

Trends in international arms transfer 2012: Does it ring any bell?

MUSTAFA R KAMAL

STOCKHOLM International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), established in 1996, is an independent international institute dedicated for research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament. SIPRI has released a report in March 2013 on trends in international arms transfers 2012.

SIPRI researchers have been studying international arms transfers since 1968. The institute's research is currently divided into three areas: Measuring international arms transfers, transparency in international arms transfers; and controlling international arms transfers. Some interesting facts have come up in the report. The volume of international transfers of major conventional weapons has risen by 17 per cent in the period 2008–12 than in 2003–2007. The five biggest exporters in the period 2008–12 were the United States, Russia, Germany, France and China. For the first time since 1950, the UK was not among the top five suppliers in 2008–12: China, a state from outside Europe and North America displaced it to become the fifth largest exporter. Is this indicative of her rise and growing significance in the international arms trade? The international arms trade was so long a monopoly of a small group of powerful countries and entry of China for the first time rings a bell loud enough for many to reckon her economic and military might- China would definitely want other powerful nations of North America and Europe to take notice of.

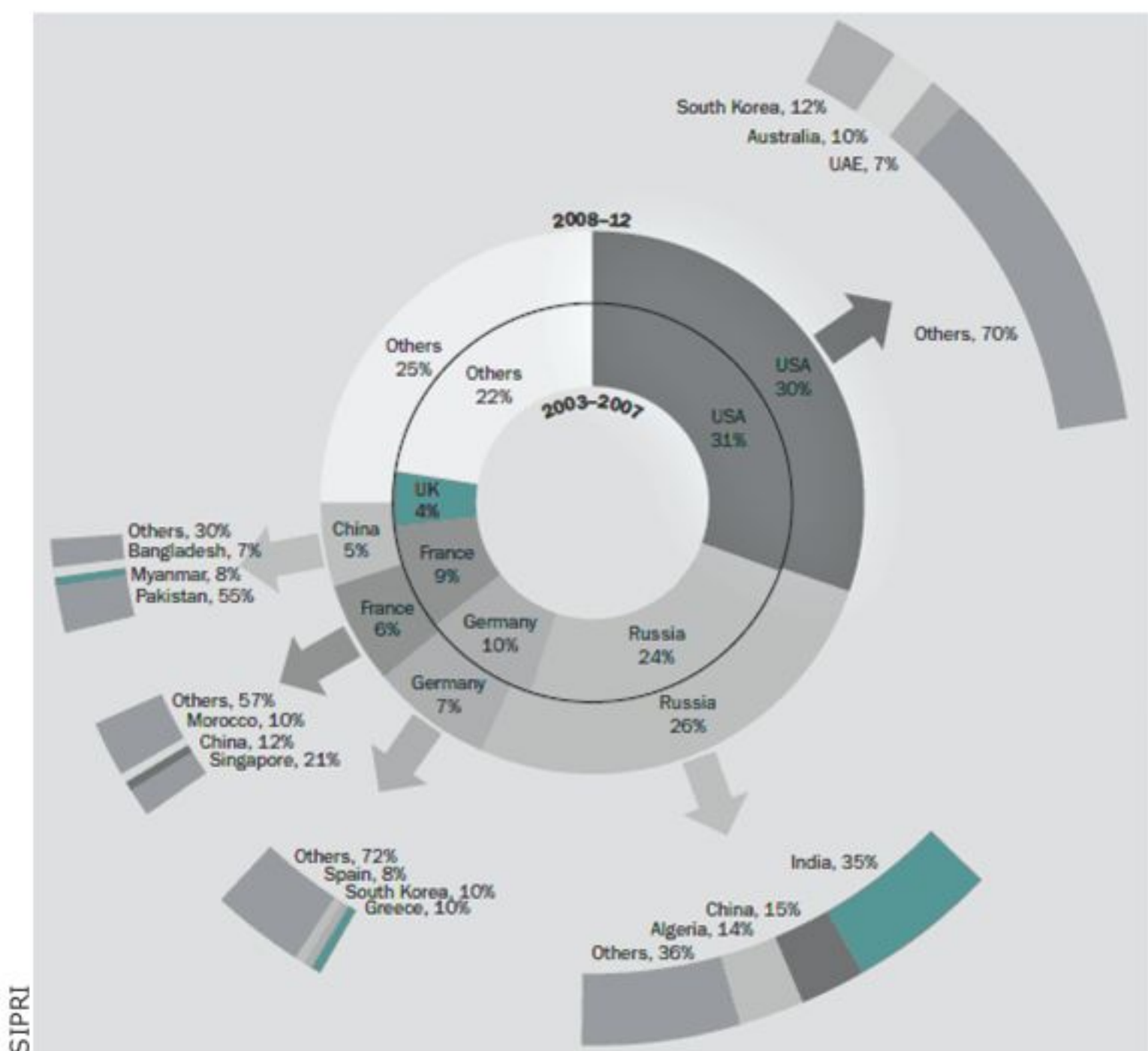
The import trend shows that the five biggest importers in 2008–12 were India, China, Pakistan, South Korea and Singapore. The flow of arms to Asia and Africa increased notably between 2008–12 and 2003–2007, while flows of arms to Europe and the Middle East decreased. The rise in flow of conventional arms to the five biggest importers is related to the tension that prevails in those countries, threat of conflict and security implications. The archival India and Pakistan is on an arms race to counter one another's military capability since the birth of these countries. South Korea is one of the largest importers of arms from the US and is facing the North's threat to her security. China is poised towards projecting its military might in the South China Sea and Indian Ocean while keeping her big neighbour India in focus. The island state Singapore has always been steadfast and focused towards

