

supplier of arms, leaving the United States as the largest supplier until at least the year 2000. With the end of the Cold War and its systemic arms race, the demand for advanced high technology weaponry declined significantly, with defence budgets in major military industrial nations declining as a result. Also, the concept of exporting arms for political influence began to be replaced by economics (especially jobs) as the primary motive of supplier states. This has led to significant amounts of surplus equipment becoming available at low prices. Major arms producing nations, therefore, have not been able to keep national production up through exports. These above realities resulted in a downward trend in the trade in major conventional weapons that was well underway by August 1990 when Iraq invaded Kuwait with a vast arsenal of imported weapons.

To highlight the importance of the development of the Register in 1992 one needs to briefly review the state of international arms trade control prior to the end of the Cold War, starting with the interwar years when the negative effects of the arms trade received a great deal of attention. The issue of controlling the export of conventional arms first surfaced in the wake of World War I, when 'Merchants of Death' were accused of starting and fuelling a host of armed conflicts. The Covenant of the League of Nations, adopted in April 1919, included an article on arms transfers:

...the Members of the League [...] will entrust the League with the general supervision of the trade in arms and ammunition with the countries in which the control of this traffic is necessary in the common interest. (Article 23, para. d)

The Members never could agree on how to control this traffic but did attempt to agree on a common set of data with which to evaluate the effects of arms traffic and its contribution to conflict. In 1925 the first *Statistical Yearbook of the League of Nations* was published, showing the values of arms imports and exports based on official national statistics.

Although the statistics were improved during the 15-year period, the figures were approximate, incomplete and generally not comparable, due to the national differences in trade classification systems, the valuation of arms transfers and different practices regarding the disclosures of countries of origin or destination. Moreover, some important categories of arms, such as heavy artillery, tanks, warships and military aircraft, were practically excluded, reflecting the structure of the foreign trade statistics on which the *Statistical Yearbook* was based.⁴

The publication of these arms trade data continued through 1938, the final volume covering 60 countries and 64 colonies, protectorates and mandated territories.⁵ With the onset of World War II, this register ceased to operate.

⁴ Report of the Secretary General, *Study on ways and means of promoting transparency in international transfers of conventional arms*, UN General Assembly Document A/46/301, 9 September 1991, para. 25.

⁵ *Ibid.*