- Sweden halts arms deliveries to Mideast states

India over the last five years was the world's biggest importer of weapons, said a report published Monday, which also showed big arms suppliers had scrambled during the period to sell to Libya.

"India is the world's largest arms importer," the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) said in a statement upon releasing the report.

"India receives nine percent of the volume of international arms transfers during 2006-10, with Russian deliveries accounting for 82 percent of Indian arms imports," it said.

India's arms import delivery volumes jumped 21 percent from the prior five-year-period, with aircraft accounting for 71 percent of its imports.

China and South Korea held a joint second place, each accounting for six percent of global arms imports, followed by Pakistan, which saw the volume of imports soar 128 percent from the 2001-2005 period to account for five percent of worldwide arms imports, the institute said.

Sweden accounts for two percent of world trade in weapons and is the world's tenth largest ar ms
exporter.

Siemon Wezeman, of the SIPRI Arms Transfers Programme, explained that India's imports of conventional weapons were largely driven by "rivalries with Pakistan and China, as well as

internal security challenges."

"As an importer, India is demanding offsets and transfers of technology to boost its own arms industry," he said in the statement, adding that competition-pressed suppliers were agreeing to India's demands.

The United States remained the world's largest military equipment exporter, accounting for 30 percent of global arms exports in 2006-10, when 44 percent of the country's weapons sales went to Asia and Oceania, SIPRI said.

There was "intense competition" between the seller companies and countries to land big arms deals around the world, the institute said Monday.

Countries in the Middle East and North Africa, being rocked by popular uprisings, were seen as "potentially lucrative markets" for weapons exporters, largely due to the tensions across the region, which "provide drivers for demand as well as give cause for concern," SIPRI said.

For the five-year period ending in 2010, "arms imports were particularlyy high in the United Arab Emirates, Israel, Egypt and Algeria," while "Saudi Arabian and Moroccan arms imports are expected to rise significantly in the coming years," it added.

There had also been a rush to sell arms to Libya, the institute said.

"Although Libya placed only limited orders for major conventional weapons following the lifting of the UN arms embargo in 2003, in recent years it has served as an excellent illustration of the competition between major suppliers France, Italy, Russia and Britain for orders," Pieter Wezeman, also of the SIPRI Arms Transfers Programme, said in the statement.

While this development was worrying, SIPRI stressed "there are limits to what supplier states are willing to provide," pointing out that the United Nations last month placed a broad embargo

on arms sales to Libya.

The think tank, which specialises in research on conflicts, weapons, arms control and disarmament, was created in 1966 and is 50-percent financed by the Swedish state.