modernizing her armed forces. Being small, by default presents its own vulnerabilities, and she is no exception to this vulnerability. Among the noteworthy deliveries in 2012 were China's commissioning of its first aircraft carrier and India's receipt of an Akula nuclear-powered submarine from Russia.

Another key fact is that the top five recipients in 2008–12 were all Asian states. The main recipient region in 2008–12 was Asia and Oceania (accounting for 47 per cent of imports), followed by the Middle East (17 per cent), Europe (15 per cent), the Americas (11 per cent) and Africa (9 per cent). Again, between 2003–2007 and 2008–12, there was a notable increase in the volume of arms imports by states in Asia and Oceania (by 35 per cent), the Americas (34 per cent) and Africa (104 per cent), and a clear decrease by states in Europe (20 per cent) and the Middle East (7 per cent). Do these facts mean anything? Of course it does ring bells. Does it mean that Asia is the hotspot of the world and the most volatile region? Well, this would give rise to lot of debates. Although volume of arms import is not the only factor to draw conclusions on the issue but it definitely is one point that is connected to it. One thing is for sure that countries in Asia are upfront in spending a large sum of their annual budget into arms import irrespective of their social security needs. Probably, in some countries physical security takes centre stage over any other considerations- at least, the figures of arms imports suggest so.

Chinese maritime disputes with its neighbours in the littoral have come in increasing attention of the world ever since President Obama announced "pivot" strategy of the US in the Asia-Pacific in January 2012. Growing US attention and China's interest in the littoral has brought Asia-Pacific into the centre of world affairs in the 21st Century. US President Barack Obama's "rebalance" strategy entails increasing US

naval assets from 50 to 60 per cent by 2020 in Asia-Pacific region. The point is whether this "rebalance" is aimed at containing China's growing economic and military might or strengthening the American presence in the region. However, Beijing views Washington's rebalance as an attempt to curb Chinese influence across the region and strengthen other countries to counter-balance Chinese dominance. Thus we see a growing US interest in Indian Ocean and Asia Pacific, stationing of US troops in Australia, Thailand, the Philippines, Guam and Singapore, joint Indo-US naval exercises, increasing US interest in Myanmar and so on. Definitely, US efforts to project her influence in Indian Ocean and Asia Pacific is in conflict with Chinese interests in this region. Evidently, import of arms is greater in regions where either tension is higher or conflict is on the rise. Although in 2003-2007, China was the largest importer of major weapons, in 2008-2012, her position slid down to second place and imports fell by 47%. On the other hand, the greatest rise of weapons import in Africa by 104% during the period 2008-2012, is in concert with the conflicts prevailing in many countries of this region in one form or the other. The database of SIPRI provides answers



to certain interesting questions relating to changes in the trends in the volume of transfers of major conventional weapons: Who are the main suppliers and recipients of major conventional weapons? How have the relationships between different suppliers and recipients changed over time? Where do countries in conflict get their weapons? How do states implement their export control regulations? Where are potentially destabilizing build-ups of weapons occurring today? The rise and fall of imports and exports of weapons by different countries during a particular period relate to the questions mentioned above. Interesting to note that imports by North African countries increased by 350 per cent in 2008-2012.

Amongst the individual countries the volume of arms imports increased by a staggering 1460 per cent for Morocco while for Algeria it is 277 per cent. Morocco rose from being 69th to 12th largest recipient of arms while Algeria from 22nd to 6th between 2003-2007 and 2008-2012.

