

II. Transparency in arms transfers

MARK BROMLEY AND SIEMON T. WEZEMAN

Official and publicly accessible data on arms transfers—both exports and imports—is important for assessing states' policies on arms exports, arms procurement and defence. Almost all states have published information on their arms exports and imports in the form of national reports on arms exports or through their participation in regional or international reporting mechanisms at some point in the past 25 years (although in many cases the information covers only one or a few years).¹ As of 31 December 2017, 36 states had published at least one national report on arms exports since 1990.² As in 2015 and 2016, no state produced a national report on arms exports in 2017 that had not done so previously, and there were no significant developments in either the types of data included or the level of detail provided.³ A number of regional reporting instruments have been mandated or established (most notably in West Africa, the Americas and the European Union) since the early 1990s.⁴ No significant developments relating to these instruments took place in 2017. The main international reporting mechanisms in the field of international arms transfers are the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA) and the 2013 Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) reporting instrument. This section analyses the current status of these two instruments.

The United Nations Register of Conventional Arms

UNROCA was established in 1991 and reporting started in 1993 (for arms transfers in 1992). It aims to build confidence between states and 'to prevent the excessive and destabilizing accumulation of arms'.⁵ Each year all UN member states are 'requested' to report, on a voluntary basis, information on their exports and imports in the previous year of certain types of weapon, specifically those that are deemed to be 'the most lethal' or 'indispensable

¹ This section covers only public reporting instruments in the field of arms transfers. Confidential exchanges of information, such as those that occur within the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Wassenaar Arrangement, are not addressed.

² SIPRI collects all published national reports on arms transfers and makes them available in its National Reports Database on the SIPRI website.

³ Some states that do not publish a national report on their arms exports release data on the overall financial value of their arms exports. These states include India, Israel, Pakistan and Russia.

⁴ The main regional reporting instruments include (a) the instrument created under the 2006 Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and Other Related Materials; (b) instruments created by the Organization of American States; and (c) the European Union annual report. For further detail on these regional reporting instruments see Bromley, M. and Wezeman, S. T., 'Transparency in arms transfers', *SIPRI Yearbook 2016*, pp. 595–603.

⁵ UN General Assembly Resolution 46/36L, 9 Dec. 1991.

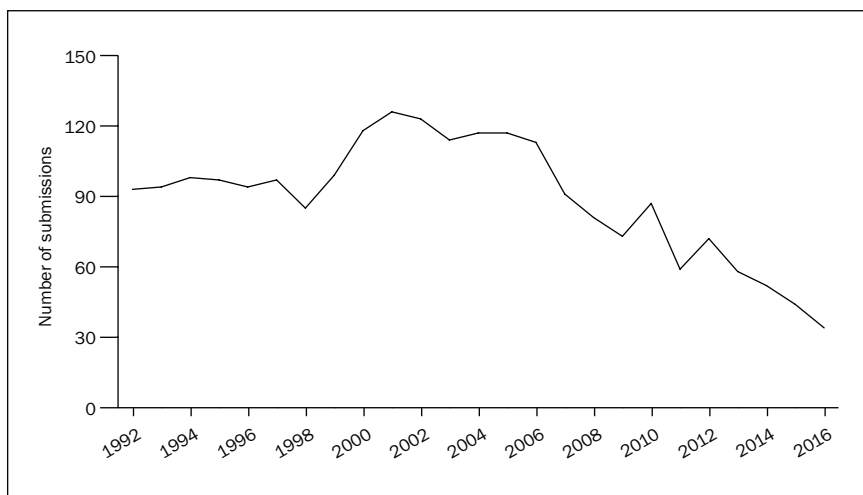


Figure 5.2. Number of submissions to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA), 1992–2016

Note: Years refer to the year covered by the report, not the year of its submission.

Source: UNROCA database.

for offensive operations'.⁶ Furthermore, states are 'invited' to provide additional background information on holdings of weapons and procurement from national production. Since 2003, states have also been 'invited' to provide background information on exports and imports of small arms and light weapons.

Reporting levels have decreased since the mid-2000s: over 100 states reported for each year between 2000 and 2006, compared with 44 for 2015 and 34 for 2016—the lowest level of reporting since the instrument was created (see figure 5.2). As in most years since 1993, the level of reporting for 2016 by states in Africa and the Middle East was very low: as of 31 December 2017, none of the 53 states in Africa and only 2 of the 15 states in the Middle East (i.e. 13 per cent) had submitted reports for that year. In other regions, there was an overall downward trend in reporting between 2012 and 2016 (see table 5.5).⁷ One of the main reasons behind this decline is the sharp fall in the number of states submitting 'nil reports' (i.e. a report indicating that the state neither exported nor imported major weapons in the relevant period). Nil reports accounted for over 50 per cent of all submissions for 2007. For

⁶ These weapons are: battle tanks, armoured combat vehicles, large-calibre artillery systems, combat aircraft, attack helicopters, warships, and missiles and missile launchers. The reports are made publicly available on the website of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA).

