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THIRD WORLD ARMS BAZAAR

DISASTER FOR SALE?

U.S.-supplied mujahideen in Afghanistan prepare to attack a government outpost during the Soviet occupation, 1983.

T.R. Lansner

If you have kept your eyes mainly on the U.S. and the Soviet Union this past year and a half,” said The Economist (London) magazine in September 1989, “you probably think the world is becoming a safer place to live in. Well, look elsewhere.”

As the superpowers began reducing their missile arsenals, Third World countries were adding to theirs. (In this article, “Third World” refers to all the countries of Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and Asia, except for Japan.) In the Iran-Iraq War, both sides fired over 1,000 long-range missiles at one another, killing civilians miles from the front lines. Both used chemical weapons; Iraq also used them against its own Kurdish minority. The fighting, which finally ended in 1988 after eight years, absorbed some $60 billion worth of arms—over 20% of Third World arms imports—according to Congressional Research Service expert Richard F. Grimmett. It was the most destructive conflict ever fought between two Third World countries, killing as many as a million and a half people, wounding 2 million more and leaving a million and a half refugees, by some estimates. Losses to Iran’s oil industry alone could amount to $250 billion; rebuilding could cost both countries $500 billion.

While it may have been the deadliest war, the Iran-Iraq conflict was only one
of more than 30 fought in the Third World during the 1980s. Countries in volatile areas are increasingly well-armed: Muammar Qaddafi’s Libya was reportedly able to make nerve gas by early 1989, with the help of a West German firm. Pakistan moved closer than ever to a nuclear-weapons capability. Sixteen countries, according to the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA), had or were trying to build ballistic missiles by 1988, giving them the ability to hit distant targets within minutes with any kind of weapon, conventional, chemical or nuclear.

Over half of all arms deals with and deliveries to the Third World between 1981 and 1988 involved the U.S. or the U.S.S.R. The superpowers agree on the need to block the further spread of ballistic missiles as well as nuclear- and chemical-weapons capabilities, but they are far from agreement on limiting the trade in conventional arms.

Even if the superpowers refuse to sell them arms, Third World countries can turn to the small but growing number of other suppliers who attach fewer strings to sales. More are doing the buying as well as the selling: although the value of Third World arms-sales agreements in 1988 reached only about half the 1982 peak of nearly $60 billion, according to Grimmett, the total was considerably higher than 20 years ago.

Arms purchases represent only a fraction of the Third World’s total military spending, which exceeded combined expenditures on health and education in the mid-1980s. Third World military spending, like arms sales, is down, but even in 1987 when it hit a 10-year low, the total came to a whopping $176 billion, according to ACDA. Despite a rising debt burden and declining prices for many of their major export commodities, low-income countries as a whole “currently allocate around 20% of central government budgets to defense,” according to Barber Conable, president of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, or World Bank.

What can be done to control the further spread of weapons and military technology to the Third World? What will be the consequences for developing nations—and for the U.S.—if the arms trade continues unabated?

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| In 1987, THIRD WORLD nations bought three quarters of the arms that changed hands internationally. Most of these weapons are conventional (as opposed to nuclear or chemical)—items like guns, tanks and aircraft—but increasingly they are highly sophisticated and destined for areas like the Middle East, where tensions run high and wars are frequent.

At the same time, chemical, nuclear and ballistic-missile technology is proliferating. India, Pakistan and South Africa are all now believed to have the ability to build nuclear weapons on short notice; Israel may have 60 to 100 on hand already, according to Jane’s Defense Weekly. Chemical-weapons technology has spread even further; Central Intelligence Agency director William Webster thinks 20 nations may already be producing them. At least 9 Middle Eastern countries now have ballistic missiles; Webster believes 15 countries will be building their own by the year 2000.

Why sell?

Except for the superpowers, most arms producers export weapons for profit. The French and British, who were the third- and fourth-largest arms exporters to the Third World between 1983 and 1987, need the export business to help keep their defense industries running at capacity in peacetime. The same is true for newer arms producers like China and Israel. Israel spends considerable sums on military research and development—a costly proposition for such a small country—to retain its technological edge over its Arab adversaries. Arms accounted for just over 4% of total Israeli export revenue in 1987, but they have earned twice that in other years.

Although they are not uninterested in the money, the superpowers have tended to sell weapons largely for political and strategic reasons—to make friends and influence allies in the Third World.

Moscow remains the largest supplier of weapons in terms of quantity, although many experts believe that when military services, technology transfer and quality are factored in, the U.S. is ahead. The U.S.S.R. has provided large quantities of weapons to allies such as Cuba and Nicaragua, either free of charge or at low cost; and it has traded arms for the use of military facilities, as in Ethiopia, Vietnam and Syria. Since the 1970s, the Soviets have also looked for cash customers like India and Iraq. Moscow’s sales have dropped in recent years, as demand has slackened and buyers like India and Iraq have sought to diversify their sources. The Soviet bloc also reduced military aid to long-time ally Nicaragua by 20% in 1989, according to U.S. intelligence sources.

