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*Editor's Note: The "Looking Ahead" series features comments concerning short- to medium-term trends related to the arms trade, security assistance, and weapons use. Typically about 250 words, each comment is written by an expert listed on the Forum on the Arms Trade related to topics of each expert's choosing.*

*This edition is divided into two main sections. In Global Trends, Nicholas Marsh examines illicit arms trafficking, Natalie Goldring questions control of the global arms trade given U.S.-Russian competition, Rachel Stohl discusses proliferation and norms needed related to armed drones, and Jeff Abramson identifies efforts being championed by civil society. In The United States in the World, William Hartung examines U.S. military and security assistance to the Middle East and North Africa, while Adam Isacson and John Lindsay-Poland present contrasting views on the likely impact of proposed U.S. aid to Central America.*

*Inclusion on the Forum on the Arms Trade expert list does not indicate agreement with or endorsement of the opinions of others. Institutional affiliation is indicated for identification purposes only.*

## Global Trends

### Trends in illicit trafficking

Bucking the role of shadowy arms dealers found in the popular imagination, governments and non-state groups fighting in recent high profile wars – e.g. Syria, Iraq, Ukraine, Libya – get their arms from states. Supplies for rebels often come from looting state arsenals or from not-even-covert shipments organized by friendly states. Governments receive military aid or generous financing terms. Much work has been expended on conflict economies, and they are still important, but in many contemporary wars weapons can be obtained for free. The prospect of more great power confrontation raises the concerning likelihood that weapons supplies to proxies will more frequently be used as a means to try to obtain foreign policy goals.



**Nicholas  
Marsh**

In recent years homicide accounts for over ten times more violent deaths than warfare. Regions affected by high levels of homicide, which are often as violent as war zones, also experience high levels of illicit firearms. Crime is the most important global driver of illicit firearms ownership, use and trafficking. The acquisition of these arms is via purchases from retail shops of lawfully imported or locally produced guns; pilfering from government stocks held by the police and armed forces; and illicit cross-border trafficking. Authorized exports have been increasing to many of these countries.

Hitherto research on illicit trafficking has mainly been conducted via case studies and field work. This important work will be augmented by the systematic collection and analysis of data. Doing so will enable researchers to track global and regional trends (albeit with important caveats about data quality and comprehensiveness), and better understand the economic and political foundations of the illicit arms trade.

*Nicholas Marsh is a Research Fellow at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO).*

## **Will U.S.-Russian competition make it more difficult to control the global arms trade?**

According to recent press accounts, Russia is considering selling advanced mobile anti-aircraft missile systems to Iran. Russia is already moving toward delivering the same system to Egypt, and has reportedly transferred it to Venezuela as well. According to *The Guardian*, the manufacturer claims that the system is effective against missiles, fixed-wing aircraft, drones, and precision-guided bombs.



**Natalie Goldring**

The Russian resurgence in the international arms trade challenges recent U.S. supremacy in this arena. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), from 2004-2008, the United States was responsible for 30 percent of the global weapons trade, with Russia in second place with 24 percent. From 2009-2013, however, the gap between the two countries narrowed significantly, with the United States still in first place at 29 percent, but Russia close behind at 27 percent. With the release of new SIPRI arms trade data in mid-March 2015, the two top suppliers may well switch places.

The United States has signed the global Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), but the prospects for ratification in the near future are dismal at best. Russia has not signed the treaty, and it abstained on the General Assembly vote on ATT passage. Advocates of global control of arms transfers must develop strategies for addressing key suppliers that are not full participants in the treaty. One possibility is seeking synergies among the ATT, the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons and the UN Register of Conventional Arms to strengthen the nascent global regime on conventional weapons transfers.

*Dr. Natalie Goldring is a Senior Fellow in in the Security Studies Program in the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University. She is also UN consultant for the Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy.*

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## **The Age of Drones**

The increased U.S. reliance on unmanned aerial systems (UAS), more colloquially known as “drones,” has been controversial in the United States and around the world. Although drones have many peaceful applications, most policy attention is focused on the proliferation and use of armed drones, particularly away from traditional battlefields.



**Rachel Stohl**

In February 2015, the United States announced a new export policy for U.S.-origin military and commercial drones. The new policy assesses each potential transfer on a case-by-case basis, includes the potential for enhanced end-use monitoring, and could require all sales through the Foreign Military Sales program. Commercial U.S.-origin drones are to be reviewed under the Export Administration Regulations. In addition, drone transfers will require recipients to agree to “Principles for Proper Use” before the export is authorized. These four principles require compliance with international legal precedents focused on human rights, international humanitarian law, privacy and use of force regulations. Implementation of these principles will be crucial and enforcement key to ensuring the technology is used with transparency and accountability.

Eighty-five countries are estimated to have armed and unarmed drones in their military arsenals and for commercial purposes. The United States has already sold sophisticated drones to close allies such as the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Italy, France, and South Korea. Experts and market forecasters estimate that the market for drones will double in the next decade and other governments are eager to enter the drones market. As the use of drones in commercial and military realms increases, governments and other relevant entities will need to develop international norms and policies governing drone use and transfers to address proliferation challenges and appropriate standards of use.

*Rachel Stohl is a Senior Associate with the Managing Across Boundaries Initiative at the Stimson Center.*

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### **Efforts with strong civil society engagement: Arms Trade Treaty, Killer Robots, Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas**

At least three efforts in which civil society is playing a critical role are set to see progress in the coming months: implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty; banning so-called killer robots; and preventing the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.



