

Does the Register Address the Arms Trade Trends of the Post-Cold War Era?

Trade in major systems. Having reviewed the first year's operation and the current status of the Register, it is appropriate to ask if the process is addressing the arms trade trends which have evolved since 1991 and the post-Gulf War environment. As mentioned previously, the UN Register is inexorably linked to the role arms build-ups played in the Gulf War. The international arms trade system of the 1980s²⁸ produced the inventories of not only Iraq but also its neighbours, the end result of which was an unstable military balance highly related to the outbreak, conduct and termination of the Gulf War. This linkage is reflected not only in the language of resolution 46/36L but also the seven categories of advanced weapons to be made transparent. 'The focus is on weapons indispensable for surprise attacks and large-scale offensive military actions. These weapons systems are relatively easy to identify, define, record and monitor.'²⁹ One needs to be very careful here to not brand the seven categories as offensive weapons. The previous remarks in this report regarding defining 'excessive and destabilizing' mean that 'offensive' too can only be defined in a certain context. That was one of the reasons the Register was developed, to provide such an opportunity. Nevertheless, these are the categories of systems most likely to cause such situations.

Even if it is assumed that the arms trade system only involves end items in these seven categories (the remainder of this section will question this assumption), the Register falls far short of addressing the trade when it comes to missiles. The inadequacies of this category have been previously addressed in this report and by almost all outside analysts of the Register. As only one problem, ground-to-air missiles are not included. In addition the range limitation of 25 kilometres means that several classes of very lethal missiles (e.g., anti-tank, air-to-air) are basically left uncovered by the Register and any subsequent assessments of arms build-ups. Clearly an excessive accumulation of missiles of these types could be destabilizing. Given that the overall trade in major weapons systems (i.e., platforms) has been steadily declining in the post-Cold War era, acquisition of additional missiles is an obvious step to increase one's military capability. There are other major systems not covered by the Register which, if accumulated in certain regions, could contribute to excessive and destabilizing build-ups. Most of these (e.g., electronic warfare systems, remotely delivered mines, etc.) are mentioned in the second part of the 1992 report which served as a menu for the 1994 Group.

New Commodities. The Register does not address some of the newer trends in the arms trade, especially those commodities which can significantly effect and alter the build-up of military capability

²⁸ For a summary of the rules of operation of this system, see Edward J. Laurance, *The International Arms Trade* (New York: Lexington Books, 1992), 167-69.

²⁹ Wagenmakers, *op. cit.*, 16.