

5. International arms transfers

Overview

The volume of international transfers of major conventional weapons grew by 17 per cent between 2003–2007 and 2008–12. The five largest suppliers in 2008–12—the United States, Russia, Germany, France and China—accounted for 75 per cent of the volume of exports. This is the first time since the end of the cold war that China has ranked among the five largest arms exporters, which had consisted solely of the USA and European states. China may represent the vanguard of an increase in the significance of Asian suppliers in the international arms trade, as South Korea is an emerging arms supplier and Japan and Singapore have potential to become major suppliers. Other significant changes in 2008–12 include the absence from the top five suppliers of the United Kingdom for the first five-year period since 1950; the departure of the Netherlands from the 10 largest suppliers; and the ranking of Ukraine as the ninth largest supplier (see section I in this chapter).

One of the consequences of the impact of the financial crisis in the USA and Europe has been the additional pressure to seek new export markets. This has led the USA and European states to streamline bureaucratic procedures and to be more willing to engage in licensed production, technology transfer and cooperative production arrangements.

The flow of arms to Asia, Africa and the Americas increased between 2003–2007 and 2008–12, with notable decreases for Europe and the Middle East. States in Asia and Oceania received 43 per cent of all imports of major conventional weapons in 2008–12. The five largest recipients of major conventional weapons—India, China, Pakistan, South Korea and Singapore—were all located in Asia and Oceania. Combined, they accounted for 32 per cent of all arms imports. A notable trend among the major recipients was the acquisition of systems that make them capable of military power projection. Among the noteworthy deliveries in 2012 were China's commissioning of its first aircraft carrier and India's receipt of a nuclear-powered submarine from Russia.

There has been a dramatic decline in arms imports by states in Western and Central Europe in recent years, as a result of declining military spending and rising economic uncertainty (see section II). These factors have also resulted in delays and cancellations in acquisitions from abroad as well as attempts to favour domestic arms producers when making procurement decisions. The most notable declines in the volume of arms imports between 2003–2007 and 2008–12 occurred in Greece, where imports fell by 61 per cent, and Italy, where imports fell by 55 per cent. Procurement budget cuts may hamper

efforts to increase the competitiveness of the European arms market and promote the joint development and acquisitions of weapon systems.

As the conflict in Syria intensified in 2012, the issue of supplying arms to the parties to the conflict—the Syrian Government and anti-government forces—remained a critical issue (see section III). In the five-year period prior to the outbreak of the conflict (2006–10), the Syrian Government received arms from Russia (48 per cent of imports), Iran (21 per cent), Belarus (20 per cent), North Korea (9 per cent) and China (2 per cent). It appears that the anti-government forces relied primarily on equipment captured from Syrian Government forces; they also reportedly received small arms, light weapons and ammunition supplied via black markets in Iraq and Lebanon. Despite repeated requests for arms and military equipment, European and US governments are reported to have supplied only ‘non-lethal equipment’ to anti-government forces. However, arms shipments have been seized that indicate that the Arab states of the Gulf might have been the origin for some of the anti-government forces’ arsenal.

Overall, 2012 was a particularly disappointing year for transparency in international arms transfers (section IV). The number of states reporting their arms imports and exports to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA) decreased to an all time low of 52 in 2012, down from 86 in 2011. In recent years the 10 largest suppliers of conventional arms, as recorded by SIPRI, have reported to UNROCA, but in 2012 only 7 of the largest exporters for 2008–12 reported: Israel, Italy and Spain did not report. Four of the 10 largest importers did not report during 2012, most notably India and Pakistan, which have been regular reporters. No reports were submitted by states in the Middle East, with no report for the first time since 2002 for Lebanon.

While SIPRI data on international arms transfers does not represent their financial value, a number of states also publish figures on the financial value of their arms exports (see section V). Based on national data, SIPRI estimates that the total value of the global arms trade in 2011 was at least \$43 billion.

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