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### **Abstract**

Once very much of an East-West issue, with the end of the Cold War, non-proliferation not only shifted to a North-South debate, but also became endowed with complex regional security underpinnings. Faced with arms race and non-proliferation in the western Mediterranean, EU security agencies are voicing concerns over the acquisition of nuclear, chemical and ballistic weapons by non-state actors and so-called "rogue" states in North Africa and the Middle East. The security picture is even more complicated by the differences in regimes, political perceptions, and security policies between states on both shores of the Mediterranean; which, in turn, leads to the escalation of military non-transparency, illicit acquisitions of WMD and, therefore, an overall increase of threat to the security of the whole region. This background begs the following question: What arms control and non-proliferation measures are suitable for this region, then?

This essay argues that global non-proliferation regimes are not the only panacea for meeting all of the nuclear threats in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The article is made up of two parts. In the first part, I analyze non-proliferation initiatives in the Euro-Mediterranean<sup>[1]</sup> region along two themes: First, military transparency (or lack thereof) and second, regional security by linking my findings to global non-proliferation regimes. In the second part, which will also include policy recommendations, I argue that for Euro-Mediterranean non-proliferation measures to succeed, it is imperative for states in the region (particularly the signatories to the 1995 Euro-Med Partnership Agreement and the follow-up Disarmament Charters) to adopt a much more *realistic* and *transparent* approach based on concepts of cooperative regional security and military transparency. Part of such an approach, transparency should also be applied when discussing compliance-related issues to be implemented, not only at the regional level (North-South), but at the sub-regional level (South-

South) as well. I also propose that states in the Euro-Mediterranean slowly involve members of civil society (from North and South) and local NGO's (bottom-up approach) in issues of non-proliferation, as a gradual way of reducing political prejudices and security stereotypes that still render Euro-Mediterranean non-proliferation efforts ineffective. Because of the sensitive nature of disarmament, I consider it also appropriate to adopt gradual policies with short, middle, and long-term objectives (involving non-state actors as well) to turn the western Mediterranean into a "zone free of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons by the year 2010," as proclaimed in the Barcelona Declaration of 1995. Last but not least, the article proposes that addressing non-proliferation in the Mediterranean is best addressed in a non-confrontational, more engaging and cooperative approach that takes into account the regional specificities of the western Mediterranean.

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## **Small Arms and Regional Security in The Western Mediterranean:**

### **Reflections on European Views**

"The decrease in the perception of the threat from the East has generated an excessive emphasis on the so-called "threat from the South" which from a classic operational point of view is characterized by irrelevant military capabilities...For Europe and for our country [Italy] the threat from this area is more to our lifestyle than to life itself." [1]

The issue of small arms[2] has surfaced on the international agenda as a major security concern. The damage inflicted on civilians in conflicts either by states or armed groups (Bosnia, Zaire, Rwanda, Afghanistan) has alarmed the international community to initiate substantive policy controls to curb the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. In the western Mediterranean, the existence of radical social groups and so-called rogue states in the south has prompted the EU and its security agencies to be even more concerned and begin addressing small arms as an immediate threat. This concern, however, has sometimes been overstated in European security literature on the southern Mediterranean. Thus, widely stated

is the claim that the situation in the south could 'explode' with further proliferation of small arms and conventional weapons.[3]

However, although European worries do not strike us as conceptually unfounded or technically immaterial, the question that comes to mind here is how do European security analysts justify their claims about small arms proliferation in the region? This paper examines the *strength* of the claim that small arms are a security threat in the western Mediterranean. It discusses south-western European worries about small arms and rising insecurity in North Africa and contextualizes European security debates on small arms and potential threats within the broader theme of regional security.

This paper argues two interrelated points: First, the link between small arms and regional insecurity is a particularly elusive terrain to make clear-cut conclusions or generalizations about. Second, bearing in mind the geopolitical and military *specificities* in the region, the causal relations between arms and regional insecurity in the whole western Mediterranean do not look as clear and threateningly immediate as they are often claimed to be. Thus, missing the links between small arms, local society and potential insecurity makes the claims about "small arms explosion," or "imminence of threat" in the western Mediterranean sound more like speculative projections that need further substantiation.

To argue the above propositions, I discuss small arms in relation to two themes: what I label "conceptual hurdles" and "empirical problems." The former refers to the fact that the elusive nature of small arms presents security analysts with particular conceptual problems, particularly when trying to link small arms to insecurity scenarios in the western Mediterranean. On the other hand, what I call "empirical problems" refers to the geopolitical *specificities* surrounding small arms in North Africa, namely conflicts, the "arms culture" and the conditions surrounding legal/illegal small arms transfers. Here I discuss criteria conducive to small arms escalation and regional armament and relate that to European security claims. What I seek to implicitly draw from this analysis is that claims about small arms and regional insecurity have to be put for testing and contextualized rather than generalized. In the western Mediterranean, discussing how small arms and armament are perceived by EU security actors is a realistic reflection on Euro-Mediterranean relations and the outlook for the future of these relations. Also, assessing the strength of European security views is an attempt to redress the perverse effect of security perceptions on regional security cooperation.

The paper is organized as follows: First, before I analyze small arms in the region, I provide a background on the links between small arms and regional security and discuss European security outlook on the western Mediterranean. In the analysis, I unpack a few conceptual problems related to European claims about small arms in the region. Then, I discuss the socio-political characteristics of the western Mediterranean in relation to small arms and potential insecurity. In this part, I analyze a set of empirical problems related to the claims about small arms and overall armament in the region. In the conclusion, I put forward a few

recommendations in relation to the research on small arms and threat assessment in the western Mediterranean.