U.S. arms sales

In addition to bolstering allies in the East-West competition, the U.S. has used military aid and arms sales to line up support for other U.S. foreign policy objectives. Israel and Egypt have acquired large amounts of U.S. weapons since 1979, when the Carter Administration (1977–81) promised them to both countries as an incentive to negotiate a peace treaty. Saudi Arabia, a vital oil supplier, a moderate Arab state and a U.S. ally, buys more U.S. arms than any other country.

Most early post-World War II U.S. weapons transfers came from surplus war stockpiles and were made free of charge under the Military Assistance Program to U.S. allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. U.S. military aid spread to Asia, the Middle East and later Latin America during the 1950s and 1960s, as the focus of the effort to contain communism shifted. Not until the Kennedy Administration (1961–63), when war surplus stocks
began to run out and the U.S. faced a balance-of-payments deficit, did the U.S. make a conscious effort to increase arms sales.

Military assistance grants have been largely phased out; most aid now is in the form of foreign military sales credits, which reduce the amount of cash a poorer buyer needs to make a deal, or in loans guaranteed by the U.S. government.

The Nixon Doctrine

In 1969, President Richard M. Nixon (1969–74) decided that the U.S., in light of its long, costly and unpopular involvement in the Vietnam War, could no longer afford to pick up so much of the tab for defending its allies. In the future, he announced, the U.S. would provide military and economic assistance, but would “look to the nation directly threatened to assume the responsibility of providing the manpower for defense” and for paying for more of its own weapons.

The Nixon Doctrine was put to the test in a strategically vital region. At the end of 1971, when the British pulled the last of their troops out of the Persian Gulf region, Washington felt it needed a local ally to help keep Moscow from extending its influence in the area. Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi of Iran, with whom the U.S. had had a close relationship since helping to restore him to power in 1953, was willing to step in, on condition that the U.S. sell him sophisticated weapons. In 1972, the U.S. reversed its policy of not selling high-technology weapons to Third World allies and secretly agreed to sell Iran “any conventional weapons systems that it wanted,” without subjecting such sales to State or Defense Department review.

In 1973–74, Iran and the other members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) quintupled the price of oil. The Federal deficit soared as a result, and the U.S. looked for a way to get OPEC countries to spend some of their petrodollars in the U.S. What Iran and Saudi Arabia most wanted was advanced U.S. military technology, and between 1973 and 1977, the value of Iranian arms imports more than tripled—and over three quarters came from the U.S. This huge new market also provided American arms firms with new customers at a time when the U.S. was ending its involvement in Vietnam and the Pentagon had cut back arms purchases.

The debate heats up

As the level of U.S. weapons sales rose during the 1970s, the congressional debate over U.S. arms-transfer policy grew more heated. The debate had begun in the late 1960s, fueled by the war in Vietnam and weapons sales to military governments in Latin America. These prompted Congress to adopt the 1968 Foreign Military Sales Act, which placed restrictions on sophisticated U.S. military hardware that could be sold to developing countries.

In 1974, Congress passed the Nelson Amendment, requiring the President to report any military sale of $25 million or more and giving Congress 20 days to veto such a sale. A year later, the amendment was incorporated into the 1976 International Security Assistance and Arms Export Control Act, which, in a slightly modified form, was passed over President Gerald R. Ford’s veto. The legislation was intended to shift the focus of U.S. policy toward “restricting, not expanding, the world arms trade,” according to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. It required additional reporting of transactions by the executive branch to Congress, extended the congressional veto period for proposed transactions and forbade the extension of military aid to military dictatorships.

The Carter theory

Jimmy Carter shared the concerns that had led to the new legislation. In May 1977, he announced that in the future, arms sales would be viewed “as an exceptional foreign policy implement, to be used only in instances where it can be clearly demonstrated that the transfer contributes to our vital national security interests.” He laid out guidelines that set a dollar ceiling on new deals, strictly limited high-technology military sales and coproduction arrangements with Third World countries, and placed the “burden of persuasion” on proponents of a sale rather than on its opponents.

In practice, however, little changed. In U.S. arms-sales policy over the next several years. The Administration discovered how useful an instrument selling weapons could be in securing the cooperation of other governments, especially in the case of the 1979 Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty: Israel was promised $2.2 billion in arms credits and Egypt $1.5 billion, and both received additional grants as well. In 1977 and 1978, the Carter Administration also concluded deals to sell AWACS (airborne warning and control system) radar planes to Iran, and advanced F-15 jet fighters to Saudi Arabia as part of a package that included substantial sales to Egypt and Israel.

