

Forum: Disarmament Committee

Issue: Combatting the trade of dual-use equipment in war zones across the Middle East and Northern Africa

Student Officer: Nehir Özcan

Position: President Chair

Introduction

The trade of dual-use equipment in war zones across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has become a significant driver of instability, fueling armed conflicts, strengthening militant groups, and undermining regional security. Dual-use equipment includes goods, technologies, and software that have both civilian and military applications. While these items are often essential for legitimate industrial, medical, and technological applications, they have also been exploited by non-state actors, terrorist groups, and authoritarian regimes to fuel conflicts and destabilize entire regions.

The uncontrolled flow of such equipment into conflict zones has exacerbated violence, prolonged wars, and empowered both state and non-state actors engaged in hostilities. Terrorist organizations, insurgent groups, and authoritarian regimes have increasingly exploited these technologies to enhance their military capabilities, disrupt enemy operations, and carry out large-scale attacks. The use of commercial drones for surveillance and airstrikes, the repurposing of industrial chemicals for bomb-making, and the use of encrypted communication systems by militant factions demonstrate how these technologies have transformed modern warfare in the region.

Despite efforts to impose arms embargoes, trade restrictions, and sanctions, the illicit trade of dual-use goods remains widespread due to loopholes in international trade laws, covert smuggling networks, and political interests. Many of these items enter war zones through legal commercial sales, only to be diverted to armed groups through intermediaries. In some cases, state actors have also been implicated in supplying these technologies to allied factions in ongoing conflicts.

Definition of Key Terms

What do I write here (WDIWH): The definitions should be precise; please do not make vague definitions. All definitions must be reworded, to ensure comprehensibility of the chair report.

Even though the definition of Key terms may seem to be an easy section, please take it seriously and provide clear definitions. You may get your definitions from a variety of sources, from online dictionaries, formal UN definitions, and any other online source; however, it is essential that you cite

them according to the MLA format.

General Overview

In conflict zones across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the uncontrolled trade of dual-use items has exacerbated violence, prolonged wars, and strengthened the capabilities of militant groups. Items such as surveillance technologies, industrial chemicals, drone components, and telecommunications equipment have been repurposed for military applications by non-state actors and authoritarian regimes alike.

The ease with which dual-use goods are diverted to military use is largely due to loopholes in international trade laws, weak enforcement mechanisms, and covert smuggling networks. As a result, these items often end up in the hands of militant groups, oppressive governments, and rogue entities that use them to conduct attacks, suppress opposition, and undermine regional stability.

The proliferation of dual-use equipment in MENA war zones has been fueled by a combination of weak regulatory oversight, black market networks, and the complicity of state and non-state actors. In many cases, these items enter conflict zones through indirect channels, such as legal commercial sales to intermediary companies, which then transfer them to restricted entities. Some of the most notable examples of dual-use technology misuse include:

ISIS and the Use of Dual-Use Technology in Iraq and Syria

During its peak between 2014 and 2017, the Islamic State (ISIS) capitalized on dual-use technologies to bolster its war efforts. The group managed to acquire commercial drones and modify them for reconnaissance, surveillance, and even aerial attacks. Reports indicated that ISIS sourced drone components from commercial markets, primarily through online purchases and smuggling routes spanning Turkey and other neighboring countries.

Similarly, ISIS exploited industrial-grade chemicals to manufacture explosives. Several reports highlighted how precursor chemicals, initially intended for agricultural or medical use, were redirected for the production of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). These IEDs were responsible for thousands of casualties and significantly impeded counter-terrorism efforts.

Chemical Weapons Use in the Syrian Civil War

Since the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, chemical weapons have been used multiple times, despite international prohibitions. Investigations have revealed that dual-use chemicals, including chlorine and sarin gas precursors, were smuggled into Syria through both legal and illicit channels. These chemicals, ostensibly meant for civilian industries, were repurposed for military attacks.

The most notorious incidents include the 2013 Ghouta attack, which resulted in over 1,400 fatalities,

and subsequent chemical attacks in Khan Sheikhou (2017) and Douma (2018). The acquisition of these substances was facilitated by weak trade controls and international smuggling networks, with evidence suggesting involvement by both state and non-state actors.

Houthi Rebels and Drone Warfare in Yemen

The Houthi rebels in Yemen have demonstrated sophisticated drone warfare capabilities, utilizing commercially available drone parts to enhance their attacks on Saudi Arabian and United Arab Emirates (UAE) infrastructure. Reports from intelligence agencies and UN experts have linked these capabilities to Iranian supply chains, where dual-use components were shipped through intermediary states to mask their origins.

