



## **Tackling the aftermath of Libya's 'Arab Spring': Addressing the Small Arms Issue**

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### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- **The NTC must lead the process towards the establishment of a National SALWs Commission (NatCom) in Libya;**
- **Ad-hoc weapons collection centers should be created to mop up the loose arms;**
- **There is the need for the AU and ECOWAS member states to further strengthen border controls as a way of stemming the influx of small arms into the region;**
- **The UN and allied forces should intensify capacity building and technical assistance on weapons collection in Libya;**
- **The UN must help in the implementation of a robust DDDR in Libya;**
- **All concerned parties must step up SALWs advocacy and public enlightenment programmes.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The 'Arab Spring' - the term used for the popular uprisings against repressive leaders in North Africa and parts of the Middle East - not only took most of the world by surprise, but more disturbingly portrayed the ruthlessness with which the embattled leaders sought to suppress those who dared to challenge their rule. In Libya, the death of Muammar Gaddafi, the autocratic leader for the past 42 years on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2011 was the grand finale to a struggle that has increasingly become violent. In the aftermath of Gaddafi's death, the leader of the the National Transitional Council (NTC), Mustafa Abdul Jalil, delivered the Liberation Speech that brought to an end, almost nine months of a brutal and devastating uprising. The results were evident in looted shops, scarred buildings, heavy civilian casualties- an estimated 30,000 people died in the killings<sup>1</sup> - and increased small arms and light weapons

proliferation. Of prominent concern is the quantum<sup>2</sup> of arms and weapons left over from the civil unrest. Five months after the end of the civil war in Libya, there is the fear that the weapons used during the conflict may find their way once again into the West African sub-region or other parts of the Middle East. These fears are further heightened by the allegations that some mercenaries who were recruited to help in the Libyan crisis have left Libya with these weapons and may trade them for money with non-state actors – pirates, terrorists, arms smugglers, and drug traffickers, among others.

This brief therefore draws attention to the importance of ensuring that these floating arms do not end up in the hands of potentially dangerous non-state actors. It also argues that the NTC must make it a priority to set up weapons collection centers to effectively gather these

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<sup>1</sup> Results of the Arab Spring. Available at: <[worldnews.about.com/od/middleeast1/tp/Results-Of-The-Arab-Spring.htm](http://worldnews.about.com/od/middleeast1/tp/Results-Of-The-Arab-Spring.htm)>. accessed on 10/02/12

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<sup>2</sup> Precise estimates are impossible because no one is sure how many weapons were in Libya pre and post the Libyan crisis.

small arms in order to guarantee sustainable peace in post-conflict Libya.

### THE LIBYAN CONFLICT IN RETROSPECT

The precedents of the ousting of autocrats in neighboring Tunisia and Egypt encouraged the Libyan people to embark on anti-government protests to force Gaddafi out of power. These protests were however met with force and brutal suppression by forces loyal to Gaddafi, leading to heavy civilian casualties. As the uprising gained momentum, Gaddafi recruited mercenaries from both Africa and Europe whom he enticed with huge sums of money to either be engaged in direct combat or strategize for him.<sup>3</sup> The indiscriminate targeting of civilians led to the involvement of the international community particularly, the Arab League, the AU<sup>4</sup>, NATO and the UN - who passed Security Council resolutions 1970<sup>5</sup> and 1973<sup>6</sup>. Conflict continued to rage between Gaddafi's forces, anti-Gaddafi forces and the international community led by NATO firing on Gaddafi from the air. Things came to a climax on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October, 2011 when Gaddafi was killed marking an effective end to the civil war.

### TRACKING ARMS USED IN THE CONFLICT

One of the legacies of the uprising is the proliferation of SALW in the region. Addressing this is important because most of the major news networks carried pictures of rebels jubilating and shooting off rounds of ammunition into the night skies from a variety of small arms. Throughout the unrest and armed conflict, a lot of these arms were used by both Gaddafi and anti Gaddafi forces.<sup>7</sup> The rebels compared to Gaddafi's forces, were

constrained in their choice of weapons and employed a wide range of hastily assembled weapons to fight.<sup>8</sup> The effects of these activities are now becoming evident in Libya's vast arsenal of small and portable weapons which is very attractive for arms smugglers and their clients.<sup>9</sup>

Photographs and video from the uprising also show civilians carrying a full array of what were once the Libyan military's weapons – like the SAM 7, an early generation shoulder – fired missile in the same family as the more widely known stinger – which intelligence agencies have long worried could fall into terrorists' hands.<sup>10</sup> The cases of state arsenals being looted by civilians, whether in Uganda in 1979, in Albania in 1977 and Iraq in 2003, emphasizes how easily small arms could quickly enter the illicit sphere and hence become difficult to track.<sup>11</sup> They can also be quietly and quickly sold through black markets to other non state actors such as the terrorist group AQIM in parts of North and West Africa for use in wars where they can present long lasting and destabilizing problems.

