

9. International arms transfers and developments in arms production

Overview

The volume of international transfers of major arms grew by 5.5 per cent between 2010–14 and 2015–19, reaching its highest level since the end of the cold war (see figure 9.1). This growth is a continuation of the steady upward trend that began in the early 2000s. However, the total volume for 2015–19 was still 33 per cent lower than the total for 1980–84, when arms transfers peaked. While SIPRI data on arms transfers does not represent their financial value, many arms-exporting states do publish figures on the financial value of their arms exports (see section IV). Based on this data, SIPRI estimates that the total value of the global arms trade was at least \$95 billion in 2017 (the most recent year for which data is available).

The five largest suppliers in 2015–19—the United States, Russia, France, Germany and China—accounted for 76 per cent of the total volume of exports. Since 1950 the USA and Russia (or the Soviet Union before 1992) have consistently been by far the largest suppliers (see section I). In 2015–19 US arms exports accounted for 36 per cent of the global total and were 23 per cent higher than in 2010–14. In contrast, Russia’s arms exports decreased by 18 per cent and its share of the global total dropped from 27 per cent in 2010–14 to 21 per cent in 2015–19. Exports by the three other largest suppliers all grew between 2010–14 and 2015–19: France’s by 72 per cent, Germany’s by 17 per cent and China’s by 6.3 per cent.

SIPRI identified 160 states as importers of major arms in 2015–19. The five largest arms importers were Saudi Arabia, India, Egypt, Australia and China, which together accounted for 36 per cent of total arms imports (see section II). The region that received the largest volume of major arms supplies in 2015–19 was Asia and Oceania, accounting for 41 per cent of the total, followed by the Middle East, which received 35 per cent—a higher share than in any of the 13 consecutive five-year periods since 1950–54. The flow of arms to two regions increased between 2010–14 and 2015–19—the Middle East (by 61 per cent) and Europe (by 3.2 per cent, the first increase since 1990–94)—while flows to the other three regions decreased—the Americas (by 40 per cent), Africa (by 16 per cent) and Asia and Oceania (by 7.9 per cent).

The total arms sales of the 100 largest arms producers and military services companies in the world (excluding China)—the SIPRI Top 100—amounted to

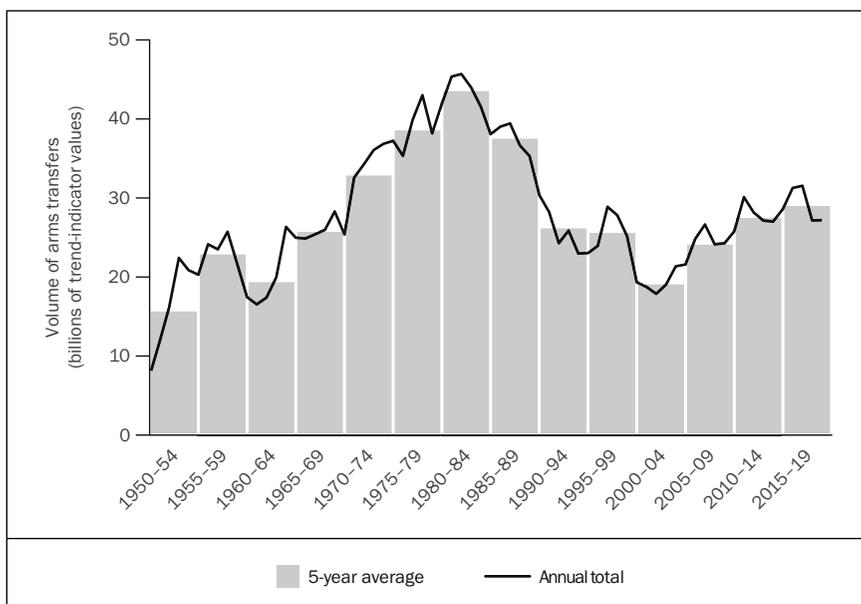


Figure 9.1. The trend in international transfers of major arms, 1950–2019

Note: Since year-on-year deliveries can fluctuate, SIPRI compares consecutive multi-year periods—normally five-year periods. This provides a more stable measure of trends in transfers of major arms. See box 9.1 in section I for an explanation of the SIPRI trend-indicator value.

Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, Mar. 2020.

\$420 billion in 2018 (see section V). This represented an increase of 4.6 per cent on the previous year.

Following the trend of recent years, there were few positive developments in official public transparency in arms transfers in 2019 (see section III). The number of states reporting their arms exports and imports to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA) remained at a low level and no major changes occurred in the various national and regional reporting instruments. The number of states fulfilling their treaty obligation under the 2013 Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) to report arms exports and imports has grown: from 53 for 2016 to 61 for 2018. However, as more states have ratified the ATT, the proportion of states parties submitting a report has fallen: from 71 per cent for 2016 to 66 per cent for 2018.

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