

ITALY

Working Paper

Control and limitation of international Arms Transfers

1. The international arms transfers have sharply increased over the past years, reaching ever higher levels and new alarming patterns.

More and more arms are being traded every day in different areas of the world, leading to massive accumulation and large-scale spread of tremendous means of destruction.

According to available sources, the overall value of conventional world arms sales has reached an impressive ceiling of \$20,000 million per year. About 75 per cent of supplies go to developing countries. The volume of such transfers since 1974 is rising at an annual average rate of over 25 per cent. Important means and funds - which could be devoted to economic development and social progress - are thus increasingly diverted to military expenditures. The expansion of trade is both quantitative and qualitative. The growth in dimension is accompanied by the accelerating technological sophistication of weapons traded.

The transfers mainly consist of major weapons and weapons systems, such as combat aircraft, armoured vehicles, missiles, warships and other military devices with a high destruction capability. In a number of cases the transfer includes not only equipment and services but also know-how.

The economic, political and military consequences of such a flow of arms can be easily assessed. Enormous resources, which could be made available for eradicating poverty, hunger and diseases, are lost in the wasteful and ever spiralling arms competition. The uncontrolled acquisition of major weapons systems by a greater and greater number of countries creates an atmosphere of anxiety and suspicion, engenders destabilizing effects and further exacerbates tensions in various regions of the world. Such a trend, far from strengthening international security, pose additional threats to peace and hinders effective progress toward the goal of general and complete disarmament.

2. The tenth Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly devoted to disarmament has significantly acknowledged the need for agreed measures of control and limitation of international transfers of conventional weapons.

The Final Document of the Special Session deals with the problem in a specific paragraph (85), which recommends: "Consultations should be carried out among major arms suppliers and recipient countries on the limitation of all types of international transfer of conventional weapons, based in particular on the principles of undiminished security of the parties, with a view to promoting or enhancing stability at a lower military level".

The need of such consultations has been reaffirmed by the United Nations Disarmament Commission in the elements of a comprehensive programme for disarmament submitted, through the General Assembly, to the Committee on Disarmament.

Furthermore, the urgency of considering ways and means of bringing the international arms trade under control has been recently reemphasized by a number of countries at the thirty-fourth Session of the General Assembly.

3. The Italian Government believes that the consideration of the issue of international arms trade should not be delayed any longer.

The problem represents a crucial issue in the efforts toward general and complete disarmament. It calls for prompt and responsible action by all countries concerned would warrant the early establishment of appropriate mechanisms and procedures, combining the global and regional approach.

To this effect, Italy advocates the setting up, within the United Nations, of an ad hoc body for the purpose of monitoring, controlling and limiting, through agreed procedures, international arms trade.

In the view of the Italian Government such a body should be structured into a number of regional Committees, corresponding to the areas taken into consideration for transfer restraints, which would include all major arms suppliers and recipients of the region.

A General Conference within the ad hoc body should be entrusted with the task of:

- shaping basic principles and general guidelines for control and limitation arrangements;
- elaborating legal, technical and military criteria for the achievement of such arrangements (identification and implementation of relevant international norms, classification of types of weapons and weapons systems, consideration of the relationship between weapon requirements, defence and security needs and regional military balance);
- controlling effective compliance with agreed arrangements;
- keeping a register of transactions.

Specific arrangements concerning different areas should then be worked out within the framework of the regional Committees, in accordance with the above-mentioned principles and guidelines.

Such arrangements should pursue the objective of stabilizing the arms balance and strengthening the security in each region at a lower level of armaments.

4. The Italian Delegation, in putting forward this proposal, fully realizes the complexity and the scope of the issues to be solved. The topic of arms transfers is in itself a difficult, sensitive and unattractive one, touching on a number of conflicting interests.

Any search for a solution requires sincere motivation, strong commitment and creative efforts by all countries concerned.

Furthermore, the setting up of new machinery to deal with the problem on an ad hoc basis will begin a serious study of organizational, legal and financial aspects.

Yet, precisely because of the complexity and the sensitivity of the matter Italy believes that appropriate action should be taken, in order to lead, as soon as possible, to effective negotiations on the substance and on the institutional aspects of the problem.

Preliminary consultations could be undertaken, as a first step, within the framework of existing disarmament bodies, with a view to acquiring the necessary background knowledge and to reaching a better understanding and a common perception of all the aspects of the issue and of possible options. Attention should be focused inter alia on the questions of definitions, of supply on a regular basis of factual information by concerned countries, of international standardized accounting, and registering of transfers and of verification.

As already suggested by Italy to the Special Session (document A/AC.137/97), publication by the United Nations of all available data on the production and transfer of weapons and the development of an effective system for processing such data would prove extremely useful.

Such consultations would give to every country an opportunity to express its views, to suggest alternative approaches, to make procedural and substantive proposals, conducive to genuine and reliable arrangements. The need for an effective contribution to the discussion by the most important supplier and recipient countries has scarcely to be emphasized. In a later stage, from an in-depth analysis of the problem, it could be possible to move to the consideration of effective solutions in an atmosphere of increased confidence and wider knowledge of the different elements of the problem.

5. In this context, it should be consistently kept in mind that the programme of action agreed upon by the Special Session of the United Nations devoted to disarmament, in fixing priorities in disarmament negotiations, considers conventional weapons together with nuclear weapons. Efforts to control, reduce and gradually reverse the conventional arms race - of which the arms trade represents a major component - should therefore be pursued concurrently with initiatives aimed at the limitation and reduction of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

The Committee on Disarmament has inscribed the problem of conventional weapons as a specific item on its general agenda.

It is the view of the Italian Delegation that the Committee on Disarmament should give to the issue of arms transfers all the attention it deserves and play a role fully consistent with its functions as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum in paving the way toward commonly acceptable solutions.