Where the Administration was most successful in trimming arms sales was in Latin America. But Washington’s refusal to sell Latin American governments significant quantities of arms simply spurred them to build their own or buy weapons elsewhere: the value of European weapons deliveries to Latin America soared during the Carter years.

In addition to complaining that it cost U.S. arms makers valuable business, critics also objected that Carter’s policy hurt U.S. influence in Latin America, leaving a gap which was filled by the Soviets. As Jeane Kirkpatrick, later President Ronald Reagan’s permanent representative to the United Nations, wrote in Commentary in 1979, Carter’s policies had “not only proved incapable of dealing with the problems of Soviet/Cuban expansion in the area, they have positively contributed to them and to the alienation of major nations, the growth of neutralism, the destabilization of friendly governments, the spread of Cuban influence and the decline of U.S. power in the region.”

The Reagan Doctrine

President Reagan’s official arms-sales statement announced that the U.S. would “deal with the world as it is, rather than as we would like it to be.” The U.S. would sell weapons where such sales would help the U.S. and its allies “to project power in response to threats posed by mutual adversaries” and prevent friends from being “at a military disadvantage.” The U.S. would also sell arms to enhance “U.S. defense production capabilities and efficiency.”

In an effort to repair the weakened U.S. position in the Persian Gulf after the overthrow of the shah in 1979, Reagan increased arms sales to friendly Persian Gulf states. In the largest deal
to date with Saudi Arabia, he removed restrictions on equipment that would increase the range and offensive capabilities of the F-15s already sold to Saudi Arabia by the Carter Administration, and sold the Saudi government five AWACS planes in addition. The deal created a furor, in large part because of concerns for Israel’s security, and Congress forced the Administration to postpone the sale for a year. When the Iran-Iraq War threatened the Persian Gulf oil-shipping lanes, the Reagan Administration also sold Kuwait a $2 billion package of F-18 aircraft and an assortment of missiles.

Under what became known as the Reagan Doctrine, Washington also increased levels of military assistance, both to governments like El Salvador, which faced a leftist insurgency, and to anti-Communist resistance groups. The U.S. provided shoulder-held Stinger antiaircraft missiles to the Afghan mujahideen (insurgents) fighting the Soviet occupation of their country and to the rebels under the command of Jonas Savimbi fighting the Cuban-backed government of Angola. It also provided large quantities of weapons to the Nicaraguan counterrevolutionaries (the contras) fighting the leftist Sandinista government, and provided aid to neighboring Honduras in order to provide a refuge and backup support for the contras.

In the wake of the Iran-contra scandal, in which it was revealed that the U.S. government had secretly sold weapons to Iran and funneled some of the profits to the contras, the Administration was forced to delay additional aircraft sales to Saudi Arabia on several occasions. This infuriated the Saudis and prompted them to conclude a $29 billion arms deal with the British in 1988.

The provision of Stingers to the Afghan resistance movement also provoked opposition because of fears, which later proved well founded, that they would wind up in the hands of U.S. enemies such as Iran.

**Why buy?**

In 1985, the U.S. spent more than 6.5% of its gross national product (GNP) on defense and had about ten soldiers for every 1,000 citizens. By contrast, Nicaragua spent over 17% of its GNP on its military that year and had 23 soldiers per 1,000 citizens. Iraq spent 30–50% of its GNP on the military for most of the years of the Persian Gulf war, with some 50 out of every 1,000 people fighting.

Nicaragua and Iraq were at war. Saudi Arabia and Oman were not, and yet Saudi Arabia spent 25% of its GNP on its military in 1985 and 13% in 1987; and Oman spent 23% in 1987. Why do some Third World countries spend so much on their military establishments in peacetime?

Security is one obvious answer. Decolonization led to the creation of some 100 new nations between 1945 and 1980, whose defense needs were no longer provided for by their former colonial rulers. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, imports of major weapons increased dramatically during the 1950s and 1960s as 27 new nations began equipping their fledgling armed forces.

Each country’s idea of its defense needs is different. Regional rivalries and frequent wars have led neighbors to arm themselves against one another in the Middle East, South Asia and South America.

In Africa, many of the conflicts have been fought not between but within individual countries as a result of colonial boundaries and social structures retained after independence that have little relationship to ethnic, religious and tribal divisions. Ethnic groups that were artificially separated have fought to redraw borders, while national governments have resisted the damage that would do to their hard-won sovereignty. Africa’s arms purchases more than doubled in the late 1970s, outstripping all other Third World regions in growth, albeit from a smaller base.

Having one’s own armed forces is an important symbol of sovereignty; for countries aspiring to regional power status, having the best weapons in the region helps establish their leadership. A strong and well-supplied army is also critical for governments facing an armed insurgency. In the Third World, a large number of governments are either led by military officers or have very close ties with them.

