

Constraining Conventional Proliferation and a Broader Definition of Security

The most important incentives for constraining the spread of conventional weapons arise from this reframed post-Cold War security agenda. In particular, because unrestrained weapons transfers influence, and potentially amplify, both the threat and impact of conflict - problems that have become more acute since the fall of the Berlin Wall - calls for controls on weapons exports are mounting. The concentrated diplomatic activity following the 1991 Persian Gulf War may have faded, but attention to the international arms trade continues through other, often non-governmental, avenues, especially as evidence accumulates of the "human security" impact of weapons supplied to conflict zones. Much of the impact stems from light weapons. As noted above, the UN Secretary-General has drawn attention to the proliferation of light weapons and has called on the international community to deliver parallel non-proliferation progress to that of weapons of mass destruction.

In Canada, the recent review of foreign policy included public and parliamentary discussion of weapons proliferation. Several individuals and non-governmental organizations appearing before the parliamentary committee reviewing foreign policy called for greater Canadian and multilateral efforts to control arms exports.¹ In its report in the fall of 1994, the committee discussed "weapons proliferation" and called for improvements to the UN Register of Conventional Arms as well as controls on landmines. More recently, the Canadian government endorsed the strengthening of controls on conventional weapons transfers. *Canada in the World* identifies the "excessive accumulation of conventional armaments by many states" as a "pressing problem." In keeping with a broader security definition, the Canadian foreign policy statement also linked "arms and development" and vowed to use all means to promote "the least diversion for armaments of the world's human and economic resources."²

These concerns have been raised directly by the Minister of Foreign Affairs on several recent occasions. At the forty-ninth session of the UN General Assembly, André Ouellet noted that in addition to the problem of nuclear proliferation, "the ongoing use of conventional weapons is an equally dangerous and very real threat to peace and security," and urged control of conventional arms as one of two priority objectives.³ At a recent conference on UN reform, he focused on the abuse of land mines, and "the continued imbalance in much of the developing world between military expenditures and spending on human development."⁴ More recently, he drew attention to the fact that most conventional weapons sales went to the developing world, and that the largest exporters of conventional weapons were the Permanent Five members of the Security Council.⁵

¹ For example, at the Toronto hearings of the parliamentary committee, the briefs of the Canadian Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and Project Ploughshares both focused on arms exports and controls. The Winnipeg brief of Project Peacemakers addressed the problem of landmines.

² *Canada in the World*, 33.

³ Statement by the Honourable André Ouellet, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to the 49th General Assembly of the United Nations, 29 September 1994.

⁴ Statement by the Honourable André Ouellet, Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the First Canadian Conference on UN Reform, Montreal, 24 March 1995.

⁵ Statement by the Honourable André Ouellet, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to a colloquium organized by l'Institut International d'Études Administratives and l'École Nationale d'Administration Publique, Montreal, 13 June 1995.