Figure: The five largest exporters of major conventional weapons, 2003–2007 and 2008–12, and their main recipient states, 2008–12 Source: SIPRI Fact Sheet March 2013

Analysis of the database reveals certain other interesting facts and figures. The USA and Russia remained by far the largest exporters of arms. China's presence in the arena of arms export is substantial that is significant of her economic and military might in the world stage. China's exports of conventional weapons rose to 162 per cent between 2003-2007 and 2008-2012 and her share of the volume of international arms export increased from 2 to 5 per cent. Pakistan, a close ally of China, alone received 55 per cent of Chinese arms exports and it is likely to remain as the largest recipient of her exports in coming years as well. Iraq and Afghanistan have become significant recipients of US major weapons in connection with the withdrawal of US combat forces and the handover of opera-

tions to local forces. In 2008–2012, Iraq and Afghanistan each received 4 per cent of US exports. Deliveries included large numbers of light armoured vehicles for internal security operations. However, Iraq also received tanks and ordered 36 F-16 combat aircraft. Aircraft made up 62 per cent of US arms deliveries during 2008-2012 while it is 46 per cent for Russian exports during that period.

India is the largest democracy in the world and at the same time, it was the largest importer of conventional weapons in 2008-2012, accounting for 12 per cent of global total of imports. India's imports were 109 per cent higher than that of China, the second biggest importer. Does it imply that India is on an arms race with both Pakistan and China? India's staggering increase in arms imports is significant in her effort to project and reiterate her position as a regional power and at the same time, to strengthen her military power to counterbalance the growing military might of China and remain at a higher platform against Pakistan. How is South Asia affected as a result of this international arms transfer? Well, Out of the five leading importers two countries, India and Pakistan are located in South Asia and remaining three are in the Asia. Indian sub-continent is a one of the most volatile regions in the entire world and large amount of arms import by India and Pakistan only adds fuel to the existing tension that prevails here. China is the largest country in the world and is the second largest importer of arms. The equation of China in the Asia is simple. In order to balance her competing relationship with India, she finds Pakistan as a closer ally to her than India. Thus Pakistan is the largest importer of weapons from China. The significance for Bangladesh is simple and straight being in the proximity of India and Pakistan she is definitely going to feel the heat of the arms race. Interesting to note that the powerful nations continue to export arms to different countries and earn billions of dollars from this exclusive trade. On the other hand, third world and developing nations continue to be the major clients of these expensive toys despite many other pressing needs of the people of most of these states. Is it an irony that the world would continue to witness and wonder? The question is whether these facts do ring any bell for them or not?

The writer is a security and defence Analyst.

The circus of democracy

F.S. AJIAZUDDIN

POLITICIANS invented democracy as a joke, and electorates have taken it seriously. One has only to follow the latest election campaign in Pakistan to be reminded that in politics, as in the theatre, comedy like tragedy is a very serious business.

Aldous Huxley once observed that while we look at comedy, in tragedy, we participate. For the past six weeks we as a nation have watched. On May 11, we will have an opportunity to participate.

Six weeks ago, at the outset of their campaigns, almost all the parties complained that the time available to them for electioneering was too short. Now, with polling day only two days away, already warring politicians have begun showing signs of exhaustion. Tired of exchanging blows, they have stooped to trading insults, more often than not aimed below the belt. Their flaccid tongues and weary arms flail aimlessly at targets no longer within reach.

No rules (the tut-tuts of the Election Commission notwithstanding) have governed this gladiatorial contest. It has been a fight to the finish, except that in this arena, the end will not be death in the sawdust or the liberty never to fight again. It will be the beginning of a different sort of servitude, a new five-year parliamentary term.

During this electoral campaign, leaders from all the major parties (with the exception of the PPP and the MQM) have crisscrossed constituencies across the country. They came. They saw. More importantly, they were seen. But only on polling day will they know whether or not they have conquered.

Modern electioneering has undergone a transformation. There is no room nowadays for gifted speechwriters like Ted Sorenson who articulated John F. Kennedy's thoughts with such memorable brilliance. There is no place for gifted orators such as Harold Wilson or our own Quaid-i-Azam M.A. Jinnah. Technology has come between a candidate and his audience.

In an earlier age, daily newspapers brought politics to the breakfast table. Today's television transmissions serve it like

a 24-hour buffet, in which dishes are constantly refilled. They are not allowed to go cold or become stale. The servings may be bland, at times indigestible. They may be tasteless. What matters is only that they should be fresh.

Speeches in the field pass through a number of filtering screens — bullet-proof ones at public rallies, the monitors of news editors who mincemeat a continuous flow of harangues into sausage-sized sound-bites, and finally the television screen where the voter can, at the touch of a fingertip, decide which candidate to switch on or off.

