

Sales of Armored Cars Are Booming in the Middle East

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Following decades of conflicts and wars, rich people from the Middle East are reportedly buying more armored cars than ever.

According to a report from *Al Arabiya English*, the armored car industry is booming in the region plagued by political crises, civil wars and terrorist attacks. U.S.-based Texas Armoring Corporation has seen sales in the Middle East grow by 15 percent annually over the past three years.

"Once you start armoring cars for a family, everyone in that family is going to start riding in an armored vehicle within the next couple of years, that's the trend we've seen," company vice president Jason Forston told the news site.

The customer base consists of executives and business owners, who are afraid of being kidnapped and targeted for their wealth. "If you have that kind of money, it's kind of silly not to spend a little bit of it on the protection of your family and your life. If your net worth is \$10 million, what's 200,000 dollars on an armored car?" Forston added.

Armored car companies are doing great in countries like Syria, Libya, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan and Yemen, where the market is estimated at about 3,000 cars a year, according to Patrick Aouad, CEO of Lebanon-based Yaka Group. He says sales to private individuals make up 10 percent of Yaka Group's business, but in Syria, the market for private individuals is 50 to 70 percent, with most of them being Lebanese. However, the market is expected to boom should the U.S. launch air strikes (**Ed. Note: the U.S. and Russia reached a preliminary deal this weekend to destroy Syria's chemical weapons**).

"If there's a strike on Syria, and Syria becomes like Iraq, you have to count around 1,000 to 1,500 sales of armored cars in Syria," Aouad said. That's because sales in post-conflict countries like Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan are some of the strongest in the region.

However, armored cars can't be sold to anyone, with the U.S. government monitoring exports to the region. "If we get any red flags at all that the vehicle could be used for nefarious purposes, or fall into the hands of the wrong person, we won't sell to him. We don't sell cars to bad guys – that's our general rule," Forston said.

By Dan Mihalascu