

The Maturing Conventional Arms Transfer and Production System: Implications for Proliferation Control

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Introduction

Since the advent of the nuclear age, the agenda of arms control has been divided between "weapons of mass destruction" and "conventional weapons." The former customarily includes nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, and their associated technologies. The latter has included everything else, from land mines and fighter aircraft, to futuristic technologies such as laser weapons, stealth technologies or electronic warfare capabilities.

Almost all of the international non-proliferation efforts (multilateral and bilateral) since 1945 have been focused on weapons of mass destruction. Almost all of the 23 million war-related deaths since 1945, however, have been from conventional weapons.¹ When one adds to this the dramatic increase in the sophistication and destructiveness of so-called "conventional weapons," it is difficult to explain this continued divergence in treatment between "weapons of mass destruction" and "conventional weapons" in the field of non-proliferation and arms control.

In recent years, especially since the end of the Cold War and 1991-92 Persian Gulf War, greater attention has been devoted to the control of conventional weapons proliferation. The central policy concern remains nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction, but recent progress in nuclear arms control, the completion of the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1992-93, the restructuring of Western and Eastern armed forces under the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, and the experience of the 1991 Gulf War, have all combined to move the issue of conventional weapons somewhat higher on the international agenda. Recent efforts would include the creation of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, the (now dormant) efforts of the Permanent-Five members of the Security Council to create a consultative mechanism concerning arms transfers (especially to the Middle East), the recently-adopted CSCE "principles governing conventional arms

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¹ Figure from Ruth Leger Sivard, *World Military and Social Expenditures 1993* (Washington, D.C.: World Priorities, 1993), 21.