## Small Arms and Regional Security

Small arms, sometimes referred to here as light weapons, are broadly defined as weapons that can be handled by one or two persons, and include machine-guns, mortars, rocket-launchers, grenade-launchers, portable launchers of anti-tank missile and rocket systems.[4] Because of space considerations, I disregard the private use of firearms, even though this classification and use should be considered within a military perspective. Including private arms in the analysis would drag the argument into specific private ownership of firearms and national gun control and legality in individual countries in the western Mediterranean.

Internationally, it is only recently that the small arms issue has emerged as an independent security threat on the global disarmament agenda, edging out a long-standing preoccupation with weapons of mass destruction and conventional weapons.[5] Post-conflict micro-disarmament efforts in South Africa and Kosovo have put small arms on the global agenda of peace and security. Krause reminds us that the regional threats posed by small arms relate to "...the increasing intensity of contemporary conflicts, diminishing the security of vulnerable groups..., increasing the violence associated with large-scale criminal activity..., eroding development gains and the prospects for socio-economic development, undermining respect for human rights, threatening humanitarian relief operations and workers..."[6]

Conceptually, however, even though small arms relate to security in every facet, there are major disagreements on the links between small arms and insecurity scenarios. Krause states that "there is not even a clear agreement on what the threat as such: some define it as a human rights issue, others as a development issue. Still, others relate small arms to post-conflict micro-disarmament, or trans-national criminality." [7] In fact, each approach focuses on different angles of the threat and advocates different strategies to minimize the insecurity caused by small arms.

The following diagram outlines how small arms relate to the increase of insecurity:

Small Arms as Threat	→ Description	→ Outcomes
Human rights	→ violence against vulnerable groups	→ cycle of violence
Organized crime	→ economic insecurity	→ self-perpetuating violence
Regional conflicts	→ spillover of violence	→ conflict escalation

Terrorism

→ violence, fear

→ societal insecurity

## Figure I: Theoretical underpinnings of Small Arms and Security

### European Security Outlook on the Western Mediterranean

Geographically, the western Mediterranean refers to south-western Europe<sup>[8]</sup> and North Africa.<sup>[9]</sup> This geopolitical focus seeks to relate small arms to a region linked by societal, economic and military security nodes. Even though I refer here loosely here to the western Mediterranean, I focus more on the southern part, since it is presumed to be the source of conflicts and insecurity. Space does not permit a detailed discussion of the various security nodes that have been developing within states in this region. But a short background on European interest in the security of the western Mediterranean is quite relevant here.

In regional security, patterns of amity or enmity between geographically contiguous states dictate interlinked security nodes.<sup>[10]</sup> In the western Mediterranean, for instance, European concerns about North African societal insecurities (rising demographic pressure, Islamic fundamentalism, soaring immigration) relate to economic underdevelopment in the south, and trigger EU securitization of the above threats. In the meantime, and in an effort to contain the above threats, south-west European states seek to cooperate with North Africa on security matters because they view their individual securities as closely linked to North Africa, not least because of their geographic propinquity to the *Maghreb*.<sup>[11]</sup>

Specialists on the region also find that overlapping security nodes between south-western Europe and North Africa have made both their securities so interlinked that it is impossible to discuss one without mentioning the other.<sup>[12]</sup> Examples of these security links are clear in the *5+5 Dialogue* (among Portugal, Spain, France, Italy and Malta, and the five members of the Arab *Maghreb* Union) and the 1995 Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (also referred to as the Barcelona Conference). Spencer argues that "Europe's own security agenda has, in turn, been addressed through articles committing the signatories of the Barcelona agreement to cooperate in fighting organized crime, in preventing the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons..."<sup>[13]</sup>

Over the last decade, Europe grew even more concerned about new threats emanating from its 'near abroad.' While a few analysts agree that the Mediterranean does not present Europe with a major military threat (Moya 1995), the collapse of the Soviet Union (mainly the fact that large stockpiles of arms could end up within the hands of radical groups) and new terrorist challenges did not de-emphasize armament and the strategic importance of the western Mediterranean as a source of potential threat to south-western Europe. Mr. Klaus Bühler, the then President of the Assembly of the Western European Union (WEU), clearly

articulated his emphasis on EU security interests in the region on October 8, 2002:

“The Assembly and the Portuguese Presidency chose to focus on this region because it is adjacent to the EU and there is a risk of it being neglected as the security debate tends to be dominated by events in the eastern part of the Mediterranean. The Western Mediterranean is in many ways an important neighbor for us.”[\[14\]](#)

Recently, for instance, the purpose of Chirac's official trip to Algeria was intended to recast French relationship with Algeria. But Chirac was interested in far more than just Franco-Algerian relations. He was also trying to promote specific security visions of France both to domestic and regional audiences in the Mediterranean. Thus, whether viewed in the context of a reactive EU solidarity towards southern threats, to borrow Aliboni's thought,[\[15\]](#) or within a pan-Mediterranean cooperative security framework (as clearly championed in the EU in the Barcelona Conference of 1995), southern EU Member states have placed western Mediterranean security as an important pillar in their rotating EU presidency agendas and labeled small arms as an immediate threat through EU security agencies: WEU, OSCE, and NATO. Claire Spencer argues that “the Mediterranean thus figures in both Europe's dilemmas (collective defense/cooperative security and ‘hard’ security/ ‘soft’ security)...”[\[16\]](#)

