

6. MISSILE TECHNOLOGY CONTROL REGIME (MTCR)

BACKGROUND

In April 1987, Canada, France, West Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, and the US announced that they had agreed on a coordinated policy for limiting exports of missiles and related technologies. The seven countries had been secretly negotiating the agreement, initially established through an exchange of letters, since 1983. Known as the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), the agreement is not a formal treaty. It was prompted by growing concern about weapons proliferation in general and the proliferation of ballistic missiles in regions of tension and instability, in particular. It seeks to control technological transfers which may contribute to the development of nuclear weapons delivery systems while permitting exports associated with civilian space programmes.

The MTCR affects exports of materials and technology related to missiles capable of carrying a 500 kilogramme payload over a distance of 300 kilometres. The range was considered to be the shortest militarily useful within a given region, and the payload represented the smallest considered possible for a nuclear warhead. Each state is responsible for its own implementation of the controls.

Two categories of technologies are controlled. Category I items include complete rocket and missile systems, production facilities for such systems, individual rocket stages, re-entry vehicles and rocket engines. This category represents the systems of greatest risk and states are required to exercise restraint and maintain a "strong presumption" to deny such exports. When items in this category are exported, the state undertaking the export must ensure that the item or technology is used only for the stated purpose once it reaches its destination.

Category II includes less sensitive items such as sub-systems and components. Many of the items in Category II have a number of possible uses, not all of them military. Thus, less restraint is called for in Category II although restraint must be exercised. Exports are to be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

The MTCR has been criticized because it does not include important supplier countries such as China, North Korea and the Soviet Union. It is also very difficult to ensure that technology exported for civilian purposes is in fact used for those purposes after it reaches its destination. However, since 1987, MTCR members have sought to strengthen the regime. Australia, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and Spain have all joined the MTCR since 1987, bringing the current total to sixteen.

The Soviet Union has indicated that it is willing to adhere to the terms of the MTCR and it has been holding bilateral discussions with the US about cooperation in limiting ballistic missile