In 1977 the Carter Administration committed the United States to unilateral arms exports limitations and to negotiating multilateral restraints with the other major exporters. This initiative led to the Conventional Arms Transfer (CAT) talks with the Soviet Union. Four sets of discussions were held on this issue without result, and the process was abandoned in 1979.[5]

There has since been a decline in the priority attached to this issue by the main exporters. The idea of increasing the international availability of arms trade statistics, as an interim step towards arms trade regulation, was put forward by the UN Group of Governmental Experts on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development, in their 1981 report. The Canadian Government responded to this recommendation, in 1982, by stating that it "...whole-heartedly supports the spirit and letter of this recommendation...."[6]

Canada is not a major player in the global conventional arms trade: it ranks twenty-seventh in the world's suppliers, far behind the superpowers, the secondary exporters and the new tier of exporters. Indeed, Canada's arms exports account for less than 0.7 per cent of the global conventional arms trade.[7]

The volume of Canada's military exports has nevertheless grown over the years, from $ 336.2 million in 1970 to $ 721.7 million in 1980, and $ 1,902.7 million in 1985.[8] Over 70 per cent of these exports were sold to US purchasers, a pattern reflecting both the overall continental orientation of Canadian trade and the impact of the Defence Production

5 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, World Armaments and Disarmament, SIPRI Yearbook 1980, London, Taylor and Francis, 1980, pp. 121-126.
6 UNGA, Relationship Between Disarmament and Development, Report of the Secretary-General, A/S-12/13, 14 May 1982, p. 10.
7 Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers, Washington, United States ACDA, 1986, pp. 101, 111.
8 DEA, Statistics on Canada's Defence Exports, Apr. 1986, unpublished.