

## V. 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.<sup>1</sup> The reporting mechanism, which was introduced in 1981, is managed by the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA). Each year the UN Secretary-General invites all member states through a *note verbale* to report their military expenditure by 30 April for the most recent financial year for which data is available. The original basis for this request is a UN General Assembly resolution adopted in 1980.<sup>2</sup> Successive biennial General Assembly resolutions have called for the continued reporting of military expenditure by member states.<sup>3</sup>

In recent years reporting rates have started to decline and become more erratic, falling from 42 per cent in 2002 to 25 per cent in 2014 (see table 13.7).<sup>4</sup> As of September 2015, the UNODA had published reports on military expenditure data from 43 of the 193 UN member states—amounting to a decrease in the participation rate to 22 per cent—although late submissions could increase this number.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the decrease in the response rate over the past few years, it is still significantly higher than it was in the 1980s, when on average just 15 per cent of UN member states participated. In the period 2002–2008 the response rate averaged 40 per cent. This higher rate was mainly attributed to the efforts of UNODA to promote the reporting process, supported by some member states, and to the introduction in 2002 of a simplified reporting form.<sup>6</sup>

For the second consecutive year participation among states in Europe continued to decline, from 58 per cent in 2014 to 56 per cent in 2015 (see table 13.8). The reporting rate for the Americas declined from 34 per cent in 2014 to 26 per cent in 2015. The participation rate in Asia and Oceania remained at

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

<sup>2</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 35/142 B, 12 Dec. 1980.

<sup>3</sup> The most recent resolution is UN General Assembly Resolution 68/23, 5 Dec. 2013.

<sup>4</sup> For more details see table 9.8., 'Number of countries reporting their military expenditure to the United Nations, 2002, 2009–14', Kelly, N., 'The reporting of military data to the United Nations', *SIPRI Yearbook 2015*, p. 370.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, General Assembly, 'Objective information on military matters, including transparency of military expenditures', Report of the Secretary-General, A/70/139, 15 July 2015 and A/70/139/Add.1, 15 Sep. 2015.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

**Table 13.7.** Number of countries reporting their military expenditure to the United Nations, 2002, 2010–15<sup>a</sup>

|  | 2002      | 2009      | 2010      | 2011      | 2012      | 2013      | 2014      | 2015      |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| No. of UN member states                        | 191       | 192       | 192       | 192       | 193       | 193       | 193       | 193       |
| <b>Total no. of reports</b>                    | <b>81</b> | <b>58</b> | <b>60</b> | <b>67</b> | <b>49</b> | <b>56</b> | <b>49</b> | <b>43</b> |
| Standardized reports                           | 70        | 42        | 41        | 47        | 31        | 38        | 33        | 27        |
| Simplified reports <sup>b</sup>                | ..        | 10        | 12        | 10        | 12        | 15        | 14        | 12        |
| Nil reports <sup>c</sup>                       | 11        | 6         | 7         | 10        | 5         | 3         | 2         | 4         |
| Response rate (%)                              | 42        | 30        | 31        | 35        | 25        | 29        | 25        | 22        |
| Reports from non-UN member states <sup>d</sup> | 1         | –         | –         | –         | –         | –         | –         | –         |

<sup>a</sup> 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.

<sup>b</sup> Countries reporting to the UN with both standardized and simplified reports are listed as standardized reports to avoid double counting.

<sup>c</sup> 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.

<sup>d</sup> 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, 2002–15 <<http://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/Milex/>>.

12 per cent in 2015. Only one African country reported information in 2015, and only one country provided data from the Middle East.

The most recent review of the reporting mechanism was published by the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) in 2011. It was endorsed by the UN General Assembly.<sup>7</sup> The GGE report made a series of recommendations and expressed the hope that the reporting process could be developed further. However, the publication of the GGE report has not led to any significant upward trend in the number of states reporting information to the UN.

In its report, the GGE suggested that low reporting rates in some regions could be explained by the incompatibility of national accounting systems with the reporting matrix. Other factors mentioned were: (a) the complexity of the reporting form; (b) a lack of political commitment, interest or capacity; and (c) the sensitivity around reporting military expenditures. These considerations shaped the recommendations of the report.

