

The US is still the world's largest arms exporter, says SIPRI

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The US is still the world's largest arm exporter, followed by Russia, Germany, France and the United Kingdom. This was according to the new data released by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (www.sipri.org) on Monday.

SIPRI also revealed that there is a significant rise in arms transfers to the Middle East. There were also increases in arms deliveries to East Asia, the Caucasus and Pakistan.

SIPRI Researcher Pieter Wezeman made comments on the 38% rise in transfers to the Middle East.

'During the past five years, we have seen the re-emergence of the Middle East as a major recipient of conventional weapons systems. While we are a long way from the levels reached in the early to mid-1980s, this is still a worrying trend in a region beset by multiple sources of potential conflict and limited intergovernmental trust and transparency.'

According to the SIPRI research report, 37 per cent of the US deliveries of major convention weapons for the period 2004-2008 went to the Middle East. The US export of arms accounts for 31 percent of global arms exports for the period 2004-2008.

Russia's arms exports were 14 percent higher than 2004-2008. Around 71 per cent of Russia arms were exported to the Asia-Pacific region for 2004-2008, with deliveries of advanced combat aircraft and naval vessels to China and India accounting for a considerable share.

The volume of Germany's arms exports increased by 70 percent.

Impact of the global financial crisis and falling oil prices

While the global financial crisis and falling oil prices are clearly going to have a significant impact on the global arms trade in the years ahead, it is too soon to demonstrate the impact of the crisis. However, there are early signs of countries delaying or cancelling purchases.

According to Dr Paul Holtom, Head of the SIPRI Arms Transfer Programme, 'While certain states—including Brazil, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Morocco—may look to tighten their belts, others—such as Taiwan and the UAE—are boosting their military capabilities. At a time when the world needs cooperative solutions to global problems, the thriving international arms market points to a squandering of resources which the international community can ill afford.'

The average volume of worldwide arms transfers for 2004–2008 was 21 per cent higher than the period 1999–2003, when the level was the lowest since the 1960s.

Transfers of major conventional weapons systems to China fell dramatically in 2007 and 2008, as China shifts its focus to domestic procurement. China placed no new ‘big ticket’ orders for combat aircraft and naval vessels with Russia in 2007 and 2008.

The volume of deliveries to Taiwan has also dropped significantly, falling 44% between 1999–2003 and 2004–2008. However, Taiwan signed a major arms deal with the United States in late 2008.

There were increasing volumes of transfers in the period 2004–2008 to states involved in armed conflict in 2008, such as Afghanistan, Georgia, Israel, Pakistan, Sri Lanka according to the report.

Xuefei Chen is People's Daily Online correspondent in Stockholm.

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