Particularly, the issue of small arms, among other security issues, has been placed among immediate security problems in EU official documents.[\[17\]](#) More specifically, the EU initiatives on small arms predate the 2001 UN Conference on Small Arms and Light Weapons. For instance, in 1997, EU Council agreed on the “Programme for Preventing and Combatting Illicit Trafficking in Conventional Arms,” and in 1998 the Council developed the “EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports.” The OSCE also recognized the need to take action to combat small arms trafficking when it adopted the Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons in November 2000. At the UN, a global Programme of Action on the illicit small arms trade in all its aspects was agreed in 2001.[\[18\]](#)

### **Small Arms As A Threat in the western Mediterranean Conceptual Problems**

In the 90's, particularly since the emergence of a wave of policy and academic ‘Mediterraneanism’ (partly fuelled by EU concern about rising non-traditional threats within the context of EU enlargement), European security analysts began to emphasize small arms as an urgent security issue.[\[19\]](#) In February 1995, *The Independent* published an interview with Willy Claes, then NATO's Secretary-General, in which he identified Islamic fundamentalism and weapons proliferation in North Africa as two of the most important post-Cold war challenges facing the West.[\[20\]](#)

Since then, the proliferation of weapons in the region, particularly its link to violent opposition groups and rogue states, has become a European security leitmotif (de Rato 1995: 7;

Lesser 1996; Lipkowski 1996:172).[21] Not only that, but assessing these threats in the western Mediterranean began to be done in ways that paralleled the threat assessments made about the Eastern Mediterranean during the conflict in the Balkans in the early 90's. Timothy Garden and others, for instance, referred to small arms proliferation and WMD in the western Mediterranean within the context of the Balkan crisis.[22] Many also argued that the Mediterranean harbors some of the largest dangers for regional and global security, among which small arms and conventional weapons proliferation. (Lesser: 1996; Lipkowski: 1996; Jacomet: 1995; Fuller: 1996; Vasconcelos & Faria: 1996, Fuller:1996). Lesser, for instance, argues that "Europe's greater Mediterranean periphery—from Algeria to Iran, Iraq and as far afield as the sub-continent—displays a striking concentration of proliferation risks." [23]

Whether in policy papers or academic assessments of threats, various authors have spoken about armament and small arms as urgent security issues and emphasized that while inter-state conflict is suppressed, domestic violent conflict has increased, in the form of political turmoil, terrorism, guerrilla actions, and insurgency.[24] Writing on security perceptions of Europe, Carlo Masala argues that "ten years after the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), discussions of proliferation are sparking a fear that the southern Mediterranean is considered as a future threat enclave." [25] The sources are enormous to cite here and include think-thanks, academics, the media and official spokespersons of EU, OSCE, NATO and WEU. While they point to instability indicators and seek to profile threats, they tell more or less one story: the proliferation of light and conventional weapons, combined with radical social groups in the south, is causing serious security concerns in south-western Europe.

It would, in fact, be unwise to accept the above statements uncritically. In every way, the elusive nature of small arms makes generalizations about the link between regional conflicts and small arms hazardous. Indeed, several characteristics of small arms make them an uncommonly difficult terrain to study. These characteristics include the very nature of these weapons themselves: they are easy to transport, difficult to track, and relatively simple to maintain for a long time. The large number of producers (up to 600 firms worldwide) makes traditional supply-side control mechanisms and even research difficult.[26] The black markets of such weapons, which often link them to transnational crime and the fuzzy relationship between light weapons flows and regional insecurity scenarios make the study of small arms a slightly complicated exercise. The fact that light weapons cross the dividing line between the military, the police, and civilian uses makes conclusions about them quite controversial.

In addition, there exist major conceptual disagreements among researchers studying small arms in relation to regional conflict. Some of these disagreements center on what types of light weapons should be included in the research agenda on threats and how the former deepen regional insecurity. Should it be military assault rifles, hand grenades and other portable (and high-tech) military equipment, or the new 'dirty' bombs associated with local terrorists? Classification of small arms in relation to conflict is significant in that it connects

particular small arms to particular groups and thus paves the way for sound analysis of likely threats and insecurity scenarios.

Nonetheless, in most statements about the “explosion of armament and threats” in the south, many EU analysts fail to discuss what types of arms that are, first, “out there;” and, second, they neglect to empirically discuss the link between such arms and the likely *insecurity* scenarios. While most statements about small arms as a southern threat do have some merit in profiling the new nature of possible threats and the fact that small arms can lead to insecurity, EU security analysts do not, however, point to the nature of arms and how these arms can cause the new insecurities predicted. It is difficult to imagine how one could refer to the “new war,” i.e., threats fuelled by small arms, with full certitude without mapping the nature of arms and the fluid network of arms transfers and potential insecurities.

Another point worth discussing on small arms deals with the quantity and magnitude of small arms. The number of small arms in North Africa and south-western Europe, for instance, remains unaccounted for as of today. Small Arms Survey, a Geneva-based think-tank on small arms, states in its *2001 Survey* that “The total number and global distribution of small arms remains one of the greatest enigmas in the field of international peace and security.”<sup>[27]</sup> This implicitly means that it is quite difficult to correlate small arms to illegal arms transfers and to potential insecurity scenarios in the western Mediterranean. Not only that, but this contradicts and undermines the categorical claims made about small arms and the magnitude of their threat to regional peace in the western Mediterranean.

