

15. International arms transfers

Overview

The volume of international transfers of major weapons grew by 14 per cent between 2006–10 and 2011–15 (see section I). The five largest suppliers in 2011–15—the United States, Russia, China, France and Germany—accounted for 74 per cent of the volume of exports.

Since 1950 the USA and Russia (or the Soviet Union before 1992) have consistently been by far the largest suppliers. They, together with Western European suppliers, have historically dominated the top 10 list of suppliers, and there are no signs that there will be any major changes in the near future. In fact, this group increased its share of the global total between 2006–10 and 2011–15. This group has now been joined by China, which has firmly established itself as one of the world's largest exporters of major weapons.

At the regional level, the flow of arms to the Middle East grew by 61 per cent between 2006–10 and 2011–15. The flow of arms to Asia and Oceania and Africa also rose, with regional increases of 26 and 19 per cent between 2006–10 and 2011–15 respectively. By contrast, the flow of arms to Europe decreased notably (by 41 per cent).

States in Asia and Oceania received 48 per cent of all imports of major weapons in 2011–15. Of the five largest recipients of major weapons, three were located in Asia and Oceania: India, China and Australia.

Tension and conflicts were ongoing in large parts of the world in 2015, and these often had direct links to arms acquisitions from abroad. Section II of this chapter focuses on arms acquisitions in the Middle East and North Africa, two regions that have experienced significant growth in imports in the past five years. It also examines how arms imported by states in the Middle East and North Africa have been used in 2015 in the conflict in Yemen. This use has led to discussion as to the morality and even legality of exporting arms to states in the Middle East and North Africa.

Following the trend set over the past few years, 2015 proved to be another disappointing year for transparency in arms transfers (see section III). The number of states reporting their arms imports and exports to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA) fell again in 2015. Only just over a quarter of all UN member states used the UNROCA mechanism to report basic data on imports and exports. In the period 2010–14, which covers the five most recent reporting years, several of the top 10 suppliers of major arms, as recorded by SIPRI, failed to report to UNROCA every year and a number of the largest importers were absent for all five years. Participation in some regions, particu-

larly Africa and the Middle East, has been consistently low in recent years. With the exception of reporting mechanisms used in Western Europe, participation in regional reporting mechanisms also appears to be in decline, while neither Asia nor the Middle East has such a mechanism.

Although SIPRI data on arms transfers does not represent their financial value, many arms exporting states do publish figures on the financial value of their arms exports. These figures are presented in section IV. Based on such data SIPRI estimates the total value of the global arms trade in 2014 to be at least \$94.5 billion. However, the actual figure is likely to be higher.

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