

AN ARMS TRADE REGISTER

Definition

An arms trade register is a database of information cataloging the trade or transfers of arms from one state to another. A register can range in content from identifying only the net total of exports from each country to specifying the kinds of arms exported and their destination.

An official international register would establish a standard, agreed methodology for measuring the flow of arms. By documenting arms transfers such a register would allow public examination of the practices of different countries. Should controls on conventional arms transfers be agreed upon by any group of countries, an arms register would facilitate implementation of an agreement by providing a standard comprehensive database that could be used to monitor the controls.

What would be included

The first and most important decision on the nature of a register is defining what would be included. The Hockin-Simard Report uses the terms "weapons" and "munitions" while the government response speaks of an "arms" register. Each term implies something different.

The distinction between conventional arms and weapons of mass destruction is clear. The formulation of "conventional" that is now generally accepted was first put forward by the UN Commission for Conventional Armaments in 1948. The Commission stated:

...that all armaments and armed forces, except atomic weapons and weapons of mass destruction fall within its jurisdiction and that weapons of mass destruction should be defined to include atomic explosive weapons, radioactive material weapons, lethal chemical and biological weapons, and any weapons developed in the future which have characteristics comparable in the destructive effect to those of the atomic bomb or other weapons mentioned above.¹

The question of what is meant by the term "arms" is less clear. The Canadian government uses the term "military goods" from the COCOM International Munitions List. Under this definition

¹ *Study on Conventional Disarmament*, UN Publication, Sales No. E.85. IX. 1: 1985, p.6.