Further, claims about arms proliferation and its relation to threat remain quite unclear, since the distribution of small arms within states themselves and among non-state actors in North Africa and the link between that and potential violence is also ambiguous and unaccounted for. Accounts of regional statistics (particularly in developing countries) concerning the transfer of small arms are sparse and far from yielding accurate analyses.<sup>[28]</sup> *Small Arms Survey* begins its 2002 report on small arms in North Africa with the following statement: “Concrete data on small arms in North Africa is hard to come by.”<sup>[29]</sup> The reason is that arms and the army in North Africa have always been linked to national security of states and information on arms has been a domain of the state. The ‘unison’ between the state and the army, and the fact that rulers in North Africa have a military background, has cloaked the issue of armament with secrecy and lack of detail, making categorical statements about small arms quite relative.

This is quite revealing, since most security monitors in Europe refer to armament and light weapons and potential threat in the south, as if they have detailed empirical data relevant to national cultures of militarism in the region. Assia Bensallah maintains that “the related detailed information [regarding arms and military expenditure] is rarely available to national experts themselves.”<sup>[30]</sup> Thus, as they stand, nonetheless, claims about military spending and small arms in particular in North Africa stem from lack of information and deep insight than

anything else. This is partly due to the lack of data on military matters, which are still considered *domaines réservés* of the state in North Africa and, most importantly, to the underlying assumptions of European security analysts. This largely hinders European analysts from pointing *directly* to particular sectors of military build-up and from linking that to regional insecurity. Bensallah further argues that “Considered as a taboo, military matters of the region [North Africa] are under-analyzed.”<sup>[31]</sup>

A further problem is that even educated guesses about the size of a government’s armed forces inventories cannot tell much about the proliferation of small arms in a country and how that could contribute to regional insecurity. How much equipment is imported within states in North Africa is unclear. Even more, there are virtually no data on non-state actors’ arms acquisitions. Peter Lock contends: “the evidence being fed into the media by interested parties and secret services is difficult to establish, which makes a daunting task to research the diffusion of small arms and the supply chains that support protracted conflicts.”<sup>[32]</sup>

That in mind, quantifying both the supply and demand sides of the small arms market and their link to threats in the western Mediterranean is broad and more complex than often assumed to be. Obviously, small arms do not proliferate by themselves. In general, the demand for small arms, for instance, is influenced not only by a state's military or paramilitary organizations, but also by groups, organized crime, and law enforcement agencies. It also involves larger numbers of manufacturers, dealers, and illicit supply mechanisms through fluid networks.

Nonetheless, the demand and supply sides of small arms remain still unclear in the western Mediterranean. Who is on the demand side in the western Mediterranean, particularly in North Africa as it is regarded as the hotbed of threats? Is it governments, radical groups, or extra-regional entities, or a combination of the above? Who is on the supply side? And how does that relate to small arms proliferation and the likely increase of regional insecurity? While reference in the European security literature is to further armament of rogue states (Libya, for instance) and radical groups (in Algeria, mostly) and the danger that poses to European security, these claims are not substantially assessed, particularly in line with the *likelihood* these actors might cause further insecurity.

The proportions of small arms distributions among government armed forces, insurgent and other non-state actors remain unclear. Although small arms proliferation is a global phenomenon, the distribution of small arms and light weapons is subject to differing regional, national, and local sets of norms and conditions that either facilitate the spread of small arms or curb their circulation. This proposition leads us to further ask how small arms are distributed within states in North Africa and the western Mediterranean at large. It is clear that even though North African societies share similar socio-economic problems, their approaches to national security are quite different, and thus their approaches to small arms as a national security issue are different from each other. This is another reason that one can not make

cross-regional generalizations about small arms and armament.

It is widely assumed by EU analysts that there is a causal relation between small arms availability and the exacerbation of the level of violence in North African conflicts. Conversely, even if we hypothetically have a rough idea about small arms distribution in the south, this does not necessarily tell us if that could lead to violence and insecurity and thus constitute a real threat to European security. Peter Lock argues that "...there is no denying that arms and their continued supply are a necessary condition for protracted war, but widespread availability of firearms does not automatically translate into violent conflict."<sup>[33]</sup> There are a number of highly "armed" societies—Australia, for instance—where small arms are not causing violence and insecurity. While one can not deny the fact that large quantities of arms make conflicts more deadly and thus increase insecurity, this assumption still lacks both empirical evidence and a framework for understanding the dynamics of civil wars in which small arms use and high lethality are most prominent. In what way does availability contribute to conflict is still understudied and throws in question assumptions about the proliferation and immediacy of threat of small arms in the western Mediterranean.

## **Conflicts and Small Arms: Characteristics of the Region**

### **Macro Indicators**

Now that I pointed out some of the conceptual problems related to small arms claims in the western Mediterranean, I move to discuss a few empirical underpinnings and problems related to the proliferation of small arms and insecurity in the western Mediterranean. It is axiomatic that the particular characteristics of a region will determine attitudes towards arms and conflict. First, the principal characteristic of the western Mediterranean is its distance from areas of intense conflict, such as the Middle East or the Balkans. Despite sharing the Mediterranean as a common seaway, the western part enjoys a relative "remoteness" from major conflicts in the Gulf and the Eastern part of the Mediterranean. Geopolitical distance has, in fact, 'tampered' *Maghreb* states' feelings towards the Palestinian cause (which is the root of Arab-Israeli conflicts), despite feelings of common Arab or Islamic culture (compared to Egypt or Syria, to name but a few states.) And thus this remoteness has, indeed, placed *Maghreb* societies more on the edge of Europe "on the outside looking in," and desperately eager to be included in the European sphere of economic prosperity.<sup>[34]</sup>

This argument could be even traced historically. Bensallah argues that "compared to the turmoil of the East Mediterranean, the Western Part is indeed a low-intensity conflict area and enjoys relative stability."<sup>[35]</sup> Historically, while the transition from colonization to self-rule was not free from bloody resistance, particularly in Algeria, North Africa has enjoyed a relative stability dotted with low intensity-violence, usually over border disputes. In fact, this regional stability—not necessarily a result of democratic governance—has indirectly been furthered by the fact that post-decolonization state-building in North Africa pushed governments more

towards “introspective” agendas, stressing socio-economic development and capitalizing more on curbing political opposition with the least amount of bloodshed. This, as a result, distanced states in the region from engaging in major regional and extra-regional armed conflicts—conflicts that have undermined, for instance, several peace initiatives between Arab states and Israel in the Middle East.

