

## **The New International Environment: Non-Proliferation and Transparency**

The establishment of the UN Register of Conventional Arms took place in a context shaped by two seminal events, the end of the Cold War and a Gulf War which saw an Iraq armed with imported advanced weapons overrun its neighbour Kuwait, threaten the oil fields of the Gulf, and hold off an international coalition of the major military powers for almost six months. The end of the Cold War saw the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a Russia that was working in tandem with the other major powers, in the UN Security Council and elsewhere. The immediate effect was increased attention paid to non-proliferation of weapons systems and transparency.

### **Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction**

During the Cold War, the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons was one of the few security goals shared by the United States and the USSR. It was not surprising, therefore, that in the post-Cold War era this cooperation would continue and accelerate. The Gulf War provided a major impetus to such cooperation. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the allied response created an unprecedented international consensus that the accumulation of advanced weapons systems can be a major factor in the outbreak, conduct and termination of armed conflict. It was a clear case of such accumulations being destabilizing in themselves and leading to negative consequences even for the major powers. Combined with the end of the Cold War and the decline of the military threat from the Soviet Union, the result was an increase in the attention that the world paid to the proliferation of destabilizing and dangerous accumulations of weapons systems as a major threat to international stability.

The response to this new threat of proliferation by the international community has varied according to the nature of the weapons systems. In the case of weapons of mass destruction, the response has been a legalistic one based on a series of United Nations resolutions which created a UN Special Commission on Iraq (UNSCOM) that continues to search for and destroy nuclear and chemical weapons, their missile delivery systems, and the capability that Iraq had assembled for indigenous manufacture of such systems. The International Atomic Energy Agency, unable to detect an ongoing Iraqi effort to build a nuclear weapon during the 1980s, has been steadily revamping its procedures and adapting itself to this new world where would-be proliferators are getting much more attention from the international community.

This increased concern for proliferation also gave a huge boost to the stalled Chemical Weapons Convention which was completed in 1993. Dormant supplier-based groups also became caught up in this transformation. The Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) began to add new members and key non-members such as China and Russia pledged to at least behave according to the norms