

## 9. International arms transfers

### Overview

*The volume of international transfers of major arms in 2017–21 was 4.6 per cent lower than in 2012–16 and 3.9 per cent higher than in 2007–11. The volume of transfers in 2017–21 was among the highest since the end of the cold war, but was still around 35 per cent lower than the totals for 1977–81 and 1982–86, when arms transfers peaked. States' arms acquisitions, often from foreign suppliers, are largely driven by armed conflict and political tensions (see section I). There are strong indications that tensions are increasing in most regions and it is thus likely that there will be more demand for major arms in the coming years, much of which will be fulfilled by international transfers.*

*SIPRI has identified 60 states as exporters of major arms in 2017–21, but most are minor exporters. The 25 largest suppliers accounted for 99 per cent of the total volume of exports, and the five largest suppliers in the period—the United States, Russia, France, China and Germany—accounted for 77 per cent of the total volume of exports (see section II). Since 1950, the USA and Russia (or the Soviet Union before 1992) have consistently been by far the largest suppliers. However, the USA's arms exports were 108 per cent higher than Russia's in 2017–21, compared with 34 per cent higher in 2012–16, and the gap is likely to increase. In 2017–21 the USA's arms exports accounted for 39 per cent of the global total and were 14 per cent higher than in 2012–16. In contrast, Russia's arms exports decreased by 26 per cent and its share of the global total dropped from 24 per cent in 2012–16 to 19 per cent in 2017–21. Exports by France, the third largest supplier, grew by 59 per cent between 2012–16 and 2017–21, while China's and Germany's exports decreased by 31 per cent and 19 per cent respectively.*

*SIPRI has identified 163 states as importers of major arms in 2017–21. The five largest arms importers were India, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Australia and China, which together accounted for 38 per cent of total arms imports (see section III). The region that received the largest volume of major arms supplies in 2017–21 was Asia and Oceania, accounting for 43 per cent of the total, followed by the Middle East, which received 32 per cent, Europe (13 per cent), Africa (5.8 per cent) and the Americas (5.5 per cent). Between 2012–16 and 2017–21, the flow of arms to Europe (19 per cent) and the Middle East (2.8 per cent) increased, while flows to Africa (–34 per cent), the Americas (–36 per cent) and Asia and Oceania (–4.7 per cent) decreased.*

*Most of the 163 importers are directly involved in armed conflict or in tensions with other states in which the imported major arms play an important role.*

*Many of the exporters are direct stakeholders or participants in at least some of the conflicts and tensions, which partly explains why they are willing to supply arms, even when the supply may seem to contradict their stated arms export policies.*

*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). This data is not consistent but gives a rough indication of the financial aspect of arms exports. Based on this data, SIPRI estimates that the total value of the global arms trade was at least US\$112 billion in 2020 (the most recent year for which financial data is available), compared with \$87 billion (in constant 2020 US dollars) in 2011. The total value of the arms trade in 2020 was about 0.5 per cent of the total value of global international trade in 2020.*

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