Third, while territorial and border conflicts remain the major source of inter-state conflicts in North Africa, these conflicts are not as acute as in other parts of the Middle East. For instance, unlike the Middle East where British rule and influence in the 1920’s imposed boundary systems on land, creating mini-states within a small geographic area, North African states’ territories have, more or less, been ‘accepted’ and demarcated during Ottoman rule in North Africa in late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>[36]</sup> Furthermore, the boundary conflicts are focused in particular spots (e.g. Western Sahara), which reduces the level of conflict in the whole region.<sup>[37]</sup> While this is not to deny the borders disputes between Morocco and Spain, Algeria and Tunisia, and Tunisia and Libya, and the fact that border claims have been refueled in the post-decolonization period; the scale of these conflicts remains very minimal compared to other disputes in the Middle East or elsewhere.

Fourth, tribalism and state structure are particularly interesting features to discuss in relation to small arms and potential insecurity. In theory, tribalism usually coincides with relatively weak state structures, and in Arab contexts—particularly in the Middle East—it has led to tribal violence and further armament of tribes and individuals. Unlike parts of the Middle East which today still witness acute small arms problems (the Yemen, for instance),<sup>[38]</sup> states in North Africa, whether through the use of force and national ideology, have been relatively successful in forging a social consensus among tribes (e.g. Arab/Berber) under a nationalistic umbrella. Tribalism is still socially strong in North African societies, though, but not so strong as to trigger violence and engender a proliferation of small arms and, consequently, regional insecurity. The weakness of central authority in many parts of the Balkans, for instance, has hindered control and oversight over weapons production and transfers, particularly light weapons. Combined with the lack of international control mechanisms, lax national policies also have led to a mushrooming of weapons factories, illegal pipelines, brokers and gunrunners.

Last, even though North Africa is regarded by many analysts as a troubled spot (generally with reference to violent non-state actors), small arms acquisition and transfer remain largely within the realm of state power. Since decolonization, states in the region sought to develop modern armies and acquired military arsenals from the ex-Soviet Union and US during the Cold War. Most of the acquisition process was done by states and weapons are stocked and maintained by governments. Thus, the social perception of arms acquisition (within states themselves) as being the domain of states (which happen to be authoritarian and worried about maintaining their status quo) clearly distinguishes this region from Latin America or Central Africa or even the Middle East itself, where loose state structures indirectly contribute to small arms proliferation. In a conference on small arms, Mohammed Bennouna,

Morocco's permanent representative to UN, stated: "...we in Morocco have not had to deal with the problem of the illicit trade in small arms as have some other regions. Nevertheless, we are pursuing an active program to control arms stocks. And we are certainly aware of the problem of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons to other countries."<sup>[39]</sup>

### **Micro Indicators**

Now that I have outlined the macro indicators regarding regional conflict in the western Mediterranean, I move to discuss a set of conditions relevant to small arms proliferation—points often ignored by European security analysts in discussions about small arms and regional security in the western Mediterranean. These points further contextualize small arms in the North African setting and pave the way for further discussion of particular problems concerning claims on small arms and regional insecurity. First, a particular point that distinguishes the western Mediterranean from other regions in relation to small arms transfers is cross-border movement. Unlike other regions—say the Pakistan-Afghan border where porous borders facilitate arms transfers, the movement and trafficking of small arms are largely curtailed in North Africa by bad relations between neighboring states and armies on alert along borders (e.g. Morocco/Algeria and Libya/Tunisia). Not only that, but the movement of persons and goods, which tends to be vertical, i.e., south-north, had particularly come under intense policing and monitoring from the EU well before the implementation of the Schengen agreement and the escalation of North African illegal migration (maritime borders between Morocco and Spain are a good example here). For instance, Spain, under the blame of Northern Europe, has tightened its border control against migration, both legal and illegal. The bottom line is that it is difficult to come to a definitive conclusion regarding licit/illicit arms transfers in a region characterized by tight border controls (Spain, France-Morocco, Algeria) or, at times, closed borders (e.g. Morocco/Algeria).

Moreover, historically, the region has not seen large transfer of arms, compared to other regions such as the Middle East or Central America. What Kartha characterized as "a tradition of smuggling," which usually facilitates small arms transfers, is substantially different in the western Mediterranean.<sup>[40]</sup> *Small Arms Survey*, as well as other international monitors, classify the western Mediterranean as a region not to be placed on a par with arms producing regions (such as Latin America, or south-Eastern Europe), where organized crime and fragile political regimes further contribute to small arms proliferation and political violence.<sup>[41]</sup> Obviously, one can not deny the small arms transfers that are connected to narcotics trafficking in northern Morocco (usually towards Spain and northern EU countries, particularly the Netherlands) and to the 'receding' civil conflict in Algeria. Western intelligence services are reportedly aware of these minor illicit arms transfers, particularly between Israel and Algeria's *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS)<sup>[42]</sup>, but they chose to turn a blind eye to that, since the scope and magnitude of such transfers remains minimal and reflects on the internal problems in states such as Algeria.<sup>[43]</sup> Further, organized crime in North Africa still can not be compared to the rates of transnational criminality in Eastern Europe or the Balkans in terms of procurement

of weapons and posing threats to national and regional systems. Drug trafficking, particularly in northern Morocco, has caused concerns in the EU, but that does not qualify it as a major organized crime threat that could develop serious arms procurement and thus increase regional insecurity.

