

VI. The reporting of military expenditure data to the United Nations, 2002–11

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Over the past decade, there has been a general decline in the annual reporting by United Nations member states of their military spending through the use of the UN Standardized Instrument for Reporting Military Expenditures.¹ At the same time, an increasing number of countries have posted information about their military expenditure online, albeit not according to the UN definition or the format of the UN Standardized Instrument. Indeed, of the 79 countries that made no response to the instrument between 2002 and 2008, 61 made at least basic information on their defence budget available online, and 16 of those gave a detailed breakdown of the budget.²

While the UN Standardized Instrument represented an important improvement in the availability of data on military spending when it was first introduced in 1981, the gradual decline in reporting has been a matter of concern to many UN member states. It was against this background that, in response to a joint German–Romanian proposal in 2007, a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) was established in November 2010 to review the operation of the UN Standardized Instrument and its further development. This was the first such review of the instrument, which has remained almost unchanged since its introduction. The aim was to ‘strengthen and broaden participation’ in the instrument and to ‘improv[e] its further development’.³ The report of the GGE was presented to the UN Secretary-General in June 2011.

This section describes the UN system of reporting, presents trends in reporting for the period 2002–11, and describes the findings and recommendations of the 2011 report by the GGE on the UN Standardized Instrument.

The United Nations reporting system

The UN Standardized Instrument for Reporting Military Expenditures was established in 1980, started its operation in 1981 and is managed by the UN

¹ In a Dec. 2011 decision by the UN General Assembly, the name of the instrument was changed to the ‘United Nations Report on Military Expenditures’. UN General Assembly Resolution 66/20, 2 Dec. 2011.

² United Nations, Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), and SIPRI, *Promoting Further Openness and Transparency in Military Matters: An Assessment of the United Nations Standardized Instrument for Reporting Military Expenditures*, UNODA Occasional Papers no. 20 (United Nations: New York, Nov. 2010), p. 16.

³ UN General Assembly Resolution 62/13, 5 Dec. 2007.

Table 4.6. Number of countries reporting their military expenditure to the United Nations, 2002 and 2006–11

	2002	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
No. of UN member states	191	192	192	192	192	192	193
Total no. of reports^a	81	80	78	77	58	60	51
Standardized reports	70	54	48	53	42	41	38
Simplified reports ^b	..	15	18	16	10	12	6
Nil reports ^c	11	11	12	8	6	7	7
Response rate (%)	42	42	41	40	30	31	26
Reports from non-UN member states ^d	1	2	1	–	–	–	–

^a Years are the year of the Secretary-General's request (the deadline of which is 30 Apr. of the following year). Figures for 2011 only include submissions up to 8 Dec. 2011. Some countries may report after this date. Total figures include nil reports.

^b Countries reporting to the UN with both standardized and simplified reports are listed as standardized reports to avoid double counting.

^c A nil report is a questionnaire returned to the UN with no data entered, usually submitted by a country that does not maintain regular armed forces.

^d Reports from non-UN member states are not included in other figures.

Sources: United Nations, General Assembly, 'Objective information on military matters, including transparency of military expenditures', Reports of the Secretary-General, Various dates, 2002–11, <<http://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/Milex/>>.

Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA).⁴ Each year the UN Secretary-General invites all member states (currently 193) through a *note verbale* to report their military expenditure by 30 April for the most recent financial year for which data is available. The basis for this request is a UN General Assembly resolution adopted in 1980.⁵ Successive biennial General Assembly resolutions have called for the continued reporting of military expenditure by member states.⁶

In their reports, UN member states are asked to use the UN Standardized Instrument for Reporting Military Expenditures, which has been developed for this purpose, but they can use any other reporting format developed by other international or regional organizations. If appropriate, a state can submit a nil report—a report with no data entered; these are usually submitted by countries with no regular armed forces.⁷

The UN Standardized Instrument is in the form of a matrix with fields for reporting spending by function (e.g. personnel, operations and maintenance, procurement, construction, and research and development, each

⁴ UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), 'Military spending', <<http://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/Milex/>>.

⁵ UN General Assembly Resolution 35/142 B, 12 Dec. 1980.