To better accommodate the particularities of national accounting systems, and facilitate and enhance participation in the UN Report on Military Expenditures the GGE agreed a common understanding of the term 'military

<sup>7</sup> United Nations, A/66/89 (note 6); and United Nations, General Assembly Resolution A/66/20 (note 1).

expenditure'. The definition to be used in UN reporting refers to all financial resources that a state spends on the uses and functions of its military forces.<sup>8</sup>

The GGE also agreed a number of modifications to the standardized and simplified reporting forms, and developed a format for the 'nil' report (i.e. reports with no data entered). Although the standardized form is preferred, states can choose which reporting form they consider most appropriate and are encouraged to complement their submissions with explanations, and additional material and documentation.<sup>9</sup>

Given that a simplified form has existed since 2002, it was always unlikely that these recommendations on their own would lead to increased participation, and participation rates since 2011 have proved this to be the case. Two recommendations in the report that, if applied effectively, might increase participation are better promotion of the importance of the report by the UN Secretariat and wider availability of practical assistance in capacity building to support states with their responses.<sup>10</sup>

The GGE report encouraged officials at higher levels of the UN Secretariat to more actively disseminate information on the report.<sup>11</sup> To further efforts to improve communication between the Secretariat and the UN member states, it recommended that national reports include details of the national contact points.<sup>12</sup> The GGE also called for continued periodic review of the report to ensure its continued relevance. 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 why the majority of states do not report, as many of these states make their military budgets available online to the general public—even if in many cases the information provided elsewhere is fairly basic.<sup>13</sup> 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 do so consistently.

The declining rate of reporting for the UN military expenditure report mirrors falling reporting rates for the UN Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup> United Nations, A/66/89 (note 6), p. 21.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations, A/66/89 (note 6), p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations, A/66/89 (note 6), pp. 23–24.

<sup>11</sup> United Nations, A/66/89 (note 6), p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations, A/66/89 (note 6), p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> See chapter 15, section III, of this volume.

**Table 13.8.** Reporting of military expenditure data to the United Nations, by region and subregion, 2015

| Region/subregion                  | No. of countries | Countries reporting to the UN (including nil reports)   | Total     | Response rate (%) |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|---|-----------|-------------------|
| <i>Africa</i>                     | 54               |   |           | 2                 |
| North Africa                      | 4                | -   |           |                   |
| Sub-Saharan Africa                | 50               | Burkina Faso  | 1         |                   |
| <i>Americas</i>                   | 35               |   | 9         | 26                |
| Central America and the Caribbean | 21               | El Salvador <sup>a</sup> , Grenada <sup>b</sup> , Trinidad and Tobago   | 3         |                   |
| North America                     | 2                | Canada, USA   | 2         |                   |
| South America                     | 12               | Argentina, Brazil, Colombia <sup>a</sup> , Uruguay <sup>a</sup>   | 4         |                   |
| <i>Asia and Oceania</i>           | 42               |   | 5         | 12                |
| Central and South Asia            | 12               | Kazakhstan  | 1         |                   |
| East Asia                         | 5                | Japan <sup>c</sup>  | 1         |                   |
| Oceania                           | 14               | Australia, Nauru <sup>b</sup>   | 2         |                   |
| South East Asia                   | 11               | Philippines   | 1         |                   |
| <i>Europe</i>                     | 48               |   | 27        | 56                |
| Central and Western Europe        |                  | Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia <sup>c</sup> , Cyprus <sup>a</sup> , Czech Republic <sup>a</sup> , Finland, Germany, Hungary <sup>a</sup> , Latvia, Liechtenstein <sup>b</sup> , Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macedonia (FYR), Malta, Portugal, Romania, San Marino <sup>b</sup> , Slovakia <sup>a</sup> , Slovenia <sup>a</sup> , Macedonia <sup>a</sup> , Belarus, Russia <sup>a</sup> | 24        |                   |
| Eastern Europe                    | 41               | Spain, Switzerland, Turkey <sup>a</sup>   | 3         |                   |
| <i>Middle East</i>                | 7                | Armenia <sup>a</sup> , Lebanon <sup>d</sup>   | 1         | -                 |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>193</b>       |   | <b>43</b> | <b>22</b>         |

FYR = Former Yugoslav Republic.

<sup>a</sup> These countries reported with the simplified form.<sup>b</sup> These countries submitted nil reports.<sup>c</sup> 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/70/139, 15 July 2015, and A/70/139/Add.1, 15 Sep. 2015.