

Defence Corruption risks in Middle East and North Africa critically high

Transparency International warns of ongoing corruption risks contributing to instability

All states in the Middle East and North Africa are at high risk of corruption posing a continuing threat to security and stability in the region according to a new Government Defence Index from Transparency International.

Sixteen of the seventeen states assessed in the index receive either E or F grades, representing either a “very high” or “critical” risk of defence corruption. Only Tunisia performs better, although is still classed as “high risk”.

Katherine Dixon, Programme Director Transparency International Defence and Security, said:

“This is one of the most unstable and conflict riven regions in the world. Over a quarter of the world’s most secretive defence spending is in the Middle East. Corruption puts international security at risk, as money and weapons can be diverted to fuel conflict.”

“It’s notable that the only country to have made some improvement, albeit small, is Tunisia where the hopes of the Arab Spring have not been completely extinguished.

“Without more transparency and accountability corruption risks in the region will continue unchecked. There is a strong case for exporting countries to have increased conditions on arms sales where there are insufficient safeguards against corruption.”

The region has some of the most rapidly growing defence budgets in the world, with a spend of \$135bn, and where up to a third of all government spending can be on defence.

There is well-documented evidence of weapons from a wide range of countries reaching terrorist groups such as ISIS, Houthi and ISIL.

Those at critical risk are Kuwait, Morocco, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Bahrain, Oman, Egypt, Qatar, Algeria, and Yemen as there is virtually no accountability or transparency of defence and security establishments. Across the region only Jordan and Tunisia publish information on defence and security budgets, though with insufficient detail for any meaningful scrutiny.

However, all countries suffer from lack of oversight, excessive secrecy, and widespread nepotism with networks based on family and business ties in the procurement of defence contracts.

High-ranking Princes in Saudi Arabia preside over powerful defence agencies and use those assets to distribute patronage to their client base. In Iraq individuals can buy military positions with a Divisional Commander’s job reportedly being sold for \$2m. In Yemen and Oman all senior positions within the intelligence services are filled on the basis of political patronage and family ties.

The lack of accountability has undermined the development of strategic defence procurement policies further threatening security in the region. Despite the US alone providing \$24bn for training and

weapons to Iraq, an Iraqi Army General stated that the inability to halt the advance of Islamic state was because it lacked advanced airpower and weapons.

Many improper sales and transfers have happened well away from evidently fragile environments, under a thin veil of legitimacy. Neither Russia nor Iran have disclosed any of the financial details regarding the S-300 missile defence system deal signed in August this year, estimated to be worth \$800 million. In 2013 Saudi Arabia purchased a large supply of weapons from Croatia on behalf of the anti-government rebels in Syria, and in 2014 financed the purchase of \$2 billion in Russian arms on behalf of Egypt's military-backed government.

Results

Country	Risk banding
Tunisia	D <i>High risk</i>
Jordan	E <i>Very high risk</i>
Lebanon	E
UAE	E
Iran	E
Saudi Arabia	E
Kuwait	F <i>Critical risk</i>
Morocco	F
Iraq	F
Libya	F
Bahrain	F
Oman	F
Syria	F
Algeria	F
Egypt	F
Qatar	F
Yemen	F

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Notes to editors:

The Government Defence Anti-Corruption Index (GI) assesses the existence and effectiveness of institutional and informal controls to manage the risk of corruption in defence and security institutions and of their enforcement. Transparency International's team of experts draws together evidence from a wide variety of sources and interviewees across 77 indicators to provide the government with a detailed assessment of the integrity of their defence institutions.

The 2015 Middle East and North Africa report publishes the country risk rankings derived from this data and examines the trends across the region. Forthcoming reports based on the 2015 index will be released on Africa, Asia-Pacific, NATO, the G20, and fragile states.