

The Arms Market and the Arms Race

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"A man may build himself a throne of bayonets, but he cannot sit on it."
William Ralph Inge

"What's the point of having this superb military... if we can't use it?" Madeleine
Albright, former American ambassador to the UN and former Sec. of State

"It is not an exaggeration to say that it is clearly in the interests of the world's
leading arms exporters to make sure that there is always a war going on
somewhere." Marilyn Waring (Counting for Nothing)

One indication of the current breaking down of [international law](#) is the ongoing arms race to obtain or enlarge the stocks of both nuclear and conventional weapons, and to militarize space.

As far as [nuclear arms proliferation](#) is concerned, we all know about the efforts by a growing number of countries to obtain them. This is happening even though the 1968 [Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons \(NPT\)](#) was designed to limit the spread of nuclear weapons. Far from contracting, the club of countries with nuclear capabilities (USA, Russia, China, France, United Kingdom, India, Pakistan, Israel) is expanding, while the goal of nuclear disarmament has become a dead letter.

Some among the most heavily armed countries, such as the United States, have revealed plans to replace their ageing nuclear weapons stockpiles with more modern and more deadly weapons. The Bush-Cheney Administration, for instance, announced last March 5 (2006), its plan for building as many as 125 [new nuclear bombs](#) a year, from 2010 to 2022, while at the same time assuring other nations that it is not seeking a new arms race. — Last June 13 (2006), the Bush-Cheney administration also made it clear that whatever the [1967 U.N. treaty](#) banning weapons of mass destruction from space says, the United States is going ahead with plans to develop [weapons for use in Outer Space](#), with the clear intention of asserting American dominance of this common property of humankind. If needs be, the Bush-Cheney administration will not hesitate to pull out of the 1967 Treaty, just as it pulled out, in 2002, from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. It is obvious that a nuclear arms race is on the way, with very few checks in its path.

In the world of [conventional weapons](#), their production, their spread and their use is even more endemic. Existing international conventions against the use of inhumane weapons against populations, such as the [1980 Convention on Conventional Weapons \(CCW\)](#), are openly violated, as the summer 2006 destruction of Lebanon by [Israel](#) vividly illustrated. And, what is more, new efforts to restrict their proliferation, especially in the developing world, such as the [proposed Arms Trade Treaty](#), are being resisted by some of the countries that are the larger producers and exporters of armaments.

On October 27 (2006), for example, the vast majority (139) of countries represented at the United Nations voted an historic resolution to have the new UN Secretary General, [Ban Ki-moon](#) prepare a global Arms Trade Treaty for 2007. The aim is to introduce some regulation of the wide-open international arms transfers that fuel conflict, poverty and serious human rights violations in many developing countries. However, the main exporter of armaments, the United States, voted against the resolution. —It was the only country to vote no. Twenty-four countries, among them large arms exporters such as Russia and China, abstained. It can be considered a tribute to some European countries that are large arms exporters, such as France, Great Britain and Germany, that they supported the resolution in favor of the coming arms trade control treaty. These European countries, at least, are showing some leadership, even though the U.S. has abdicated any pretense of leadership in this domain. —To be effective, however, the proposed treaty would need to be implemented by all countries that are large producers and exporters of armaments and by most other countries. The reason is simple: a weapons company with its headquarters in a given country with strict export controls can always circumvent national regulations by manufacturing weapons in a non-complying country. Even then, there would remain the hurdle of stopping those underground international arms dealers who do their illegal trade without requesting any export licenses.

The total international [arms trade](#) has been increasing rapidly, in 2005 reaching an all-time high in current dollars of \$44.2 billion (from \$38.9 billion in 2004). The United States is the world's leading [conventional arms exporting nation](#), accounting for about 29 percent of all international arms trade. Last year, in 2005, it exported \$12.8 billion of military gear of all sorts, about half of it (\$6.2 billion) going to developing nations. The other main arms exporting nations last year were France (second with \$7.9 billion in total arms sales) and Russia (the third exporter, with \$7.4 billion in total sales). The United Kingdom and China came in behind, with \$2.8 and \$2.1 billion in arms exports in 2005. Overall, however, the 25 countries of Western Europe surpass the U.S. in trade of armaments, with about 44 percent of total arms exports. The other two non-Western countries, Russia and China, are responsible respectively for about 17 percent and 5 percent of total world arms exports.

Such a large-scale [trade in armaments](#) has the expected consequences of fueling regional conflicts, when they are not solidifying undemocratic and abusive regimes. It also has the effect of increasing poverty in countries that are already poor. But is it realistic to want to reduce arms exports without at the same time attempting to reduce military production?

Indeed, the fundamental cause of the flourishing international trade in armaments is the large military establishments that industrial countries subsidize year after year. The [Stockholm International Peace Research Institute](#) has estimated that total [world military expenditures](#), (which had been falling from 1991 to 1996), are on the rise again, especially since 2001, and amounted to \$1,118 billion in current dollars, in 2005, or 2.5 per cent of total world production, or again, about \$173 per capita. This is big business and it can only be sustained with the threat of oncoming armed conflicts or through arms exports to countries in turmoil.

The [USA](#) is responsible for close to half (48% in 2005) of all military expenditures in the world. It is, therefore, not surprising that it is also the largest arms exporter and that many of its industries are reluctant to loose such a lucrative business. Fourteen other countries account for about 36 per cent of global military expenditures, with such countries as Russia, UK, France, Japan and China, each spending about 4 to 5 per cent of the total. In other

words, the five nuclear members of the [**U.N. Security Council**](#) (USA, Russia, China, U.K. and France) are also the world's largest military spenders —Therefore, it is only normal that leadership on this matter should originate from this quarter.

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