**Arms and security**

While building a bigger and better military establishment would appear to strengthen a developing nation’s security, many believe that it does the exact opposite. They argue that increasing the numbers and kinds of weapons—especially if those weapons are perceived as offensive, like long-range bombers—in areas of political instability makes wars more, not less, likely and permits them to drag on longer with more-destructive results. The counterargument is that wars are not caused by weapons, but are the product of economic, political and social tensions.
The goods: a glossary

Ballistic missiles: Propelled by booster rockets, ballistic missiles are guided for part of their flight path, then pulled by gravity and wind toward their targets. The high speed and ability of the most advanced ballistic missiles to carry large and destructive warheads—including chemical or nuclear weapons—make them both dangerous and hard to defend against. Many countries have ballistic missiles that can travel over 100 miles, some over 1,000.

Seven countries that have the technology to produce ballistic missiles or related parts—Britain, Canada, France, Italy, Japan, the U.S. and West Germany—banded together voluntarily in 1987 in the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). The regime does not call for a total embargo on the transfer of technology and it only restricts sales of complete rocket systems that can carry an 1,100-pound bomb (thought to be the minimum weight needed to carry a nuclear weapon 190 miles). Rocket engines, warheads, warhead parts and guidance systems are also restricted. A second, broader category of items (including equipment needed to produce rocket propellant and computer software, for example) may be restricted in certain cases, if there is reason to believe they could enable the buyer to build missiles.

Chemical and biological weapons: Chemical weapons contain toxic liquid or gas that kills or maims. Biological weapons contain living organisms, such as viruses or bacteria, that cause disease or death. The 1925 Geneva Protocol bans the use of both chemical and biological weapons, though not their production and stockpiling. Moreover, most signatories reserved the right to use chemical weapons if attacked with them. A 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention forbids their production, development and stockpiling, but does not cover chemical weapons. (The U.S. ratified both the 1925 and 1972 conventions in 1975.)

Conventional weapons: Nonnuclear, nonchemical weapons. This is a broad term, covering the most primitive guns to the most sophisticated modern jet fighters. “Major” conventional weapons systems refer to aircraft, ships, armored vehicles (like tanks) and missiles.

Nuclear weapons: A general term referring to two types of arms: atomic weapons, whose power comes from splitting the nucleus of an atom (fission); and thermonuclear weapons, in which two nuclei are combined (fusion) to produce vastly more power. Most of today’s nuclear weapons have the power of thousands or millions of tons of a conventional explosive like TNT.

To produce a nuclear weapon, a country has to know how to separate a fissionable form of uranium or plutonium from the far more common nonfissionable kind to make “enriched” material that is over 90% fissionable. (Natural uranium is only 0.7% fissionable.)

The major treaty for controlling the spread of nuclear weapons is the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), signed in 1968 and in force since 1970. Signatories to the treaty who have nuclear weapons—the U.S., Britain and the U.S.S.R.—pledge not to transfer nuclear weapons technology to nonnuclear weapons countries but to share with other countries technology with civilian applications (nuclear power, for example). Nonnuclear signatories pledge not to seek to acquire a weapons-making capability and to accept International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards on their nuclear activities. The purpose of the safeguards is to determine that all nuclear materials are being used for civilian purposes and to sound the alarm if evidence of diversion to a weapons program appears. The nuclear weapons powers also pledge to “pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament....”

Either way, many believe that large military budgets are unhealthy. In the words of the 1980 Report of the Independent Commission on International Development Issues, under the chairmanship of former West German Chancellor Willy Brandt, the “buildup of arms in large parts of the Third World itself causes growing instability and undermines development.” Diverting scarce resources to the military leaves too little money and too few trained people to do an adequate job of alleviating poverty, hunger, disease and illiteracy—all of which Third World countries share to a greater or lesser degree. Third World countries as a whole spend almost four times as much on their military establishments as they do on health care, and 50% more than they do on education, according to Ruth Leger Sivard, who has been compiling an annual report on world military and social expenditures for over a decade. And when wars do occur, the consequences for development are devastating. Although early students of the development process viewed military rule as helpful, many now believe that it distorts the process and makes transition to democratic rule unlikely. Some think that to protect their power and privileges, military or authoritarian regimes are likely to rely on “the weapons and loyalty of security forces...against internal disaffection,” in the words of Jagat S. Mehta of the Lyndon Baines Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas. Some believe they are also more inclined to adventurism abroad. One example cited is Argentina’s unsuccessful 1982 invasion of the British-held Falkland Islands. At the time, the military junta was rapidly losing support because of a deepening economic crisis.

A changing market

By the end of the 1980s, sales of weapons to the Third World countries had fallen off. One explanation for the
drop is the countries' need to absorb the large quantities of arms bought in the late 1970s. Another is the interest payments on their burdensome debt, which have left many countries with less cash to spend.