In a sense, the electoral campaign for the next National Assembly 2013 began five years

ago, in 2008, when the proceedings of the last Assembly were televised live. Over those five years, the public has been a spectator of the Pakistani equivalent of the Roman Circus Maximus. "When the politicians complain that TV turns their proceedings into a circus," Ed Murrow (the doyen of American broadcasters) had once written, "it should be made plain that the circus was already there, and that TV has merely demonstrated that not all the performers were well-trained."



Will the next batch of MNAs be better trained than their predecessors? Will they perform better? Will they be younger and therefore more proactive? It would need a seer with 40:40 vision to predict what will be the composition of the next National Assembly, or who will form the next national government. What is clear, though, is that every party, not

just the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf, regardless of its ideology, will need to prepare for a change within itself, to make space for greener shoots.

Over the next five years, our television channels will continue to play a role as crucial as they have during the past six weeks. Until now, they have been projecting personalities and highlighting policies. Their future responsibility will be that of a watchdog with the added instincts of a bloodhound — to reveal, to expose, and whenever necessary, to help apprehend those elected representatives who fall short of national expectations. It is a heady responsibility, though, and not one to be taken casually.

"It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better," the former US president Theodore Roosevelt said in a speech at the Sorbonne in 1910. "The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming, but who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself for a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat."

At this time in our political chronology, as we stumble awkwardly towards democratic maturity, we, the passive voters, "those cold and timid souls" who know neither personal victory nor defeat, should salute those thousands of candidates who will not be elected, those who will "fail while daring greatly". In that defeat, they too will have served our national interest.

The writer is an internationally recognised Art-Historian and Author of more than a dozen books.

©Dawn. All rights preserved. Reprinted by arrangement with ANN.

A tsunami, but what sort?

CAROLYN HONG

MALAYSIAN Prime Minister Najib Razak blamed the losses suffered by his ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) on a "Chinese tsunami".

Many Malaysians think their national leader has got it wrong. The situation, they say, is far more nuanced because the opposition also won more Malay seats in addition to Chinese-majority ones.

In fact, if there is a pattern, it is that the opposition won mostly in urban areas, populated by both Chinese and Malay voters.

"There is definitely a racial element but it's also important to recognise the urban-rural divide," said political columnist Karim Raslan.

Urban voters tend to focus on big issues such as abuse of power and transparency in public life. In rural areas, the focus tends to be more on the relationship between the politician and voter.

"It's a much more paternalistic role," Karim said.

This is why the Pakatan Rakyat (PR) thrives in urban areas, while the BN prospers in the rural due to its extensive grassroots network.

"It was a 'Malaysian tsunami', and not a 'Chinese tsunami'," said Democratic Action Party (DAP) veteran Lim Kit Siang, who scored one of the most dramatic victories in this general election when he decisively won Gelang Patah in Johor, a constituency with 34 per cent Malay voters.

That suggests Malays voted for Lim too, even against his popular rival, outgoing Johor Menteri Besar Abdul Ghani Othman.

No doubt the Chinese-based DAP did the best among the three component parties in the PR coalition. The party won 38 of 51 seats it contested.

Najib said the BN was hurt by Chinese voters going over to the opposition and warned that such polaris-

ation of votes could cause tensions. "What is important is that we reject extremism and racism," he said, soon after the BN obtained a simple majority.

But political analysts say PR made inroads not only with the Chinese ground but also into Malay areas, particularly urban seats.

Aside from Gelang Patah, it also won big - with a margin of more than 40,000 votes - in Serdang, a seat in Selangor where 40 per cent of voters are Malay.

Likewise, in Puchong, Selangor, with a similar Malay base, its victory margin was more than 30,000 votes. The high scores could not have been attained without significant Malay support.

The seats of Kulai and Bakri in Johor, and Klang in Selangor, also had more than one-third Malays, but were won by the DAP with respectable margins of more than 5,000 votes.

DAP's Malay-based partners - Parti Keadilan Rakyat and Parti Islam SeMalaysia - also held their ground in Malay-majority seats in Terengganu, Selangor, Kedah and Kelantan, although they did not do as well as DAP.

As former New Straits Times editor Kadir Jasin asked in a blog: "Is it not possible that this was not a 'Chinese tsunami' or racial chauvinism, but a Malaysian tsunami based on new realities and aspirations of the young?"

It is a view with which political analyst Ibrahim Suffian of the Merdeka Centre concurs. "We are probably seeing the emergence of class-based politics, with the urban and middle class responding to the message of the opposition," he said. "But the opposition needs to do more to address latent socio-economic concerns of the Malay community."

This, he said, was the missing element in the PR's campaign.

The writer is a Journalist.

© The Straits Times. All rights reserved. Reprinted by arrangement with ANN.