⁶ The most recent such resolution is UN General Assembly Resolution 66/20 (note 1).

⁷ UN General Assembly Resolution 66/20 (note 1).

broken down into subcategories) and by military service (e.g. air force, army and navy) and to give aggregated totals.⁸ In the belief that some countries found this matrix too complicated and to encourage reporting by more countries, the UN introduced an alternative, simplified reporting form in 2002 that requests only aggregate data by service on personnel, operations and procurement. The reported data is included in an annual report to the General Assembly.⁹

The objective of the instrument has evolved over the years. The initial purpose was to use the reporting system as a step towards gradual reductions in military budgets.¹⁰ The justification stated in the most recent resolution is

that the improvement of international relations forms a sound basis for promoting further openness and transparency in all military matters [and] that transparency in military matters is an essential element for building a climate of trust and confidence between States worldwide and that a better flow of objective information on military matters can help to relieve international tension and is therefore an important contribution to conflict prevention.¹¹

Trends in reporting, 2002–11

There has been a decrease in reporting to the UN Standardized Instrument during recent years (see table 4.6). The number of countries reporting has dropped from a high of 81 in 2002 to 51 in 2011.

Since 1980, 124 states have submitted a report at least once.¹² Over the period 2002–11 the rate of response to the UN (including nil reports) was 37 per cent, but this fell to 31 per cent in 2010 and to 26 per cent in 2011. The region with the highest overall reporting rate in 2011 was Europe, while the Middle East and Africa had the lowest rates (see table 4.7).¹³

The political sensitivity of military expenditure may be a primary reason for not reporting in some cases. However, this cannot be the reason for the majority of those that do not report as many of them have made their military budgets available to international financial institutions or online to the general public.

⁸ The Standardized Instrument is available on the UNODA website, <<http://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/Milex/Forms/>>.

⁹ The most recent report is United Nations, General Assembly, 'Objective information on military matters, including transparency of military expenditures', Report of the Secretary-General, A/66/117, 29 June 2011, and Addendum A/66/117/Add.1, 28 Sep. 2011.

¹⁰ See UNODA and SIPRI (note 2); and Omitoogun, W. and Sköns, E., 'Military expenditure data: a 40-year overview', *SIPRI Yearbook 2006*, pp. 276–77, 286, 291.

¹¹ UN General Assembly Resolution 66/20 (note 1).

¹² UNODA and SIPRI (note 2), p. 2.

¹³ On reporting rates in Latin America see Bromley, M. and Solmirano, C., *Transparency in Military Spending and Arms Acquisitions in Latin America and the Caribbean*, SIPRI Policy Paper no. 31 (SIPRI: Stockholm, Jan. 2012).

Table 4.7. Reporting of military expenditure data to the United Nations, by region and subregion, 2011

Region/ subregion	No. of countries	Countries reporting to the UN (including nil reports)	Total	Response rate (%)
<i>Africa</i>	54		2	4
North Africa	4	Tunisia ^a	1	
Sub-Saharan Africa	50	Burkina Faso	1	
<i>Americas</i>	35		9	26
Central America and the Caribbean	21	El Salvador ^b , Jamaica ^b , Mexico, Trinidad and Tobago	4	
North America	2	Canada, USA	2	
South America	12	Argentina, Brazil, Peru	3	
<i>Asia and Oceania</i>	42		8	19
Central and South Asia	12	Kazakhstan	1	
East Asia	5	Japan, South Korea ^b	2	
Oceania	14	Australia, Nauru ^a , Samoa ^a , Solomon Islands ^a	4	
South East Asia	11	Malaysia ^b	1	
<i>Europe</i>	48		31	65
Eastern Europe	7	Armenia ^b , Belarus, Russia	3	
Western and Central Europe	41	Austria, Albania ^c , Andorra ^a , Bosnia and Herzegovina ^c , Bulgaria, Czech Republic ^c , Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland ^d , Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia (FYR), Monaco ^e , Montenegro ^c , Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania ^c , Serbia ^c , Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Turkey ^c , UK	28	
<i>Middle East</i>	14	Lebanon ^b	1	7
Total	193		51	26

^a These countries submitted nil reports. ^b These countries reported with the simplified form. ^c These countries reported with both the simplified and the standardized forms.