In addition, countries that previously imported most of their weapons now have or are acquiring the technology to build their own, and sales of technology are rising. Israel, India and Brazil are producing major conventional weapon systems. Many Third World producers are also selling their wares, mostly to other Third World countries. Their weapons are less sophisticated; they are therefore less expensive, which makes them attractive to many Third World purchasers, who are often more interested in low-technology, combat-proven equipment anyway. Developing nations are also spending more on spare parts, refurbished secondhand weapons and “upgrade kits” to modernize weapons already in their arsenals, rather than buying new ones.

Why produce?

Over 90% of the major weapons built in the Third World are made in just nine countries: Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Israel, the two Koreas, South Africa and Taiwan. Largely as a result of sales to Iran and Iraq during the war, China has recently joined the ranks of the world’s major arms exporters, dwarfing other Third World producers.

In its 1986 study on Third World arms production, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute concluded that a developing country’s main reason for establishing its own arms industry was to free itself from dependence on imports from unpredictable suppliers. Israel and South Africa, for example, are both internationally isolated “pariah” states that have faced arms embargoes and other restrictions; both have developed significant, advanced-weapons industries of their own.

Regional ambitions may play a role, as they do in motivating countries to buy arms. Developing nations are also interested in creating high-technology “spin-off” industries, such as electronics and aircraft. Third World countries maintain, too, that they need their own weapons to protect themselves from superpower intervention in their affairs.

The spread of technology

The proliferation of sellers combined with the drop in demand has changed the arms trade significantly: buyers now have more leverage than sellers to cut a good deal. Whereas in the past the U.S. could attach political or economic strings to a sale, buyers can now go elsewhere for many items if they do not like the terms.

In fact, buyers have been able to insist on “sweeteners” that lower their costs. In many cases today, a seller will actually subsidize a sale to a recipient country through an “offset” agreement, in which the seller agrees to accept something the buyer produces as part of the payment.

“Coproduction” agreements have increasingly been incorporated in arms deals: a seller sells not only a weapon system, but also supplies the parts and helps the buyer build it in his own country, or licenses the buyer to produce it. That way a buyer gains the know-how to service the weapons and to build the next generation itself—which is how most Third World arms industries got started. Third World countries also help each other with financing arms projects: Egypt and Iraq are both helping to fund Argentina’s Condor missile project.

The black market

The result of such licensing and coproduction agreements is that the technology for producing weapons

Pakistani arms dealer displays his wares.

T.R. Lansner
continues to spread. If political motives get countries started in arms production, economic necessity soon turns them into arms exporters in order to fund their weapons industry. Not all producers feel bound by restrictions on the use of the technology they buy or by internationally agreed-upon embargoes: Israel, for example, is suspected of having violated a mandatory 1977 UN embargo by selling large quantities of weapons to South Africa. Although the Israeli government has denied it, Israeli officials have admitted privately that they need to make sales even in violation of existing agreements in order to fund Israel's defense effort.

The black market for illegal weapons is believed to have grown significantly during the 1980s, although it is impossible to know by how much. Among the principal customers were pariah states like Iran and South Africa that cannot purchase weapons through legitimate channels, as well as terrorist organizations, drug runners and other underground groups. These groups are interested largely in such items as rifles and ammunition, which are easily concealed while in transit.

Coproduction and licensing agreements have contributed to the illegal arms trade because they bring more people into the act. As the number of private dealers involved in the trade has grown, governments' control over the arms traffic—especially in older, less-advanced equipment—has diminished.

Iran during the war was a prime example: under Operation Staunch, the U.S. boycotted the sale of weapons to Iran and pressured American allies to follow suit. The U.S. and Soviet Union also cooperated to block the flow of weapons to Iran. But Iran was able to procure large amounts of ammunition and other supplies, some of it illegally. In fact, Iran was able to obtain arms from suppliers in at least 33 nations; sellers in 28 countries supplied both sides of the conflict.

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**Spreading disaster**

_the effects of chemical weapons: Halabjah, Iraq, 1988._

The spread of conventional weapons throughout the Third World has been accompanied by a growth in the number of nuclear powers and a rise in the spread—and use—of chemical weapons.

Israel, South Africa, Pakistan and India are the so-called threshold countries that could become full-fledged nuclear powers in the near future. None has signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) or joined the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and submitted to the safeguards process; all are believed to have the capability to produce nuclear weapons. Pakistan and India officially deny the intent to build them; Israel has maintained a policy of deliberate ambiguity on the subject, saying only that it "will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East." More recently, however, it has implied that it would use nuclear weapons in response to a chemical attack. Israel is reported to be working on a thermonuclear weapon.

India conducted a nuclear explosion in 1974, which technically makes it a nuclear power according to the terms of the NPT, even though it says the explosion was a peaceful one. It is also reported to be working on a thermonuclear weapon. Although neither India nor Pakistan is believed to be stockpiling nuclear weapons, both are assumed to have enough materials and knowledge to construct and test several dozen on short notice.

