

III Constraining Conventional Arms Proliferation: The Global Context

Introduction: The Global Political Context

As noted in the introductory chapter, the emphasis of this report is on *constraining* conventional arms proliferation, rather than on eliminating or completely restricting all aspects of the trade in conventional weapons. The reasons for this emphasis will become more clear throughout this chapter, which discusses in turn the political, economic/industrial, and technological dimensions of the production and trade in conventional weapons. Together, this discussion will illuminate some of the "supply and demand" considerations that make the trade in conventional weapons one of the more complex issues on the international security agenda.

Four general considerations (summarized in Figure 3.1) set the political context for efforts to constrain conventional proliferation. The first is the self-help imperative of states operating under the "security dilemma." In addition, under the United Nations Charter, every state not only possesses the right to defend itself, but is formally under obligation to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security, and to make available to the Security Council the necessary armed forces and facilities. In a self-help world, the "security dilemma" (the inability to distinguish between offensive and defensive capabilities and intentions of possible opponents) and the resulting worst-case planning often makes cooperation to reduce conventional proliferation extremely difficult. This is especially problematic given that states acquire military equipment not just to meet national defence needs and UN obligations, but also for reasons of internal security, bureaucratic competition, or national culture.

Perceptions of defence requirements vary between nations, and have traditionally been among the most jealously guarded of sovereign prerogatives. And nations obviously see their security threats from differing perspectives. Canada enjoys relative security, because it is surrounded by three oceans and has had friendly relations and a long-standing and effective defence relationship with its large ally to the south for more than 150 years. Russia and the former Soviet Union, on the other hand, have been repeatedly invaded, and to a large degree, the massive build-up of Soviet military might was based on an almost-paranoid fear of invasion of the homeland. Some of these security risks are real, some imaginary, and perhaps, in some cases, some are concocted so as to maintain internal control. For whatever reasons, the fundamental belief in the necessity to maintain defence forces is a characteristic of international relations in a system of sovereign states.

Several factors determine the size of, nature of, and tasks assigned to, defence forces. Different states are faced with radically different constellations of threats to their security and economic well-being; these represent the primary determinants of national policies towards defence, and in turn, towards how the armed forces will be equipped. Nations at high risk (real or perceived), devote considerable financial, industrial and personnel resources to their military forces. Israel is a good example: in the past it has believed that its security was under constant threat from its Arab neighbours, or from terrorist groups operating from neighbouring states. As a consequence, it maintains a high level of combat capability and has fought several wars to ensure its security and survival as a nation state. In so doing, it has successfully developed an indigenous defence industrial base, although at great expense to its national treasury and its principal ally, the United States.¹ On the other hand, a nation which perceives it faces few external security risks may

¹ In 1993, Israel spent 9.1 percent of its GNP on the armed forces (13th in the world), mobilized 36.8 soldiers per thousand population (second in the world). In the 1980s, defence production accounted for more than 25 percent (and perhaps closer (continued...))