

II CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS

Trends in Production and Trade

Michael T. Klare of Hampshire College claimed that weapons' exports would soon increase, according to an analysis of the political, military, technological, and economic factors that influenced the arms trade. First he offered a historical overview. The United States' strategy from 1973 to 1984 was to support its allies in the Third World through massive arms sales. The Soviets pursued the same strategy, and the technological gap between North and South widened. The end of the war in Vietnam resulted in excess production capacity which was redirected toward the South. The Middle East became the main export market: while it had only absorbed 27 percent of all exports in 1974; by 1983 it was absorbing 43 percent. For the rest of the 1980s, arms traffic declined of several factors, including the end of the Cold War, *perestroika*, the decline of the USSR, the moderation of conflict in the South, problems of absorption in the South, low excess capacity in the American arms industry under Reagan, the economic difficulties of the Third World, the declining price of oil, and the exponential increase in the price of arms. Recently, markets in Southeast Asia had revived. Imports of high-tech products had begun to increase, as well as of packages to modernize existing weapons systems.

Despite the Soviet retreat from the international stage, the Americans have continued to expand their influence and are intervening even more in the Third World. President Bush said in 1989 that this was where future threats to the United States would originate. He refused to institute an embargo on weapons destined for the Middle East because it would have applied to the United States' traditional allies in the region as well. This position has not changed, despite Mr. Bush's speech on the Middle East delivered 29 May 1991. Other large producers such as France, the United Kingdom and China will have to maintain their sales in order to keep up their rate of production. Despite the declining number of conflicts between countries, states in the Middle East and Asia still want to acquire modern weapons and sophisticated military technologies. For these reasons, Mr. Klare concluded that the arms trade would increase in the very near future.