Brazil, Argentina, Iraq and North Korea have unsafeguarded nuclear reactors which could be used for weapons research programs; Brazil and Argentina can already produce nuclear weapons material. Iran and Libya are also believed to have ambitions.

All of these countries, along with another dozen or more, are working on acquiring or even learning to build sophisticated bombers and ballistic missiles with which to deliver nuclear weapons over long distances. India tested a ballistic missile with a 1,500-mile range in May 1989. Even without nuclear warheads, ballistic missiles are dangerous: their use by Iraq in the Persian Gulf war caused civilian casualties 300 miles from the front. Saudi Arabia's 1988 purchase of huge Chinese missiles gives it the ability to hit Israel or even the Soviet Union with a heavy dose of explosive power.

Third World countries that now have the technology to produce ballistic missiles probably also know how to make chemical weapons. Egypt, Syria, both Koreas, Israel and Libya are all suspected of having chemical weapons; both Iran and Iraq used them during the Persian Gulf war. Iraq's use of chemical weapons against Kurds living in the northern Iraqi city of Halabjah in March 1988 killed an estimated 3,000-5,000 people. Libya allegedly now has the largest chemical weapons factory in...
the Third World, which by January 1989 was reportedly capable of producing 40 tons of nerve gas a month, according to U.S. intelligence sources.

Controlling the spread

Efforts to restrict the proliferation of weapons and the technology for producing them, if they are to succeed, depend on a considerable level of agreement among a large number of actors. That kind of agreement has proved elusive even within the U.S. government and between the U.S. and its allies, let alone between the U.S. and the Soviet Union or between sellers and potential Third World buyers.

Nonproliferation efforts have been most successful with nuclear weapons, on which the largest number of players seem to agree, and least successful for conventional weapons, on which there is a huge divergence of views. Chemical weapons fall in between.

Safeguards

The U.S. has been interested in controlling the spread of nuclear weapons since 1945, but U.S.-Soviet differences over how to do so stalled progress for over a decade. The logjam was broken with the founding of IAEA, which went into operation in 1957. Although IAEA safeguards have generally worked well in monitoring what is done with nuclear material imported for civilian use, countries that have developed their own nuclear facilities with an eye toward building a weapons program—like India, Pakistan and Argentina—have by and large not assented to IAEA inspections.

The 1968 NPT expanded the safeguards process and added provisions for sanctions against signatories who are found to have violated the treaty’s provisions. Again, the problem is that those states that have refused to sign the agreement are the same ones that are known to have or suspected of having or being close to possessing nuclear weapons: Israel, Pakistan, South Africa, Argentina, Brazil and India.

As of mid-1989, 141 countries had signed the treaty. While most Western countries believe that the treaty should be extended for an indefinite time period when it comes up for renewal in 1995, many Third World voices object that the treaty discriminates against the nuclear have-nots. They also argue that the nuclear weapon countries have not held up their end of the bargain, which requires them to make serious efforts to disarm. Many point to the lack of a comprehensive test ban (underground testing is still legal) as a symbol of the superpowers’ unwillingness to divest themselves of their nuclear weapons.

Chemical-weapons control

Chemical-weapon-control efforts began before World War I. The use of gas in that war led to the 1925 Geneva Protocol. Although it was widely observed for several decades, violations have increased over the past 20 years. Chemical weapons—the “poor man’s atomic bomb”—are not that difficult to make; violations are hard to police since many of the same chemicals that make weapons can also make legitimate products; chemical sales are highly profitable; and the Geneva Protocol contains no enforcement mechanism.

Multilateral negotiations on a convention that would outlaw chemical weapons completely have been in progress at the 40-nation United Nations Conference on Disarmament in Geneva off and on for 20 years. In 1985, 19 chemical-producing nations banded together to form the Australia Group and agreed to restrict the export of materials critical to chemical-weapons production. But the signatories disagreed over what materials should be covered, and not all were equally committed to reaching a consensus.

In January 1989, 149 nations met in Paris and adopted a document reaffirming their commitment to the Geneva Protocol and calling for redoubled efforts toward a comprehensive ban on “development, production, stockpiling and use of all chemical weapons,” and for their destruction.

But problems remain. The most serious is verifying compliance with a ban because it is so hard to tell the difference between a chemical plant and a chemical-weapons factory. It would be relatively quick and simple to remove all evidence of weapons production before an inspection, say experts.

Political obstacles are likely to prove even more intractable. At the 1989 Paris conference, Arab countries demanded the right to keep their chemical weapons until Israel gets rid of its nuclear arms (the conference rejected the demand). Other Third World nations objected to Western efforts to stop the proliferation of chemical weapons while some among them, including the U.S., are continuing to produce them.

CATT and the MTCR

Talks on conventional arms transfers and ballistic missiles have made the least progress of all.

