Arming genocide

A CLOSER LOOK

TASNEEM TAYEB

ARMS trade is big business, governed by its own set of conventions. These transactions are triggered by conflicts and peacekeeping; for violence and security—depending on who the buyer is. And global arms sale has reached alarming levels in recent years—highest since the end of the Cold War.

This multibillion-dollar industry rode high on the back of continued conflicts in the Middle East, Central and South America, and Asia, in recent years, with the total value of the global arms trade reaching more than USD 95 billion in 2017 (ISPRI).

And although 105 states have ratified the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), a multilateral treaty that regulates the global trade in conventional arms, some of the signatories are not complying with it. Case in point: arms sale to Myanmar during the Rohingya genocide.

The *Anadolu Agency* reported that a UN fact-finding report, earlier this year, stated that 14 companies from China, North Korea, India, Israel, the Philippines, Russia and Ukraine have supplied fighter jets, armoured fighting vehicles, warships, missiles and missile launchers to Myanmar since 2016.

The UN report found that, "The public record made it clear that the Tatmadaw [Myanmar's military] used many of the types of arms and related equipment that these entities were providing, to commit gross violations of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law."

And while Israel was among the seven suppliers, it came under focus on the UN report because, to quote the report: "Israel, in particular, allowed the transfer of arms covered by the ATT (Arms Trade Treaty) at a time when it had knowledge, or ought to have had knowledge, that they would be used in the commission of serious crimes under international law."

An AR-15 style rifle displayed at an arms expo.

PHOTO: **REUTERS/JOSHUA LOTT/FILES**

Until an Israeli court order prohibited further arms sales to Myanmar, Israel, according to human rights groups, had sold to Myanmar over 100 tanks, weapons and boats used to police the country's border.

According to a report by *Times of Israel*, Israel allowed the sale of arms to Myanmar well into the fall of 2017, long after other countries had banned such arms sales by its firms to the country.

And despite the ban on arms sale to Myanmar, relations between the two countries remains warm, so warm that Myanmar military high-ups had been seen touring the Israel Defence and Homeland Security Expo in Tel Aviv in June this year; they were keenly examining the latest military technology innovations of Israel.

Apart from directly engaging in arms deals with Myanmar, around 60 foreign companies have ties with businesses controlled by Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited and Myanmar Economic Corporation—two military-dominated conglomerates in Myanmar, thus, aiding in their growth. As a result, the UN fact-finding mission urged imposing targeted financial sanctions on companies linked with Myanmar's military and suggested that foreign companies doing business with the Tatmadaw-controlled corporations could be complicit in international crimes.

According to Doctors Without Borders (MSF), at least 9,000 Rohingya had been killed in Rakhine between August 25-September 24 in 2017. Among the killed, 730 were children below the age of 5. According to a global humanitarian group report, 71.7 percent, or 6,700 Rohingya, were killed through violence—some perhaps with the same weapons Myanmar had procured from the seven nations. This may explain why India or China, two major regional powers with strategic influence over Myanmar, are not quite as vociferous as they could be in their efforts to call for an end to the persecution of the Rohingya in Rakhine.

Arms sale is a lucrative business. And although sale of arms is not easy to justify, it is essential that it is regulated in a responsible manner in order to avoid unnecessary human suffering. Uppsala Conflict Data Program statistics shows that since 1989, 2,436,351 people have died in armed conflicts, with over 77,320 in 2018 alone. In 2017, in a drastic rise in human deaths caused by violence, nearly 589,000 lives succumbed to it.

These figures are as alarming as they are heart wrenching—but they do not account for the more intangible: the human suffering these arms cause.

More than 723,000 Rohingya had to flee the genocide in Myanmar and seek shelter in Bangladesh, which is currently hosting more than 1.1 million Rohingya refugees, thanks to the many phases of violence the Tatmadaw has unleashed on the helpless minority group over the decades.

And while it is easier to tally the number of the dead, or the ones who have had to flee their homeland to escape violent persecution, the question remains: how can one quantify the daily sufferings of the people affected by violence during conflicts—conflicts that are reinforced, complemented and often escalated by arms sale, especially to irresponsible buyers?

