

IV. The reporting of military expenditure data to the United Nations

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The United Nations Report on Military Expenditures remains an important source for official data on military expenditure.¹ The report, which began in 1981, is managed by the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA). Each year the UN Secretary-General invites all member states to report their military expenditure by 30 April for the most recent financial year for which data is available.

Response rates to the annual invitation in recent years have been significantly higher than in the 1980s, when on average just 15 per cent of UN member states participated. In the period 2002–2008, the response rates averaged 40 per cent. This increase was mainly attributed to the efforts of the UNODA, supported by some member states, and to the introduction in 2002 of a simplified reporting form.²

Since 2008 reporting rates have been noticeably erratic (see table 4.5). By 2009 reporting rates had fallen to 30 per cent, the lowest level since 2000. After small increases in 2010 and 2011, in 2012 the rate of response fell to a new low of 25 per cent. As of June 2014, the UNODA had reported that 59 of the 193 UN member states had submitted military expenditure data during 2013.³ Although the total number of countries reporting might increase due to late submissions, current figures still indicate an increase in the participation rate, to 31 per cent.

Participation among states in Europe increased most significantly, from 56 per cent in 2012 to 81 per cent in 2013 (see table 4.6). Reporting rates for the Americas dropped for the second consecutive year, from 40 per cent in 2011 to 31 per cent in 2012 and 20 per cent for 2013. Participation rates in Asia and Oceania also continue to decline, from 26 per cent in 2011 to 21 per cent in 2012 and only 12 per cent in 2013. For the second consecutive year, only two African countries handed in reports in 2013, and once again no Middle Eastern state provided information.

¹ Until 2012 the UN Report on Military Expenditures was known as the UN Standardized Instrument for Reporting Military Expenditures. UN General Assembly Resolution 66/20, 2 Dec. 2011.

² 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, p. 14.

³ United Nations, General Assembly, 'Objective information on military matters, including transparency of military expenditures', Report of the Secretary-General, A/68/131, 11 July 2013, and A/68/131/Add.1, 16 Sep. 2013; and UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, 'United Nations Report on Military Expenditures: participation by member states (2013)', [June 2014], <<http://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/Milex/Docs/2013-MILEX-participation-by-Member-States.pdf>>.

Table 4.5. Number of countries reporting their military expenditure to the United Nations, 2002, 2008–13^a

	2002	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
No. of UN member states	191	192	192	192	193	193	193
Total no. of reports	81	77	58	60	67	49	59
Standardized reports	70	53	42	41	47	31	38
Simplified reports ^b	..	16	10	12	10	12	18
Nil reports ^c	11	8	6	7	10	5	3
Response rate (%)	42	40	30	31	35	25	31
Reports from non-UN member states ^d	1	–	–	–	–	–	–

^a Years are the year of the Secretary-General's request (the deadline of which is 30 Apr. of the following year). The reports relate to spending in the most recently completed financial year.

^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 totals.

Sources: United Nations, General Assembly, 'Objective information on military matters, including transparency of military expenditures', Reports of the Secretary-General, Various dates, 2002–13, <<http://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/Milex/>>.

Figures released for 2012 and 2013 so far have tempered expectations for a general upward trend following the 2011 report of the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on the reporting mechanism, which was endorsed by the UN General Assembly.⁴ In its report, the GGE suggested that low reporting rates to the UN in some regions could be explained by the incompatibility of national accounting systems with the reporting matrix. Other factors mentioned included the complexity of the reporting form, a lack of political commitment, interest or capacity, and the sensitivity of reporting military expenditure. Such considerations all helped shape and influence the recommendations of the report.

To better accommodate the particularities of national accounting systems and to facilitate and enhance participation in the UN Report on Military Expenditures, the GGE agreed on a common understanding of military expenditure. The definition of 'military expenditure' to be used for the UN report refers to all financial resources that a state spends on the uses and functions of its military forces.⁵

The GGE also agreed on a number of modifications to the standardized and simplified reporting forms, and developed a format for the 'nil' report

⁴ United Nations, A/66/89 (note 2); and UN General Assembly Resolution 66/20 (note 1).

⁵ United Nations, A/66/89 (note 2), p. 21.

Table 4.6. Reporting of military expenditure data to the United Nations, by region and subregion, 2013

Region/ subregion	No. of countries	Countries reporting to the UN (including nil reports)	Total	Response rate (%)
<i>Africa</i>	54	Burkina Faso, Senegal ^b , Comoros ^b	3	6
<i>Americas</i>	35		11	31
Central America and the Caribbean	21	Belize, Costa Rica ^a , Dominican Republic ^b , El Salvador ^b , Jamaica ^b , Mexico	6	
North America	2	USA	1	
South America	12	Brazil, Chile ^b , Paraguay, Peru ^b	4	
<i>Asia and Oceania</i>	42		6	14
Central and South Asia	12	India ^b	1	
East Asia	5	China ^b , Japan	2	
Oceania	14	Australia, New Zealand ^b	2	
South East Asia	11	Malaysia ^b	1	
<i>Europe</i>	48		39	81
Central and Western Europe	41	Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina ^b , Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus ^c , Czech Republic ^b , Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary ^b , Iceland ^d , Ireland, Italy ^c , Latvia, Liechtenstein ^a , Lithuania, Luxembourg ^c , Macedonia (FYR), Malta, Montenegro ^c , Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia ^c , Slovenia ^c , Spain ^b , Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey ^b	33	
Eastern Europe	7	Armenia ^b , Belarus, Georgia ^b , Moldova, Russia, Ukraine	6	
<i>Middle East</i>	14	-	-	-
Total	193		59	31

^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/68/131, 11 July 2013, and A/68/131/Add.1, 16 Sep. 2013; and UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, 'United Nations Report on Military Expenditures: participation by member states (2013)', [June 2014], <<http://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/Milex/Docs/2013-MILEX-participation-by-Member-States.pdf>>.

(i.e. reports with no data entered). States can choose the most appropriate reporting form (although the standardized form is preferred) and are encouraged to complement their submissions with explanations, additional materials and documentation.⁶

Given that a simplified form had already existed since 2002 it was unlikely that the recommendations described above could lead to increased participation alone. Participation figures so far have proved this to be the case. Recommendations from the report that might lead to increased participation, if applied effectively, are improved promotion of the importance of the report by the UN Secretariat and offering practical assistance in capacity building to assist states in their response.⁷

The GGE report encouraged officials at higher levels of the UN Secretariat to more actively disseminate information on the report.⁸ To further efforts at better communication between the Secretariat and the UN member states, it recommended that national reports include details of the national contact points.⁹ The GGE also called for continued periodic review of the report to ensure continued relevance and operation. It is not clear what measures the UN has taken to follow up the GGE's recommendations.

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 make their military budgets available online to the general public, although in many cases the information provided elsewhere is fairly basic.¹⁰ Equally, the fact that many countries have responded at least once suggests that they have the capacity to report but lack the political commitment to respond consistently.

⁶ United Nations, A/66/89 (note 2), p. 2.

⁷ United Nations, A/66/89 (note 2), pp. 23–24.

⁸ United Nations, A/66/89 (note 2), p. 15.

⁹ United Nations, A/66/89 (note 2), p. 20.

¹⁰ 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. 22.