Although there is a ballistic Missile Technology Control Regime (see box),
it is a voluntary agreement lacking collective enforcement and verification means. Neither the U.S.S.R. nor China is a party to the agreement, nor are any Third World producers, many of whom find the regime discriminatory.

The Carter Administration initiated the Conventional Arms Transfer Talks (CATT) with the Soviet Union in 1977 in the hope that if the two biggest conventional arms sellers could agree to adopt restraints, they could convince other arms exporters to do so as well. By July 1978, the superpowers had agreed that a transfer-limits arrangement should contain provisions for deciding what types of governments should and should not be eligible to receive arms, what sorts and quantities of arms should be transferred, and procedures for implementing such an agreement. Quarreling within the Carter Administration and deteriorating relations with Moscow led the U.S. to abandon the talks by 1979, and they have never been resumed. An early Reagan statement indicated that the U.S. would "not jeopardize its own security needs through a program of unilateral restraint."

Third World put-down?

Within the Third World, conventional arms control has by and large been viewed with suspicion and hostility. Third World countries have condemned efforts to control supplies as discriminatory, designed to keep the have-nots from joining the elite club of haves. Krishnaswami Subrahmanyam, director of India's Institute for Defense Studies, argues that the industrialized world sees the growing military capabilities of developing nations "as a potential challenge to the world order dominated by the present set of developed countries; hence the excessive and somewhat distorted focus on military spending by the developing countries in the strategic literature of the industrialized world." Third World countries resent the suggestion that they buy arms for prestige instead of genuine security reasons. They point out that, among other things, the developing world needs to protect itself against the tendency of the superpowers to extend their own quarrels to the Third World and to intervene in other countries' affairs.

South Americans have demonstrated some interest in a regional agreement to limit arms transfers even since an arms race got under way there in the late 1960s. When the rising price of oil triggered an economic crisis in 1973–74, countries were eager to lower military spending. At a conference held in Ayacucho, Peru, in 1974, Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Peru and Venezuela agreed on the general need for limiting the acquisition of offensive weapons and lowering arms spending. But efforts to build on the declaration with concrete agreements failed because of differences among signatories and Brazil's refusal to participate.

### U.S. arms-transfer policy

The U.S. has strongly supported nuclear nonproliferation efforts over the years. It has used its influence to press nonsignatories to join the NPT and IAEA, and it convinced Taiwan in 1988 to abandon a nuclear program of potential military significance. Washington has also successfully pushed for tightening restrictions on the export of nuclear technology and expanding the safeguards process.

A question of priorities

Critics charge, however, that the U.S. has weakened the nonproliferation regime by not pressing two of its allies, Israel and Pakistan, hard enough on the issue of proliferation. Israel, which is believed to have had a nuclear weapons capability since 1968, has never faced sanctions from the U.S. because of its nuclear program. Washington considers its alliance with and support for Israel crucial to the preservation of U.S. interests in the Middle East. Pakistan, which probably crossed the nuclear threshold in 1986, lost U.S. military assistance only temporarily in 1979 and 1987 because of its nuclear program.

Despite the Symington Amendment to the 1985 Foreign Assistance Act, requiring annual certification that Pakistan does not possess any nuclear weapons in order to receive U.S. aid, the Bush Administration is going ahead with plans to provide Pakistan with a six-year $4 billion aid package, and is considering the sale of 60 F-16 jet fighters to the government of Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto as well. In this case, withdrawing American aid would have conflicted with the U.S. goal of supporting the Afghan mujahideen against the Soviet occupation, an effort in which Pakistan was playing a key role. Since the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in February 1989, Bush and Bhutto have continued to cooperate on seeking a political settlement in Afghanistan that will permit some 3.5 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan to go home.

On chemical weapons, President Bush has made achieving a comprehensive ban on production, stockpiling and use a priority of his Administration, although he continues to have doubts about how verifiable a total ban would be. The Administration said in May 1989 that "in principle" it would approve legislation imposing sanctions on countries that use chemical weapons or help other countries to build them. In the meantime, the U.S. is now making "binary" weapons, which do not become lethal until their two chemical components are combined. The components are stored separately, unlike older stocks, and are therefore safer. The U.S. is now in the process of destroying the older weapons.

The Bush Administration has been actively talking about chemical-weapon control with the Soviet Union, which first admitted it had chemical weapons in 1987, but far fewer than Western estimates suggested. Since then, the two sides have reached agreement on the need for on-site inspections as part of any treaty. At the UN in Sep-
mer 1989, Bush suggested that both superpowers cut their stockpiles to one fifth of present U.S. levels as a spur to the multilateral negotiations going on in Geneva. The U.S. has stated that within eight years of a Geneva treaty, it would destroy most of its remaining stockpile, leaving only 2% to deter use by any nonsignatory country. The Soviet Union countered with an offer to stop producing chemical weapons immediately and to begin destroying all stockpiles if the U.S. would halt production of its binary weapons.