With world powers counting their profits through arms sales, or simply not bothering themselves about issues—death and displacement due to violence—that have become recurring realities in this conflict-infested world, it is the fate of nearly two million Rohingyas—some in Bangladesh, some still trapped in Myanmar—that is at stake in our very own backyard. In the equation of power and money, human suffering is perhaps of no importance.

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Popular protest: How effective is it?

JAMES M DORSEY

IF there is one theme, beyond corruption and a host of economic and social grievances, that have driven protests—large and small, local, sectoral and national—across the globe, it has been a call for dignity.

Reflecting a global breakdown in confidence in political systems and leadership, the quest for dignity and social justice links protests in Middle Eastern and North African countries like Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, Algeria and Sudan to demonstrations in nations on multiple continents ranging from Chile, Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela and Haiti to France, Zimbabwe, Indonesia, Pakistan and Hong Kong.

The global protests amount to the latest phase of an era of defiance and dissent that erupted in 2011 and unfolded most dramatically in the Middle East and North Africa with the toppling of the autocratic leaders of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen.

Of the four Arab nations, only Tunisia has produced a relatively successful transition from autocracy to a more democratic form of government.

Regional and domestic counterrevolutionary forces staged a military coup in 2013 to remove Egypt's first and only democratically elected president from office, installing one of the country's most brutal and repressive regime in its post-independence history.

Libya and Yemen are wracked by civil wars, fuelled by foreign intervention. Syria has been devastated by an almost nine-year long civil war between forces supported by outside forces that were determined at whatever cost to decide the fate of the country's own popular revolt.

Like elsewhere in the region, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan used the 2013 Gezi Park protests, the largest anti-government demonstrations in the decade of his party's rule, as well as a failed military coup in 2016, to reverse Turkish strides towards democracy and political pluralism.

The Middle East and North Africa's retreat into more repressive authoritarianism and autocracy coupled with crackdowns of various sorts in Russia, China, Hong Kong, and Kazakhstan, to name just a few examples, has prompted analysts to wonder whether mass protest remains an effective way of achieving political change.

"Only 20 years ago, 70 percent of protests demanding systemic political change got it—a figure that had been growing steadily since the 1950s. In the mid-2000s, that trend suddenly reversed. Worldwide, protesters' success rate has since plummeted to only 30 percent," concluded *New York Times* journalists Max Fisher and Amanda Taub in a column exploring the roots of the current wave of discontent.

Mr Fisher and Ms Taub base their conclusion on a study by political scientist Erica Chenoweth that suggests that illiberals, authoritarians and autocrats have become more adept at thwarting protest using what she terms "smart repression."

Yet, "smart repression" that involves in Ms Chenoweth's definitions efforts to ensure the loyalty of elites; greater brutality and violence by security and paramilitary proxies; enhanced censorship and criminalisation of dissent; and depicting revolts as foreign-inspired conspiracies and forms of terrorism is at best an upgraded version of standard authoritarian and autocratic responses.

It's hard to describe what is smart or more sophisticated about the repression involved in the military coup in Egypt and its immediate aftermath in which more than 1,000 people were killed; the arbitrary detentions of prominent businessmen, members of the ruling family, religious figures and activists in what amounted to a power grab by Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman; the alleged mass detention of an estimated one million Turkic Muslims in re-education camps in China's troubled, north-western province of Xinjiang; or the arrests of tens of thousands in countries like Turkey and Egypt.

What may provide a better explanation of the reduced effectiveness of protest may be the fact that for the first time since World War II, the number of countries moving toward authoritarianism exceeds the number moving toward democracy as a result of what political scientists Anna Luehrmann and Staffan Lindberg have dubbed "a third wave of autocratisation."

Demonstrators wave flags in protest against dire economic conditions in southern Lebanese city of Sidon on October 18.

PHOTO: **AFP**

Underlying that wave is the rise of a critical mass of world leaders that share a belief in illiberal, authoritarian and autocratic principles of governance and disregard human and minority rights in favour of a supremacist endorsement of the rights of an ethnic or religious group.

The rise of those leaders is in many ways the flip side of the protests. They often are political outsiders, men who may or may not be part of the elite like Donald J Trump in the United States, Victor Orban in Hungary, Narendra Modi in India, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil and Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines but project themselves as forces of change that will tackle the elites' grip on power.

