

It should be emphasized that simply providing a national context in which the military operates, i.e., signalling whether the country is engaged in an armed conflict, does not address directly the question of whether military spending is excessive. A country can spend a large sum on its military without being engaged in armed conflict, and still not be spending excessively as long as there is a legitimate threat to national security. At the same time, it is feasible for a country to be engaged in an armed conflict, but judged to be spending excessively on its military if it is determined that a reduction in oppressive government military actions would reduce internal (and/or external) tensions, conflict and deaths.

Arms Imports as a Share of Total Imports

Arms imports as a share of total imports is used as another gauge of a country's relative commitment to military spending and economic development. Imports are an essential element in the development process. To the extent that a country's limited trading resources are devoted to importing arms, and they are diverted from more productive uses, development is slowed.

Arms imports data are used also to compensate for reporting problems with some countries' military expenditures data. According to the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, there are a number of countries that include only operating expenses in their reported military expenditures.² A better estimate of total military spending for those countries is obtained by adding the value of arms imports to available expenditure estimates.

The accuracy of arms imports data is not considered particularly good. Arms imports are defined usually as arms deliveries, not arms payments. Thus, since arms can be paid for in different years than they are delivered, the data can give a false impression of the economic burden imposed by international arms purchases in any given year. In addition, weapons prices often do not reflect production costs, and trade is facilitated frequently by barter or other offsetting arrangements. As a result, one must be careful when comparing the arms imports of individual countries over time, and comparing the arms imports of different countries in any given year.

² The Agency cites Algeria, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, Honduras, Iraq, Iran, Libya and Syria in this regard. See U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers, 1993-94*, Washington DC, February 1995, p. 166.