Another point worth mentioning about the region is the relative absence of local small arms producers, the reverse scenario of which usually makes small arms acquisitions easy and exacerbates local conflicts. Brazil, for instance, a major arms producer in South America, has been cited by *Small Arms Survey* as playing an indirect factor in illicit arms transfers in South America, and thus contributing to regional insecurity. North African states, on the contrary, are listed in various small arms monitoring sources as “unassessed” areas or relatively low arms producers compared to other states in the Middle East, such as Israel or Egypt. Nonetheless, while the inexistence of indigenous small arms manufacturers does not, in effect, diminish the potential to regional insecurity, making a distinction between the western Mediterranean and other regional zones of conflict sets the context for further discussion about European claims of arms and rising insecurity.

### **Empirical Problems**

At the state level, the risk of proliferation of systems of conventional and unconventional weapons in the *Maghreb* often leads European strategists to over-exaggerate North Africa states’ military threats.<sup>[44]</sup> Thus, it is commonly argued that the levels of military expenditures are quite high in North Africa compared to the defense requirements of the states in the region. What is particularly ignored among European security analysts, however, is the idea that North African states are not greatly preoccupied with the military aspects that concern Europe. North Africa does not consider Europe as a direct military threat and, second, has neither the military capacity nor the political ambition to “invade” Europe. In fact, various economic development trends favor scaling down of arms in the *Maghreb*. Alaoui states that “If disarmament is indeed a future issue, scaling down military expenditure and the arms race, not only for security reasons but for the sake of development, is badly needed.”<sup>[45]</sup> Also, as regards the concept of *national security*, which is dominant in northern Africa, governments’ worries about what they see as ‘internal threats’ come well before their need to deal with what could be labeled external threats.

For the time being, Europe is not perceived as a threat--in any case not a military threat--either by governments in the *Maghreb* (except Tripoli) or by the sectors of the *élite* who have nothing against Islam, but fear an Islamic state. Rather, Europe is seen as an essential partner whose intrusive presence is not feared but rather its lack of interest. Governments and élites in North Africa who advocate secularism fear that (a) Europe will abandon its economic aid or make it conditional on sound political reform; (b) that the question of the *Maghreb*, which is now a European political and security issue, because of the presence of large immigrant communities in Europe, could be used in a demagogic and often xenophobic way for

domestic political motives; (c) that radical Islamist movements could obtain material support from Europe and the United States and threaten the status quo in the region.

While it is not impossible to purchase small arms with the existence of extra-regional suppliers, the states in North Africa (which happen to be autocratic) have a relatively tight grip on small arms acquisition. Unlike states in the Middle East like the Yemen, where small arms are widely available, there is a tight control by governments on the acquisition and transfer of small arms societies in North Africa. Since decolonization, states in North Africa adopted strong measures to control civilian access to small arms. Aware of their political oppositions, states in North Africa have maintained a tight grip on access to arms through armies and through a culture of “no tolerance for arms.” This stands in contrast to small arms threats in the Balkans. “In Albania, for example, there was massive looting of government arsenals,” says Rachel Stohl, a senior analyst specializing in conventional arms at the Center for Defense Information in Washington. “Those weapons made their way through the civilian population to other countries.”<sup>[46]</sup>

Nonetheless, in statements about small arms and insecurity, European security analysts discuss small arms and armament in the *Maghreb*, they do so as if they have detailed and reliable statistics on small arms proliferation on the region. In North Africa, particularly, the number of weapons responsible for most deaths in civil war in Algeria, for instance, remains a mystery. Whether concealed by government secrecy or by bureaucratic neglect, there are neither reliable estimates, nor official statistics. That there is a close relationship between light weapons trafficking and contemporary conflict is quite undeniable. What is not clear and what Another point worth discussing here is the interrelation between regimes in the south, small arms and instability. Conversely, one could argue that in North Africa, the sheer idea of states eager to maintain a “clean” international image consistent with economic *ouverture* policies, i.e. not to be labeled a terrorist state (not to mention the necessity to lure foreign investments)--has pushed states in North Africa to go to extra lengths to maintain an extremely strong grip on access to arms control within their national boundaries. Tunisia and Morocco are good examples here. The shooting events Morocco witnessed in Fès and Marrackesh in the summer of 1994 and the recent bombing in Casablanca of the Belgian Embassy in May 2003 shocked the national security apparatus and put the army and security apparatuses on alert.

In a way, the anticipated “explosion of violence” in the western Mediterranean, as a cause of southern instability and the proliferation of small arms, often stated in sensational terms by the media and at times even articulated with similar hyperbole by official institutions, has simply not materialized since the early 90’s when European external relations began to focus on the security of the western Mediterranean as the “near abroad.”