### EXAMINING THE THREAT POSED BY SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS (SALWs) PROLIFERATION

SALW availability helps to destabilize regions, spark conflicts and escalate violence in societies. While not directly causing conflicts, they can nevertheless play an important role in escalating and prolonging it, especially if ammunition is in good supply as has been evidenced in the case of Libya. Even more worrying is its ability to

<sup>3</sup> Abcde, Special commentary: can African mercenaries save the Libya regime? The Jamestown foundation, 27 February, 2011. Available at:

<[www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=37551&cHash=4e5f37dc8755b53452b6de6c97eef96a](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=37551&cHash=4e5f37dc8755b53452b6de6c97eef96a)>

<sup>4</sup> The Africa Union in March, 2011, called for a ceasefire to allow political talks to take place, while the Arab league suspended Libya from the union.

<sup>5</sup> See UN Resolution 1970/2011, adopted by the Security Council at its 6491<sup>st</sup> meeting on 26 February, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> See UN Resolution 1973/2011, by the Security Council at its 6498<sup>th</sup> meeting on 17 March, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Amnesty International, 'Gaddafi's attacks on Misratah may be war crimes' available at

<[www.amnesty.ie/news/gaddafi%E2%80%99s-attacks-misratah-may-be-war-crimes](http://www.amnesty.ie/news/gaddafi%E2%80%99s-attacks-misratah-may-be-war-crimes)>. Accessed November 13,

2011. For instance during the siege of Misurata, Gaddafi was alleged to have used horrifying tactics such as indiscriminate attacks on civilians using heavy artillery, rockets, cluster bombs and sniper fire leading to massive civilian casualties

<sup>8</sup> C.J, Chivers, 'Hidden Workshops Add to Libyan Rebels Arsenal', New York Times, May 3, 2011. Available at:

<[www.nytimes.com/2011/05/04/world/africa/04misurata.html?pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/04/world/africa/04misurata.html?pagewanted=all)> Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> October, 2011. The rebels are also reported to have launched rockets despite the danger these pose to populated areas within their range.

<sup>9</sup> David Rosenberg/the medialine, 'Libya threatens to become terrorist arms depot', Jerusalem Post, October, 27, 2011.

Available at:

<[www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=235737&R=R3](http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=235737&R=R3)> Accessed: 27 October, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> C.J, Chivers, Experts fear looted Libyan arms may find way to terrorist, New York Times, 3, March 2011. Available at:

<[www.nytimes.com/2011/03/04/world/africa/04weapons.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/04/world/africa/04weapons.html?_r=1)>, Accessed; 27 October, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> ibid.

fall into the hands of terrorist networks, drug traffickers and pirates. For instance, in the aftermath of the Libyan uprising, concerns have been raised over the potentials of increased arms penetration from Libya into Nigeria.<sup>12</sup> In Africa, the Sahel region has achieved notoriety for harboring terrorist such as the AQIM. These operate along the borders of Algeria, Mauritania, Mali, Niger and some parts of Chad, and have the potential to acquire some of these weapons from Libya.<sup>13</sup>

As happened recently in Ivory Coast where the DDR process was not effectively implemented, as soon as there was an impasse over the 2010 November elections, the SALW came back into circulation and were used extensively to inflict heavy civilian casualties. Potentially, other tribes or splinter groups in Libya can re arm themselves especially if they feel their interests are not adequately addressed by the new government as reports already tell of remnants of aimless armed militias from the civil war roaming the capital city and refusing to hand in their weapons. An all inclusive representative and transitional government as espoused by the UNSC 2009/2011 emphasizes the need for the transitional period to be underpinned by a commitment to good governance, rule of law and respect for human rights. This will ensure sustainable peace in the long run for Libya and reduce the recurrence of conflicts.

Organized smuggling rings can also be swiftly formed to move these floating weapons as happened in Albania in the late 1990's.<sup>14</sup> During this time people who have lost their livelihoods may inadvertently resort to smuggling of weapons in exchange for money for subsistence. Africa's porous borders, poor security and weak institutions are all fertile grounds for the perpetuation of such stealthy activities.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> F. C Onuoha, Domestic Terrorism and Aviation Security in Nigeria, *The Punch*, 18 September 2011, p.16, This analyst warns that the extremist Islamic sect, Boko Haram, can get hold of weapons such as SAM 7 missing from the Libyan armory, to endanger aviation security in that country.

<sup>13</sup> Modibo Goita, 2011, West Africa's Growing Terrorist Threat: Confronting AQIM's Sahelian Strategy. Africa Security Brief, No. 11, published by the Africa Centre for Strategic Studies.

