

## 5. MIDDLE EAST ARMS CONTROL

### *BACKGROUND*

Since the Persian Gulf war there has been considerable interest in developing a regional arms control plan for the Middle East which would limit conventional arms transfers and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. In the past there have been various proposals for arms control in the Middle East including a proposal for making the region a nuclear weapon-free zone, but they have met with little success. Since 1974, the United Nations General Assembly has dealt with a resolution on establishing a nuclear-weapon free zone in the Middle East, and each year since 1980 it has adopted the resolution without a vote.

The new interest in Middle East arms control after the Persian Gulf war has been driven as much by the war itself as by the realization that the coalition faced many weapons that had been sold to Iraq by its own members. As a result, a number of the proposals that have been put forward for Middle East arms control have focussed on controlling conventional arms transfers to the region (see Chapter 1, ARMS TRANSFERS). Arms control proposals have come from a number of countries including France and the US. On 4 July 1991, Egypt put forward a package of proposals intended to create a qualitative and quantitative balance of forces in the region, while ensuring security with minimum levels of armament. The proposals included a commitment of restraint by arms supplying countries, and a commitment by countries in the region to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and to refrain from using nuclear, chemical or biological weapons.

In the aftermath of the Persian Gulf war, Canada was the first country to propose new arms control measures. While the situation in the Middle East was key to the Canadian proposals, the proposals themselves have a global focus and do not seek to deal solely with the Middle East. Canada proposed that a world summit be held at the United Nations to establish a wide-ranging programme of arms control to be completed in time for a second summit to be held in 1995.

During March and April 1991, there were increasing calls for arms control in the Middle East from countries in the region, as well as from the US and France. On 29 May 1991, after consultations with governments in the region, the US unveiled its proposals for Middle East arms control. These called for agreement among the five major suppliers of conventional arms, Britain, China, France, the Soviet Union and the US, on guidelines which would control the export of destabilizing weapons to the region while allowing exports for legitimate defence needs. Middle East states would agree to refrain from further acquisition, production and testing of surface-to-surface missiles as a first step towards eliminating these