A relevant note initiated by Mateos in a EuroMesco study of European press coverage of security issues in the Mediterranean Basin is worth quoting here: “The insistence on linking the Arab world to terrorism contributes to the negative image of the South and is an expression

of understanding security in Eurocentric terms.”<sup>[47]</sup> There is little doubt that small arms could pose problems in the region. What is less clear, however, is the extent to which this could threaten the overall security of the whole region in a sense that warrants statements such as the “new war,” or “high instability” caused by proliferation. This is not to totally dismiss the claims made by the authors cited earlier in this paper regarding the threat posed by small arms. Instead, the distinction should be one between short-term and long-term dangers to European security. Whereas the former may not be clear at present, certainly not with respect to Cold War standards, the long-term threats posed by small arms to European security interests are still to be nuanced rather than just accepted. Peter Lock states that “without further qualification and empirical data, these alarmist statements should be handled with reservation.”<sup>[48]</sup>

## Conclusion

Limited as they are, issues of military nature will not be absent from among the many challenges facing western Mediterranean security in the next decade. In fact, issues of military security might be gaining more ground with the radicalization of Islamic groups as a consequence of US pre-emptive doctrine against terrorism. My argument has been that European analysts still discuss small arms, as if it were an autonomous issue that could increase the spill-over of threats, and thus threaten the security of Western Europe. Clearly, this perspective, while yielding interesting observations about small arms as a threat, misses a great deal by not attempting to realistically look for the links between small arms, threats, and regional insecurity scenarios. Without necessarily de-emphasizing the consequences of armament or trivializing small arms as a security threat in the western Mediterranean, the immediacy of small arms is not as clear, as it is often assumed to be. Although there seems to be violent repercussions that could stem from the proliferation of small arms and conventional weapons alike, the links between arms and the immediacy of threats are not as clear-cut as most European security analysts argue. The emphasis should be rather on a good empirical distinction between short-term and long-term military threats as they appear, rather than simply on profiling them. Also, when making projections about small arms and threats, EU security analysts have to bear in mind the type of possible conflict scenarios and whether these are of territorial, ideological, religious, ethnic, or strategic nature. Drawing distinctions between possible conflicts or threats and relating that to small arms is more likely to yield realistic predictions. It was not my attempt to relegate European worries to sheer alarmism, but any study of small arms and the violent repercussions the former could engender needs to contextualize small arms in their indigenous milieu. Put simply, research on military threats has to study societies in relation to arms and arms in relation to societies before jumping to conclusions about threats and “new wars” in regions. Our ability to perceive a danger ahead is not enough; we should be able to capitalize on empirical evidence to realistically map likely threats and thus further our understanding of the security of regions. This is more likely to inform future efforts to reduce the perverse effects of perceptions and enhance Euro-

Mediterranean relations.

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[1] Reference will be made to the Euro-Mediterranean Conference Chapters on arms control and non-proliferation

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## ENDNOTES

[1] Goffredo Canino, "the Army and Volunteer Services," *Rivista Militare* March-April 1999

[2] Small arms, sometimes referred to here as light weapons, are defined as weapons that can be handled by one or two persons, and include machine-guns, mortars, rocket-launchers, grenade-launchers, portable launchers of anti-tank missile and rocket systems including their ammunition. I disregard pistols, rifles and weapons used by individuals for private use, even though those could be considered as weapons in the military sense. These would drag the argument into national gun control and gun culture in North Africa and south-western Europe. Among the features of such arms is that unlike nuclear,

biological and chemical weapons where production is difficult to conceal, they are relatively cheap and thus affordable to many non-state actors, easy to transport, conceal and smuggle into conflict areas. For more on small arms see Allsop, Derek and Lubomír Popelínský et al. *Brassey's Essential Guide to Military Small Arms*. London: Brassey's, 1997; Benson, William. "Light Weapons Controls and Security Assistance: A Review of Current Practice." *International Alert and Saferworld*. (September 1998); *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, "Small Arms, Big Problem." Special Issue. (January-February 1999); *Small Arms Survey 2001: Profiling the Problem*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001.

[3] For further readings on how the European media and European security agencies discuss small arms in North Africa, see Mateos, Sanches Evilia. "European Perceptions of Southern Countries: Security and Defense Issues: A Reflection on the European Press" EuroMesco Papers 2003; Béchir Chourou "Security Partnership and Democratization: Perception of the Activities of Northern Security Institutions in the South" in *Euro-Mediterranean Partnership for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000

[4] The definition of small arms here follows the definition used in the 1997 *Report of the Panel of Government Experts on Small Arms* (United Nations Document A/52/298, 27 August 1997)

[5] *Small Arms Survey 2001: Profiling the Problem*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001, 251.

[6] Krause, Keith. "Multilateral Diplomacy, Norm Building, and UN Conferences" *Global Governance* 8 (2002), 251.

[7] Krause, Keith. "The Challenge of Small Arms and Light Weapons" 1998. <http://www.crinfo.org/index.cfm>

[8] Spain, Portugal, France and Italy

[9] Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania and Libya

[10] For a theoretical background on security complex theory, see Barry Buzan *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*. New York: Harvester, 1991

[11] The *Maghreb* is used interchangeably with North Africa. The Arabic origin of the word means "the place where the sun sets" and refers to the furthestmost and western part of the Arab world, the Middle East being the centre.

[12] For further readings on security in the western Mediterranean, see Joffé (1994); Chourou (1998); Biad (1993) ; Aliboni (1996)

[13] For further details on the Euro-Med Partnership, see (EC, 1995b, Barcelona Declaration, p.3)

[14] Speech by Karl Bühler. See <http://www.assembly->

[weu.org/en/presse/cp/2002/38.html](http://weu.org/en/presse/cp/2002/38.html).