Notably, Houthi forces launched drone strikes against Saudi oil facilities in 2019, temporarily halting nearly 50% of the country's oil production. The attack underscored the risks of dual-use technology falling into the hands of non-state actors and highlighted the need for stricter international monitoring of the trade in drone-related components.

Libyan Conflict and the Role of Arms Embargo Violations

The ongoing instability in Libya has been fueled by the influx of foreign weapons and dual-use equipment. Despite a UN arms embargo, various factions have managed to acquire surveillance equipment, armored vehicles, and communication tools through indirect channels. Nations with vested interests in Libya's political landscape have facilitated these transfers, often exploiting legal gray areas to avoid direct accountability.

For instance, investigations have shown that military-grade encrypted radios and satellite communication devices intended for commercial purposes have been utilized by warlords and militias to coordinate attacks. The unrestricted availability of such technologies has further complicated efforts to establish lasting peace in the region.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

United States

The United States plays a leading role in regulating the trade of dual-use equipment through agencies such as the Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) and the Department of State. The U.S. has imposed strict export controls and economic sanctions on entities suspected of supplying dual-use technologies to terrorist organizations and sanctioned regimes. Washington has also been a proponent of the Wassenaar Arrangement, a multilateral export control regime aimed at preventing the misuse of sensitive technologies. However, challenges remain in enforcing these policies, particularly in regions where illicit smuggling networks operate beyond U.S. jurisdiction.

European Union (EU)

The European Union enforces the Dual-Use Regulation framework, which governs the export of sensitive technologies by its member states. This regulatory system aims to prevent the proliferation of dual-use goods that could contribute to conflict. However, enforcement remains inconsistent across EU nations, with some countries taking a stricter approach than others. Additionally, EU-based companies have occasionally been implicated in cases where dual-use technology was diverted to war zones through third-party intermediaries.

Iran

Iran has been accused of providing dual-use technologies, including drone components and missile guidance systems, to allied groups such as the Houthis in Yemen and Hezbollah in Lebanon. While Tehran denies these allegations, multiple intelligence reports have linked Iranian-supplied equipment to attacks on civilian and military targets in the region. Iran's involvement in the trade of dual-use equipment has led to increased sanctions from the U.S. and the EU, further straining diplomatic relations.

Türkiye

Türkiye serves as both a producer and transit hub for dual-use technologies, due to its strategic location and expansive trade network. While the Turkish government has taken steps to crack down on illicit smuggling, porous borders and sophisticated underground networks allow dual-use goods to be diverted to militant groups in Syria and Iraq. Additionally, Turkish companies have faced scrutiny over allegations of exporting drone components and surveillance equipment to conflict zones.

Russia

Russia has been accused of lax export controls regarding dual-use electronics and military-grade technologies. Reports suggest that Russian-made surveillance tools and encrypted communication systems have found their way into war zones across the MENA region. Moscow's strategic alliances with authoritarian regimes, such as the Assad government in Syria, have also led to concerns over its role in facilitating the misuse of dual-use technologies.

Timeline of Events

August 2013	The Ghouta chemical attack in Syria kills over 1,400 people. Investigations confirm that dual-use chemical precursors were smuggled into Syria despite international restrictions.
--------------------	--

October 2014	<p>Reports emerge that ISIS is modifying commercial drones for surveillance and aerial attacks in Iraq and Syria. These components are traced back to legal online purchases.</p>
March 2015	<p>The Yemeni Civil War escalates, and Houthi rebels begin using dual-use drone technology and missile guidance systems, allegedly supplied through illicit trade networks.</p>
April 2017	<p>The Khan Sheikhoun chemical attack in Syria kills over 80 people. Investigators confirm that dual-use industrial chemicals were diverted and weaponized.</p>
September 2019	<p>Houthi rebels launch a drone attack on Saudi Aramco oil facilities, disrupting nearly 50% of Saudi Arabia's oil production. The attack demonstrates how commercially available drones can be repurposed for large-scale military operations.</p>
October 2020	<p>The UN Panel of Experts on Libya releases a report detailing how dual-use encrypted communication devices and surveillance tools were smuggled to armed militias despite an arms embargo</p>
May 2022	<p>Intelligence reports confirm that non-state actors in MENA are increasingly using encrypted communication devices and AI-driven surveillance tools, raising concerns over the evolving role of dual-use technologies in conflict zones.</p>

UN Involvement

The United Nations has played an active role in addressing the trade of dual-use equipment in war zones across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), primarily through diplomatic negotiations, monitoring mechanisms, and enforcement initiatives. Given the significant impact that dual-use technologies have had on prolonging conflicts, the UN has sought to curb their proliferation through various strategies.

