Boost the Economy", *The Nation*, Robert Pollin and Heidi Garrett-Peltier, 9 May 2012
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[37] "MoD seriously misled me on Saudi arms sales, says Vince Cable", *The Guardian*, 4 November 2016
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[39] "Theresa May claims selling arms to Saudi Arabia helps 'keep people on the streets of Britain safe'", *The Independent*, 7 September 2016
[40] "Hollande, l'allié indéfectible des Saoudiens", *Les Echos*, Adrien Lelievre, 27 Juin 2016
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[44] "U.S. Arms Transfers to Saudi Arabia and the War in Yemen", *SecurityAssistance.org*, William D. Hartung, 6 September 2016
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[67] Speech by the Russian Defence Minister, 22 February 2017, available at: http://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12112634@egNews
[68] "Taking Stock – Arming of Islamic State", *Amnesty International*, December 2015, p. 23
[69] "Fire and Forget - The proliferation of Man-portable Air Defence Systems in Syria", *Small Arms Survey*, Issue Brief, Number 9, August 2014, p.9-10, http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/G-Issue-briefs/SAS-IB9-MANPADS-and-Syria.pdf. We note that the study suggests that current evidence of MANPADS held by rebels in Syria is based on blurry videos on social media and unidentified sources in news articles and thus lacks systematic documentation such as serial numbers and concludes that "public knowledge of the sources and suppliers of these weapons will remain limited." Other research groups confirm stronger evidence as to the source of the equipment as will be shown.
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