Aspects of their civilisationalism and reactionary nationalism have been empowered and is supported to varying degrees by often opposed political forces that include far-right, anti-migrant and supremacist ethnic and religious groups as well as popular leftists, including some of the Democratic Party presidential candidates in the United States.

The result is a potential vicious circle in which civilisational attitudes, increasingly restricted democratic rights and greater repression marginalise ever more societal groups including significant segments of the middle class as well as minorities, who like in the case of Hong Kong, Iraq, Sudan or the Rohingya, see their resilience hardened by perceptions of having nothing more to lose. Violence on all sides of the divide increases with the risk of militants having a greater appeal.

The conclusions of Ms Chenoweth, Ms Luehrmann and Mr Lindberg would bear that out. If protest is people's only peaceful alternative in response to unresponsive governments and political forces, undermining the protests' effectiveness narrows the choices to affect change.

From that perspective, the scholars' conclusions would amount to a contemporary adaptation of writer George Orwell's "1944" assertion that "all revolutions are failures, but they are not all the same failure."

However, that may be prematurely jumping to conclusions despite what the scholars' project trends.

To be sure, the jury is still out on whether the revolts in Tunisia and Sudan will produce enduring political change.

But eight years on from the Arab revolts in 2011, protesters determined to secure recognition and their place in society, underline lessons learnt by no longer declaring victory once a leader is forced to make concessions or resign as in Algeria and Sudan and by transcending easily exploitable sectarian ethnic and religious divides like in Iraq and Lebanon, a mosaic of 18 carefully balanced sectarian groups.

Said Middle East scholar Hanin Ghaddar: "For the first time in a long time, Lebanese have realised that the enemy is within—it is their own government and political leaders—not an outside occupier or regional influencer… Political leaders have been unable to control the course of the protests, which are taking place across all sects and across all regions… What brought them together is an ongoing economic crisis that has hurt people from all sects and regions."

The realisation that street power needs to be sustained until the modalities of transition are in place is key to enhancing the chances of protest retaining its effectiveness.

The future of protest as an effective tool depends similarly on perceptions of a common interest that transcends sect, ethnicity and class becoming part of the fabric of society.

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ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY

November 7, 2000
Disputed US presidential election

On this day in 2000, the US presidential election ended in a statistical tie between Democrat Al Gore and Republican George W Bush, only to be settled on December 12 by the US Supreme Court after a bitter legal dispute.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS
1 Dance move
5 Quite full
10 Directs the rowers
12 Came up
13 Left, on a boat
14 Around
15 Ran into
16 "A mouse!"
18 Mess up
19 Expensive
21 Aphrodite's son
22 Field guardian
24 Attack
25 Paunch, slangily
29 Course numbers
30 Prepares veggies
32 "That's it!"
33 LAX guess
34 Particle
35 Check writer
37 Butler's portrayer
39 Sporting site
30 "Dallas" mom
41 Hospital sections
42 Bound

DOWN
1 Rouge
2 Barflies
3 Enticingly different
4 For each
5 Pillage
6 "Exodus" hero
7 Man with a cape
8 Third-party account
9 Precious ones
11 Helmsman, e.g.
17 It may start with "E"
20 Hacienda homes
21 Bert's buddy
23 Summer house
25 African expanse
26 Grace, for one
27 Masses
28 Clarke of "Game of Thrones"
29 Purple-flowered tree
31 Expensive
33 Important times
36 Stop
38 Utterly

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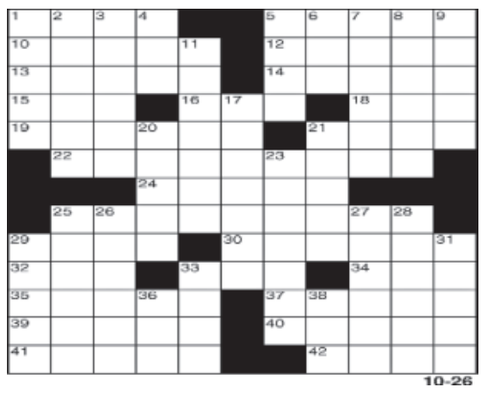

10-26

YESTERDAY'S **ANSWERS**

P	A	S	T	A		S	T	I	R	S
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L	A	N	C	E		N	O	B	E	L
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BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

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