

WHY SUPPLIERS SUPPLY ARMS

One of the central issues highlighted by Dr. Klare's analysis was the question of why states choose to become or remain arms suppliers. Three separate aspects of this question were discussed throughout the conference:

1. What motivates the superpowers to supply arms?
2. What motivates middle-tier states such as Britain, France, and Canada to supply arms?
3. What motivates developing states to embark on the complex and costly venture of producing arms?

1. What motivates the superpowers to supply arms?

The first of these questions was dealt with in the second session, which began with a presentation by Chris Smith of the University of Sussex. He pointed out that both the Soviet Union and the United States had after World War II seen arms transfer relationships as a powerful means by which they could exercise influence and maintain a global geo-political presence. He distinguished three phases in the superpowers' approach to arms transfers.

In the first phase (from 1945 to 1973), the emergence of the United States and Soviet Union as global superpowers, their intense competition during the Cold War, and the power "vacuum" left by decolonization and the creation of new states meant that arms transfer relationships were a potent tool for initiating and cementing new relationships. This was especially true for the Soviet Union. It did not begin to supply arms outside of the "socialist bloc" (i.e. Eastern Europe, North Korea and China) until 1955, and low levels of Soviet economic aid and other development assistance meant that arms transfers were a relatively more important political link between client and patron.

In the second phase (1973 to 1980), both the United States and Soviet Union placed less emphasis on foreign policy considerations and more emphasis on the economic benefits of arms transfers. For the Soviet Union, this included the acquisition of hard currency that could be used to purchase badly needed Western technology. For the United States, many of its major customers were now wealthy oil-producing states, to whom the United States was no longer willing to supply arms as low-cost loans or grants. The resulting shift from grants and loans to cash sales also permitted the lesser suppliers (Britain and France) to increase their role, as their transfers had always been predominantly commercial.