One of the UN's most crucial functions has been monitoring and reporting on the illicit flow of dual-use goods into conflict zones. The UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), alongside specialized bodies like the UN Panel of Experts, has continuously assessed the impact of dual-use technology in ongoing conflicts. Reports from these bodies have provided detailed insights into how militant groups, terrorist organizations, and even state actors exploit these technologies for military purposes. Investigations by UN panels have exposed networks that supply non-state actors with drone components, chemical precursors, and encrypted communication systems, leading to international scrutiny of such practices.

In addition to monitoring, the UN has attempted to curb the trade of dual-use equipment through sanctions and arms embargoes. These measures have been implemented in war-torn nations such as Libya, Syria, and Yemen, where dual-use technologies have been diverted to conflict. However, despite the existence of these sanctions, enforcement remains a major challenge. Smuggling networks, weak border security, and the involvement of external actors have allowed embargoed items to continue reaching war zones. The lack of a unified enforcement mechanism has led to inconsistent compliance, with certain nations bypassing restrictions to advance their strategic interests.

The UN has also sought to address the issue through international cooperation. Treaties and agreements, such as the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), have been promoted as frameworks for responsible trade and greater transparency in the sale of sensitive equipment. Furthermore, the UN has worked alongside international law enforcement agencies such as INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization (WCO) to improve customs regulations and border monitoring. Despite these efforts, major gaps remain in tracking the movement of dual-use goods, particularly through indirect trade channels that obscure the true buyers and end-users of these technologies.

Beyond policy and enforcement, the UN has engaged in capacity-building initiatives to help member states strengthen their domestic regulations. This includes offering technical assistance, training programs, and resources to improve export control measures. In many conflict-prone regions, weak governance and insufficient legal frameworks have made it easy for dual-use goods to fall into the wrong hands. The UN's efforts aim to bolster national governments' ability to regulate their own trade policies effectively.

Despite these extensive efforts, the challenge of dual-use technology in war zones persists due to geopolitical complexities and evolving technological advancements. The UN continues to advocate for stronger global cooperation and technological solutions to improve monitoring and enforcement, but

without stronger international commitment, the illicit trade of dual-use equipment remains a major security threat in the MENA region.

Relevant UN Documents

UNSC Resolution 1540 (2004): Requires states to enforce domestic controls preventing WMD proliferation and regulate dual-use technologies.

UNSC Resolution 2118 (2013): Led to the dismantling of Syria's chemical weapons program, targeting precursor chemicals like isopropanol and chlorine.

UNSC Resolution 2216 (2015): Imposed an arms embargo on Houthi rebels in Yemen, restricting dual-use components in drones and missiles.

UNSC Resolution 2374 (2017): Established sanctions in Mali to prevent armed groups from acquiring dual-use technologies, particularly surveillance equipment and drones.

Treaties and Events

Over the years, several international treaties and major events have attempted to regulate the trade of dual-use equipment and prevent its misuse in conflict zones. These agreements have primarily focused on export controls, arms regulations, and the prevention of chemical and biological warfare, with varying degrees of success.

One of the most relevant agreements is the Wassenaar Arrangement (1996), which established guidelines for controlling exports of conventional arms and dual-use technologies. This arrangement, however, is voluntary and lacks enforcement mechanisms, allowing loopholes that facilitate illicit transfers. Moreover, major military and industrial powers like China are not members, limiting its global reach.

The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), adopted in 2013, was intended to regulate the global trade of conventional weapons and associated technologies, including dual-use goods. While the treaty introduced binding obligations for signatories, its effectiveness has been hindered by key arms-exporting nations such as the United States and Russia refusing to ratify it. Without the participation of these countries, the ATT remains incomplete in its enforcement capacity.

The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which entered into force in 1997, is another pivotal agreement that prohibits the development and use of chemical weapons, including dual-use chemicals that could be repurposed for warfare. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) oversees its implementation, but violations, such as the 2013 and 2017 chemical attacks in Syria, demonstrate the challenges of enforcing the treaty in active war zones.

Additionally, the UN Security Council has imposed arms embargoes on countries like Libya (2011),

Syria (2013), and Yemen (2015), restricting the sale and transfer of weapons and dual-use technologies. However, as numerous UN reports have documented, these embargoes have been repeatedly violated, largely due to illicit smuggling networks and third-party intermediaries that circumvent restrictions.