Sources: United Nations, General Assembly, 'Objective information on military matters, including transparency of military expenditures', Report of the Secretary-General, A/66/117, 29 June 2011, and Addendum A/66/117/Add.1, 28 Sep. 2011.

In general, most countries that have never reported to the UN Standardized Instrument tend to make only basic information on military spending available elsewhere (such as a single total figure).¹⁴ Equally, the fact that many countries have responded at least once suggests that they have the capacity and the willingness to report but lack political commitment to respond consistently.

The report of the Group of Governmental Experts

In June 2011 the report of the Group of Governmental Experts on the Operation and Further Development of the United Nations Standardized Instrument for Reporting Military Expenditures was presented to the UN Secretary-General and submitted to the UN General Assembly.¹⁵

The GGE suggested that low reporting rates to the UN Standardized Instrument in some regions could be explained by the incompatibility of national accounting systems with the reporting matrix. Other factors mentioned were the complexity of the standardized reporting form; a lack of political commitment, interest or capacity; the sensitivity of reporting military expenditures; and a lack of awareness at a sufficiently high political level.

The report emphasized the need for the broadest possible participation in reporting military expenditure and this requirement influenced the recommendations of the GGE. To better accommodate the particularities of national accounting systems and to facilitate and enhance participation in the UN reporting system, the GGE agreed on a common understanding of military expenditure and on a number of modifications to the standardized and simplified reporting forms. It also developed a format for the nil report and proposed a new title for the reporting instrument. The common definition of 'military expenditure' was agreed to be all financial resources that a state spends on the uses and functions of its military forces.¹⁶

The report suggested that states should be able to choose the most appropriate reporting form (although the standardized form should still be considered the preferred format) and should be encouraged to complement their submissions with explanations, additional materials and documentation.¹⁷ Given that a simplified version of the UN Standardized Instrument has existed since 2002 it is unlikely that these recommendations alone will lead to increased participation. Nevertheless, recommendations from the report that might lead to increased participation if applied stringently are

¹⁴ UNODA and SIPRI (note 2), p. 22.

¹⁵ United Nations, General Assembly, 'Group of Governmental Experts on the Operation and Further Development of the United Nations Standardized Instrument for Reporting Military Expenditures', Note by the Secretary-General, A/66/89, 14 June 2011.

¹⁶ United Nations (note 15), p. 21.

¹⁷ United Nations (note 15), p. 2.

improved promotion of the instrument by the UN Secretariat and the offering of practical assistance to member states lacking the capacity to report data.¹⁸ Such capacity building can take many forms, such as training of key personnel, online training packages and on-site support.¹⁹

The GGE report noted the importance of leveraging existing resources of the UN disarmament machinery to promote the UN Standardized Instrument and encouraged officials at higher levels of the UN Secretariat to more actively disseminate information on the instrument.²⁰ To further efforts at better communication between the Secretariat and member states, it recommended that national reports include details of the national contact points.²¹ The GGE also called for continued periodic review of the instrument to ensure continued relevance and operation and suggested the next review be scheduled in five years.

The report concluded that transparency in military expenditure remains an essential element for building trust and confidence among states. The recommendations of the GGE report were endorsed by the First Committee of the General Assembly and then by the full General Assembly, in each case without a vote.²² In doing so, the General Assembly changed the name of the reporting instrument to the United Nations Report on Military Expenditures. It will be interesting to see, given the recommendations of the 2011 GGE report, whether the downward trend in reporting can be reversed in the coming years.

¹⁸ United Nations (note 15), pp. 23–24.

¹⁹ United Nations (note 15), p. 21.

²⁰ United Nations (note 15), p. 15.

²¹ United Nations (note 15), p. 20.

²² United Nations, General Assembly, First Committee, 'Objective information on military matters, including transparency of military expenditures', Draft resolution, A/C.1/66/L.35, 17 Oct. 2011; and UN General Assembly Resolution 66/20 (note 1).