<sup>14</sup> Op.cit

<sup>15</sup> For instance an Algerian daily reports that the army arrested some Libyans in two four wheel drives packed with

There is also the threat from returning mercenaries of the Libyan conflict to sell their arms to other potentially dangerous interested parties.<sup>16</sup> This reflects the real danger of SALW in destabilizing the region and underscores the importance of forming partnerships to tackle the menace. It is further buttressed by recent developments in Mali where the threats from ex-Gaddafi Tuareg fighters<sup>17</sup> propelled the Malian army to overthrow a government they felt were unresponsive to their security needs.

### **POLICY ALTERNATIVES FOR ARMS RECOVERY IN LIBYA**

National Small Arms Commissions have proven to be quite useful for countries emerging out of crisis. Libya should therefore consider forming one to continue the fight against the threat of SALW. Ad hoc weapons collection Centers could be instituted by the commission to gather the weapons across the country. These can be initiated by the NTC as soon as practicable in partnership with relevant donor agencies and especially both sides of the parties to the conflict.

Capacity building and technical assistance<sup>18</sup> on weapons collection must not be overlooked. Libya needs extensive support in this area and the UN as well as member states must continue to support and train the Libyan stakeholders on this very important issue as well as provide technical assistance to them. This is especially critical since Libya will not be producing oil at full capacity any time soon.<sup>19</sup>

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weapons near the desert border. See:  
<http://feb17.info/news/report-algeria-stops-libyan-weapons-smugglers/>

<sup>16</sup> Central Africa concerns over Libyan conflict, October, 2011. Available at: <[www.iansa.org/news/2011/10/central-africa-concerns-over-effects-from-libyan-conflict](http://www.iansa.org/news/2011/10/central-africa-concerns-over-effects-from-libyan-conflict)> Accessed 19 November, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Mali army clashes with ex-Gaddafi Tuareg fighters, BBC News report, 18<sup>th</sup> January, 2012. Available at <[www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-16610893?print=true](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-16610893?print=true)>

<sup>18</sup> Libya- Government of Germany funds destruction of small arms and ammunition. October, 2011. Available at: <[www.iansa.org/news/2011/10/libya-government-of-germany-funds-destruction-of-small-arms-and-ammunition](http://www.iansa.org/news/2011/10/libya-government-of-germany-funds-destruction-of-small-arms-and-ammunition)>. Accessed: 19 November, 2011. The German and US governments have already jump started the process by providing funds for specialist Libyan and international teams to locate, secure and destroy small arms and ammunition arsenals.

<sup>19</sup> John W. Schoen. 22 October, 2011. 'Restoring Libyan oil output could take years' available at: <[www.msnbc.msn.com/id/44229170/ns/business-](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/44229170/ns/business-)

Implementation of a robust Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration and Reinsertion programme (DDRR) is also essential in guaranteeing that former rebels and pro Gaddafi forces go through the DDRR processes. Successive UN Resolutions<sup>20</sup> have since established and extended a United Nations Support Mission in Libya - UNSMIL - to among others restore public security, order and promote the rule of law (until March 2012). This time frame is however, still not enough to effectively tackle the complexities associated with post-conflict re-construction especially in the area of security. It is hoped that the UN will at least extend the mandate to one year or until a semblance of order and security is restored.

The AU and ECOWAS must also coordinate policies and security programmes to effectively tackle the inflows of smuggled arms into the sub region and beyond. These must include strengthened border controls and capacity building programmes for those at the frontline of the borders.

Finally, stepping up SALWs advocacy and public enlightenment to the general public will ensure that the citizens are abreast with the potential menace of any unrecovered SALW. Knowledge of SALW potential for destruction will be beneficial to the people.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The North of Africa and the Middle East will never be the same again especially after it's 'Arab Spring'. As the cases of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria have shown, a lot of weapons were employed by both sides, but more so by the incumbents in the uprisings. Consequently a lot of arms will be floating around in the Arab world long after the 'Arab spring' fades out. The challenge then will be how to control these weapons so they do not end up in the hands of non state actors such as arms smugglers, drug traffickers, pirates and terrorists who could gain more 'ammunition' and continue to use them to destabilize the fragile peace in the West Africa and Sahel regions.

The paper makes the following recommendations;

- The NTC must lead the process towards the establishment of a National SALWs Commission (NatCom) in Libya;
- Ad-hoc weapons collection centers should be created to mop up the loose arms;
- There is the need for the AU and ECOWAS member states to further strengthen border controls as a way of stemming the influx of small arms into the region;
- The UN and allied forces should intensify capacity building and technical assistance on weapons collection in Libya;
- The UN must help in the implementation of a robust DDRR in Libya;
- All concerned parties must step up SALWs advocacy and public enlightenment programmes.

### About the Author

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oil\_and\_energy/t/restoring-libyan-oil-output-could-take-years> Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> November 2011.

<sup>20</sup> See UN Resolutions 2009/2011, 2017/2011 and 2022/211 adopted by the Security Council at its 6620<sup>th</sup>, 6644<sup>th</sup> and 6673<sup>rd</sup> meetings respectively.