Beyond treaties, international conferences and summits have also sought to address the issue. The 2016 Nuclear Security Summit (NSS) briefly discussed dual-use chemical and biological materials, but it failed to produce concrete agreements beyond nuclear security. Similarly, the 2018 UN Conference on Disarmament debated strengthening arms control measures, but disagreements among major powers prevented the adoption of binding resolutions.

While these treaties and events represent significant steps toward regulating dual-use technology, their impact has been limited by weak enforcement mechanisms, non-compliance from key nations, and evolving technologies that outpace existing regulations.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Despite the existence of various treaties and regulatory frameworks, previous attempts to resolve the illicit trade of dual-use equipment in war zones have largely failed due to enforcement challenges, geopolitical interests, and evolving technological threats.

One of the most persistent issues has been the failure to enforce arms embargoes. Despite UN-imposed restrictions on Libya, Syria, and Yemen, multiple reports from UN expert panels confirm that embargo violations remain widespread. Smuggling routes through intermediary nations and the use of legal businesses as front companies have enabled restricted technologies to continue flowing into war zones. Some countries with vested geopolitical interests have also turned a blind eye to violations or have selectively enforced embargoes to benefit their own strategic agendas.

Another major shortcoming has been the ineffectiveness of national export control policies. While agreements like the Wassenaar Arrangement and the European Union's Dual-Use Regulation provide frameworks for restricting sensitive exports, enforcement varies significantly between countries. Some states have strict compliance mechanisms, while others permit the export of dual-use goods with minimal oversight. The lack of a centralized enforcement body means that tracking and preventing illicit transfers is nearly impossible on a global scale.

Additionally, the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), while an important step forward, has suffered from low ratification rates among major arms exporters. Without participation from key nations like the United States and Russia, the treaty lacks the universal enforcement power needed to regulate global arms and dual-use technology transfers effectively.

International conferences have also struggled to produce tangible solutions. The 2016 Nuclear Security Summit, though relevant, focused primarily on nuclear materials and failed to address

broader concerns about the proliferation of other dual-use technologies, such as drones and cyber-surveillance tools. The 2018 UN Conference on Disarmament did bring attention to arms control issues, but political divisions prevented any binding agreements from being reached.

One of the most pressing unresolved issues is the technological evolution of dual-use equipment, particularly the commercialization of drones, AI-driven surveillance tools, and 3D printing of weapon components. Many of these technologies are now widely accessible on the commercial market, making it nearly impossible for existing treaties to effectively regulate them. Terrorist groups and militant organizations have exploited legal trade channels to acquire commercial products and modify them for warfare, a challenge that current regulatory frameworks fail to address.

Despite some progress through intelligence-sharing and international law enforcement coordination, most efforts remain reactive rather than preventive. Interpol, UN agencies, and national customs authorities have successfully intercepted shipments of restricted equipment, but these measures only occur after violations have already happened.

In conclusion, previous attempts to resolve this issue have failed primarily due to weak enforcement, loopholes in trade laws, and geopolitical obstacles. Future solutions must focus on closing regulatory gaps, increasing accountability for violators, and updating international agreements to address emerging technologies before they can be exploited for military use.

Possible Solutions

To effectively combat the illicit trade of dual-use equipment in war zones, a multi-faceted approach is essential. This includes strengthening international legal frameworks, such as expanding UN sanctions and updating export control regulations, to prevent the misuse of dual-use technology. Enhancing monitoring and enforcement mechanisms through advanced technologies like AI and blockchain could improve traceability and flag suspicious transactions. Increasing capacity-building for customs authorities and strengthening UN monitoring bodies would also improve enforcement. Targeting smuggling networks with coordinated crackdowns and enhanced border security can disrupt illicit trade routes, while public-private partnerships can bolster supply chain security. Furthermore, addressing the role of both state and non-state actors by imposing stricter penalties and promoting transparency in defense contracts would help reduce unauthorized transfers. Diplomatically, reducing the demand for these technologies by addressing the root causes of conflict can also play a vital role.

Notes from the Chair

When approaching this issue, delegates should recognize the humanitarian and security challenges posed by the diversion of dual-use goods into war zones. While crafting solutions, it's important to avoid redundancy with previous UN resolutions and build upon existing efforts. Proposals must also be practical, considering the economic and political constraints of different nations, and adaptable to future technological advancements and geopolitical shifts. Ethical considerations should guide the

formulation of solutions to ensure that legitimate scientific research and civilian industries are not unduly restricted. Lastly, the long-term sustainability of any proposed measures is crucial for maintaining their effectiveness over time.

Bibliography