Washington and Moscow have also agreed to work toward limiting the spread of ballistic missiles. Where much remains to be done is in the area of conventional weapons sales; although the Soviet Union has said it is willing to restart the CATT talks, the U.S. has not expressed interest in resuming them.

Options

The volume of arms bought and produced by the Third World has dropped in recent years. What, if anything, can the U.S. do to ensure that this trend continues?

1. Restrict sales of weapons and the technology to build them. The U.S. should encourage the resumption of talks on conventional-arms transfers and on tightening the MTCR, and should work toward involving a larger number of countries—both buyers and sellers—in both sets of talks. In the meantime, the U.S. must take unilateral steps to restrict sales of weapons, components and related technology to the Third World, especially to volatile regions and to repressive regimes which could use them against their own citizens, urges Michael T. Klare, director of the Five College Program in Peace and World Security Studies in Amherst, Mass. Even if increasing numbers of weapons are not the cause of wars, they do seem to prolong conflicts and to increase their destructiveness. Wars not only hurt the countries involved, but they are dangerous to U.S. political and economic interests. The leverage the U.S. once had through the sale of weapons was never long-lasting, according to Klare, and structural changes in the arms trade have weakened that leverage considerably.

Political scientist Stephanie G. Neu

man of Columbia University disagrees and believes that arms sales give the U.S. significant leverage. Because the superpowers continue to dominate arms sales—particularly in sophisticated equipment—joint U.S. and Soviet restraint can limit the supplies of weapons combatants obtain. Newman notes that security assistance programs have served the U.S. well: they have provided the U.S. with influence in distant spots without the direct involvement of U.S. military forces.

2. Stop producing binary chemical weapons. If the U.S. is serious about stopping the spread of chemical weapons, it should begin at home; its failure to cancel production of its own new chemical weapons will feed the widespread Third World conviction that nonproliferation attempts are discriminatory. Now that the U.S. and U.S.S.R. agree on the need for on-site inspection, they should take the lead and sign a bilateral chemical-weapons agreement.

The Administration has insisted on keeping its options open because of the difficulties in verifying a total chemical-weapons ban. If the U.S. is to have a reliable and safe deterrent against other countries' chemical weapons, it needs to replace its current stockpile with safer binary weapons.

3. Work toward a comprehensive test ban (CTB) on nuclear weapons. The major objection of Third World countries, both those that have and those that have not signed the NPT, is that the U.S. and the other nuclear powers have not dismantled their own nuclear arsenals. Even strategic-arms agreements between the superpowers do not preclude the testing and development of new and more dangerous weapons. A CTB would be a first and significant sign to the nonnuclear states that it is safe to give up their own aspirations to nuclear weapons.

The U.S. government, however, has consistently argued that as long as nuclear weapons exist, testing is needed to ensure the safety and reliability of the American nuclear deterrent. Government sources have also expressed doubt that they could adequately monitor whether other countries were refraining completely from nuclear testing.

The U.S. cannot stop the spread of weapons to the Third World without the help of other industrialized nations—and of Third World countries themselves. What can it do to encourage others' restraint?
FOR DISCUSSION

1. There are two conflicting views of the relationship between arms sales and war: (a) arms sales to the Third World increase the likelihood of and destructiveness of wars, and (b) weapons do not create wars; wars create a demand for weapons. Which do you agree with? Can you cite examples to support your conviction?

2. Do you think that U.S. arms sales are more often useful or more often counterproductive in the pursuit of U.S. foreign policy goals? Can you give examples?

3. Third World countries have resisted most efforts by developed nations to restrict their access to military technology or weapons on the grounds that they are discriminatory. Do you think that they are right to do so?

4. What steps, if any, could the U.S. and other industrialized countries take to persuade Third World nations to spend less on their military establishments?

5. Do you think the U.S. should be more consistent in applying sanctions against the spread of nuclear capabilities, even if it means angering close allies like Israel? Why or why not?


7. U.S. arms manufacturers complain that, in the absence of a multilateral agreement to limit arms transfers, American refusal to sell arms to a country usually means more business for another seller with fewer scruples. Should there be a free market in arms? Why or why not?

8. Selling weapons to other countries is often cited as a way to keep weapons costs down: producing more and selling some means a lower price per unit. What do you think of this rationale?

9. Do you agree or disagree with the Bush Administration's decision to go ahead with production of new binary chemical weapons? Why or why not?

10. Do you believe the U.S. should negotiate and sign a comprehensive test ban on nuclear weapons? Why or why not?

SUGGESTED READINGS


Smith, Gerard C., and Cobban, Helena, “A Blind Eye to Nuclear Proliferation.” Foreign Affairs, Summer 1989, pp. 53-70. Background on U.S. proliferation policy, with special attention to Pakistan and Israel.