



Transfer Of Weapons Is One Of The Most Dynamic & Lucrative Sectors Of World Trade

International Conventions Are Selectively Used, Leading To Complex Regional Instabilities

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Tensions in West Asia have surged following attacks on two major oil facilities in Saudi Arabia. The entire world got shocked when they witnessed the images on the TV sets about the pre-dawn attacks on September 14 which resulted into knocking out of more than half of the top global exporter's output - five percent of the global oil supply.

It was shocking that a military savvy state like Saudi Arabia was caught totally unaware and all their defences were purged successfully by the incoming drone attacks. Clearly there was something amiss as far as the air-defence network of Saudi Arabia is concerned.

Witnessing to inability of the existing military defences of Saudi Arabia to stop these attacks, the Russian President Vladimir Putin has proposed that Russia is ready to provide assistance to Saudi Arabia. He argued that Saudi Arabia should follow the examples of Iran which has purchased the S-300 system and Turkey which has purchased the latest S-400 system from Russia.

These systems help defending against incoming aircraft/drones and cruise/ballistic missile attacks. Today, there are some oil crisis due to just five percent reduction in oil supply.

Imagine a situation, if tomorrow, an attack takes place creating major damages. Hence, Putin's offer to strengthen the air-defence structure of Saudi Arabia should be given a serious thought. However, there is also a



Khurais oil field in Khurais, Saudi Arabia, Friday, Sept. 20, 2019, after it was hit during Sept. 14 attack. I. Yemen's Houthi rebels claimed the assault. (AP Photo/Amr Nabil)

is, the role of arms sale in foreign & defence policy of a country.

Over the years, arms sales have become a crucial dimension of international affairs.

Arms sales has political as well as economic logic. Normally, at the global level it has been observed that arms are sold to only friendly countries. At the same time, on occasion arms sales gets stopped owing to international political pressures.

There are some international conventions also which control such sales. Such conventions at times get selectively used for the sake of undertaking or stopping the arms sale. At times, arms sales help building up local arms races, create or enhance regional instabilities.

There is also an argument giv-

ing "powers having major defence industry infrastructure have interest in ensuring that the instability in global affairs should not diminish totally"!

As per the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Sweden, the volume of international transfers of major arms in 2014-18 was 7.8 per cent higher than in 2009-13 and 23 per cent higher than in 2004-2008.

This agency is one of the most reputed agencies in the world which collates and analyses the arms sale and arms transfers data. In recent times, the 1991 Gulf war demonstrated to the rest of the world about the modern day options available in military weaponry area.

Currently, in the West Asian

like Afghanistan in South Asia, no dearth of arms and ammunition is visible. Here, for years together all warring factions are known to have enough ammunition to continue fighting. In Syria, Yemen, Libya or Iraq there is no dearth of warfighting equipment found anywhere.

Obviously, these weapons are coming from somewhere and unofficial supply lines are appear to be working fine!

Geopolitical situation at times shapes the dynamics of weapons trade. One of the major reasons for the West Asia to remain as a violent war theatre, is the presence of oil over there. It is known that oil dependence also affects the trade of weapons between countries. The oil-dependent economies have incentives to

transfer arms to oil-rich countries to reduce their vulnerabilities. Barter of oil and arms does take place.

Interestingly, Russia is not an oil dependent economy. They have a major military industry complex. Hence, the current situation is of double benefit for Russia. The stability of the EU's energy supply is fragile. In 2018, almost 27.3% of the EU's crude oil imports came from Russia, and 6.6%, came from Saudi Arabia.

Today, if required Russia can increase their supplies to EU, if Saudi Arabia finds it difficult. This would boost Russia's oil trade and if Saudi Arabia purchases S-300/S-400 systems from Russia then it would boost their military trade!

As per some reliable estimates, the total international trade in arms is worth about US\$100bn per year. Russia and the US have major arms industries. In addition, there is an illegal arms trade which could be worth US\$10bn per year.

This industry would remain alive if there is a demand. Hence, war cries and political instability are necessary for the survival of this industry. Interestingly, almost 60 years back in his speech on 17 January 1961, the then US President Eisenhower had warned about the growth of a 'military-industrial complex' and the risks it could pose. His words have come true today.

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