With the first Arms Trade Treaty Conference of States Parties to occur in August and many decisions still to be made about the operation of the treaty, states should now move expeditiously to establish robust import and export regimes – where they are lacking – and be explicit about how they are applying treaty criteria to arms transfer decisions. The civil society-led ATT Baseline Assessment Project and Control Arms' *ATT Monitor* are already up and running, and should provide a good starting point from which to aid and measure these steps.

The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots continues to engage all countries on the need to preemptively ban the development, production and use of fully autonomous weapons systems. In January, concerns over such weapons were expressed at the World Economic Forum in Davos. In April, civil society members will be active at a second informal meeting of experts under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) to discuss emerging "lethal autonomous weapons systems."

Finally, civil society groups and UN agencies continue to raise alarm about the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas and their subsequent harm to civilians in Syria, Ukraine and other conflict areas. Organizations working under the International Network on Explosive Weapons have documented statements of concern by at least 40 countries and point to an expert meeting – the third of its kind – to be held in Vienna in September as an opportunity for countries to begin development of an international commitment to stop the practice.

*Jeff Abramson is the founder of the Forum on the Arms Trade and Program Manager of Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor.*

# The United States in the World

## U.S. Arms Transfers and Military Training in the Middle East and North Africa

The United States is the largest supplier of weapons and training to the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region, and is likely to remain so over the next few years. But there has been no comprehensive effort to assess the potential impacts of these transfers, which range from tens of billions of dollars in deals with Saudi Arabia to the evolving program to train and equip a 5,000-strong force of Syrian moderates to fight ISIS.



**William  
Hartung**

The need for closer monitoring and control of U.S. transfers to the region is underscored by recent cases such as the use of U.S.-supplied weaponry to put down the democracy movement in Bahrain and the surrender of large quantities of U.S.-supplied weaponry to ISIS by U.S.-trained Iraqi security forces. But despite these warning signs, it is likely that U.S. transfers to the region will continue to grow in the context of building and sustaining a coalition against ISIS.

U.S. transfers of arms and training to the region must also be seen in the context of the activities of other suppliers. In the midst of the violence rocking the region, is there a room for a policy of greater restraint in arms transfers on the part of its major arms suppliers, or will such efforts have to await a resolution of major ongoing conflicts like the Syrian civil war?

*William Hartung is Director of the Arms and Security Project at the Center for International Policy.*

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## Central America: This aid package could be a break with the past, if it supports those trying to break with the past

We don't have a lot of detail yet about how the Obama administration plans to spend its proposed \$1 billion in aid for Central America. That means there is still opportunity for advocates to influence how it gets spent.

We do know that only about 15–20 percent of it would go to Central American security forces. This is an important break with past frameworks like Plan Colombia (81% non-military/police aid, 2000–2006) or the Mérida Initiative (78%, 2008–2010). This time there are no helicopters, and almost nothing for militaries.

For now, our energy must go toward supporting these overall amounts, which will face a fight in Congress. But our message must also be that this aid cannot subsidize kleptocratic elites or bypass civil society. The 22% of aid through the International Narcotics and Law Enforcement account must not revert to old patterns of funding weapons and elite units while downplaying recipients' corruption and human rights abuse.



**Adam  
Isacson**

Central America has no shortage of creative community-based violence prevention initiatives, honest judicial personnel, and courageous investigative journalists and human rights defenders. All badly need help and should get support from this package.

Police are necessary to protect people, too, and the police aid in this package can have the greatest impact if it goes to professionals working in areas like internal anti-corruption controls, relating and being accountable to communities, reducing response times when citizens call for help, investigating corrupt financial flows, and making policing a proper career.

*Adam Isacson is Senior Associate for Regional Security Policy at the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA).*

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### **Central America: Police and private investment don't replace political will and compassion**

The Obama administration has proposed a billion-dollar aid package for Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador that would more than double U.S. aid to police that remain abusive despite years of counter-drug and anti-corruption programs. The package also nearly quintuples mostly unspecified development assistance.

Just as pouring billions into Afghan reconstruction didn't make the war in Afghanistan good, increased aid to governments with no political will to stop corruption and violence does not make militarized approaches to child migration or drug trafficking worthy of support. Honduran law enforcement agencies are "criminal organizations inside and out," said Honduras' deputy drug czar, later killed.

The package aims to stop children and families from fleeing violence to the United States, by promoting private enterprise, militarizing the U.S.'s and Mexico's southern borders, training drug warriors, and supporting certain faith-based youth programs. Vice-President Biden made clear that the package is modeled on Plan Colombia – associated with massive forced displacement and killings – and U.S. community policing, which promoted 'broken windows' policing and prison expansion. The judicial reform promoted for Central America has had abysmal effects on prosecuting extrajudicial executions in Colombia and northern Mexico.

The Pentagon's Southcom and State Department's narcotics bureau have made Honduras and Guatemala the focus of military and police programs for years. Nicaragua, "neglected" by such efforts, has remarkably less organized crime, violence, and children fleeing to the United States. Money won't create political will for the changes needed in Central America. But it could support compassionate treatment of families fleeing violence to our homeland.

*John Lindsay-Poland is a researcher and analyst with the Fellowship of Reconciliation Peace Presence.*