[15] Aliboni, Roberto. "Security and Common Ground in the Euro-Med Partnership" 2001 Report by the EuroMesco Group on The Euro-Med Charter: Searching for Common Ground" [http://www.iai.it/sections\\_en/ricerca/MEDITERRANEO/PDF/Euromesco\\_Rep.PDF](http://www.iai.it/sections_en/ricerca/MEDITERRANEO/PDF/Euromesco_Rep.PDF)

[16] Spencer, Claire. "Rethinking or Reorienting Europe's Mediterranean Security Focus" in *Rethinking Security in Post-Cold War Europe*, Park W. & Rees, Wyn, eds. NY: Addison Wesley Longman Ltd., 1998, 138.

[17] See Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Agreement historical review [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/euromed/index.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/euromed/index.htm) "To promote regional security by acting, inter alia, in favour of nuclear, chemical and biological non-proliferation through adherence to and compliance with a combination of international and regional non-proliferation regimes, arms control and disarmament agreements..."

[18] See 2000 OSCE Document on small arms <http://www.osce.org/docs/english/fsc/2000/decisions/fscew231.htm>

[19] Willa, Pierre. "La Méditerranée comme Espace Inventé" Jean Monnet Papers in Comparative and International Politics. <http://aei.pitt.edu/archive/00000596/01/jmwp25.htm> "We can therefore twist Hobsbawm's terms. It is not the Mediterranean that created Mediterraneanism but the other way around." Pierre Villa discusses this in his piece "La Méditerranée comme Espace Inventé": "On peut donc travestir les termes d'Hobsbawm: ce n'est pas la Méditerranée qui crée le « méditerranéisme », mais c'est l'inverse, en d'autres termes, le discours crée l'objet.

[20] *The Independent*

[21] Ian Lesser, for instance, predicts that within ten years, it is possible that every southern European capital will be within range of ballistic missiles based in North Africa or the Levant. Lesser, I. *Southern Europe and the Maghreb: US Interests and Policy Perspectives*. Santa Monica: RAND, 1996

[22] "Weapons of Mass Destruction and Mediterranean Security" Conference lecture 2002 <http://www.tgarden.demon.co.uk/writings/articles/2002/020430rusi.html>

[23] <http://www.afsa.org/fsj/oct01/lesseroct01.cfm>

[24] Aliboni, Roberto. "Re-setting the Euro-Mediterranean Security Agenda," *The International Spectator*, II:6, 1998, 33-34

[25] Masala, C. "Germany's Mediterranean Challenge" *Contemporary Security Policy*

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[26] *Small Arms Survey: Profiling the Problem*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001, 8-9

[27] *Ibid.*, 2

[28] *Ibid.*, 8-9

[29] *Ibid.*, 170

[30] *Ibid.*, 153

[31] *Ibid.*, 155

[32] Lock, P. "Armed Conflicts and Small Arms: Refocussing the Research Agenda" in Rotblat, Joseph, ed *Security, Cooperation and Disarmament: the Unfinished Agenda* Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 1998, 335

[33] *Ibid.*, 334

[34] Morocco clearly expressed its intention to join the then EC when King Hassan forwarded Morocco's application to the EC in 1986. Tunisia, also, on many occasions, expressed its intention to seek further economic ties with the EC and now with EU. Algeria's civil conflict has thwarted the country's "European ambitions." Libya, on the other hand, has not been included in the Euro-Mediterranean Charter due to Qaddafi's isolationist ambitions and uncompromising stance on the Middle East conflict.

[35] Alaoui, Assia. "The Maghreb" chapter in *Regional Approaches to Disarmament: Security and Stability*, Dhanapala, Jayanthap, ed. UNIDIR. Vermont: Dartmouth Publishing Company, 1993, 143

[36] The Algerian and Moroccan border disputes were settled by the Tlemcen Treaty (15 June 1972). The borders between Tunisia and Algeria were confirmed by the Friendship Treaty of 19 March 1983. In fact, the borders between Libya and Algeria and Libya and Tunisia resulted from the French-Ottoman agreement (12 May 1912).

[37] One could also mention here the border disputes between Morocco and Spain over Ceuta and Mellila and other islands off the Mediterranean coast. Also, Libya and Tunisia have maritime delimitation disputes. Often referred to as the "North African apple of discord," the Western Sahara stalemate stood against all efforts to draw Algeria and Morocco in forging unity within the Maghreb Arab Union. Although these disputes are low-intensity, they have been hurdles in attempts at unity among North African states.

[38] Miller, Derek. "Demand, Stockpiles and Social Control: Small Arms in the Yemen"

Available at <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/OPapers/OPaper9Yemen.pdf>

[39] Bennouna, Mohammed. Statement made in a UN Conference on Small Arms

[40] Kartha, Tara “Controlling the Black and Gray Markets in Small Arms in South Asia” in *Light Weapons and civil Conflict: Controlling the Tools of Violence*, Boutwell & Klare, eds. Oxford: Rowmann & Littlefield Publishers Inc, 1999, 56

[41] *Small Arms Survey 2001: Profiling the Problem*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001, 170

[42] *Ibid.*, 171

[43] BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 2 April, 1999

[44] Alaoui, Assia. “The Maghreb” in *Regional Approaches to Disarmament: Security and Stability*, Dhanapala, Jayantha, ed, Geneve: UNIDIR Vermont: Darmouth Publishing Company 1993, 168

[45] *Ibid.*, 157

[46] <http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/1204/p02s02-usgn.html>

[47] Mateos, S. Evilia. “European Perceptions of Southern Countries: Security and Defense Issues: A Reflection on the European Press” EuroMesco Papers 2003  
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[48] Lock, P. “Armed Conflicts and Small Arms: Refocusing the Research Agenda” in Rotblat, Joseph, ed *Security, Cooperation and Disarmament: the Unfinished Agenda* Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 1998, 335