⁷ Findings are based on information from the UNROCA website; and United Nations, General Assembly, 'United Nations Register of Conventional Arms', Report of the Secretary-General, A/72/331, 14 Aug. 2017.

Table 5.5. Reports submitted to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and Arms Trade Treaty, by region, 2012–16

Years refer to the year covered by the report, not the year of its submission. Figures in parentheses are the shares (%) of states (UN member states or ATT states parties) in each region that have reported.

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<i>UNROCA</i>					
Africa	3 (6%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
Americas	11 (31%)	9 (26%)	8 (23%)	8 (23%)	3 (8.6%)
Asia	12 (41%)	5 (17%)	7 (24%)	5 (17%)	3 (10%)
Europe	43 (91%)	39 (83%)	36 (77%)	27 (57%)	28 (60%)
Middle East	1 (6.7%)	3 (20%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (13%)
Oceania	2 (14%)	1 (7.1%)	1 (7.1%)	3 (21%)	0 (0%)
Total	72 (37%)	58 (30%)	52 (27%)	44 (23%)	34 (18%)
<i>ATT</i>					
Africa	..	..	..	4 (57%)	6 (46%)
Americas	..	..	..	8 (47%)	6 (30%)
Asia	..	..	..	1 (100%)	1 (100%)
Europe	..	..	..	32 (94%)	34 (92%)
Middle East	..	..	..	..	..
Oceania	..	..	..	3 (100%)	2 (50%)
Total	..	..	..	48 (79%)	49 (65%)

.. = not available or not applicable; ATT = Arms Trade Treaty; UNROCA = United Nations Register of Conventional Arms.

Sources: UNROCA database; reports on UNROCA by the UN Secretary-General to the UN General Assembly, various years; and reports by the ATT Secretariat, various years.

2014 the figure was 23 per cent, for 2015 it was 32 per cent, and for 2016 it was 6 per cent (representing only two nil reports).

Notably, certain states that are known to have exported weapons covered by UNROCA in 2015, 2016 or both years did not report for either one or both of those years. States falling into this category include China, France, Israel and Italy, all of which—according to SIPRI data—are among the world’s largest arms-exporting countries (see section I).

The Arms Trade Treaty reporting instrument

Article 13 of the ATT obliges its states parties to provide annual reports on ‘authorized or actual exports and imports of conventional arms’, following a format similar to that of UNROCA.⁸ States parties have invested significant effort in developing the reporting process: they have agreed to adopt templates for submissions and established a working group on transparency

⁸ For a summary and other details of the ATT see annex A, section I, in this volume. On developments in the ATT in 2017 see chapter 10, section I, in this volume.

and reporting to examine reporting-related issues. During 2017 the working group developed a guidance document—which was endorsed at the third ATT Conference of States Parties in 2017—to inform states parties’ practices and encourage more timely and complete submission of reports.⁹ Nonetheless, reporting has been far from universal, and it declined in 2017.

By 31 December 2017, 49 of the 75 states parties (65 per cent) that were due to submit an annual report on their arms exports and imports during 2016 had done so.¹⁰ Only 28 (37 per cent) had done so before the mandated deadline of 31 May 2017. This represents a decline on the previous year in both the proportion of states submitting annual reports and the proportion doing so before the mandated deadline. By 31 December 2017, 48 of the 61 states parties (79 per cent) that were due to submit an annual report on their arms exports and imports during 2015 had done so.¹¹ A total of 28 (46 per cent) had done so before the mandated deadline of 31 May 2016. An independent analysis of the reasons for non-compliance with the requirement to submit these ATT reports highlighted a number of contributing factors, including the availability of the information, a lack of capacity and coordination among government agencies, and concerns about the sensitivity of the information.¹²

To date, the impact of the ATT reporting instrument on overall levels of transparency in the international arms trade appears to be mixed. On the one hand, there are signs that becoming a state party to the ATT is encouraging states to make data available on arms transfers that they had not previously provided to UNROCA. In their ATT reports on arms transfers in 2015, for example, Austria, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic and Liberia provided information on small arms transfers; these countries have never submitted this type of information to UNROCA.¹³ On the other hand, there are also signs of states showing a growing interest in making their ATT national reports available only to other states parties. The ATT does not stipulate that the annual reports on arms exports and imports will be made public, and the

⁹ Arms Trade Treaty, Working Group on Transparency and Reporting, ‘Co-chairs’ draft report to CSP3, ATT/CSP3.WGTR/2017/CHAIR/159/Conf.Rep, 31 July 2017, Annex D, ‘Reporting authorized or actual exports and imports of conventional arms: questions and answers’.

¹⁰ Arms Trade Treaty Secretariat, ‘Reporting’, 8 Mar. 2018. Greece also submitted a report despite not being required to do so.

¹¹ Liberia, Paraguay and Switzerland also submitted reports despite not being required to do so.

¹² Holtom, P. and Stohl, R., *Reporting in Review: Examining ATT Reporting Experiences* (Arms Trade Treaty-Baseline Assessment Project: Washington, DC, Aug. 2017), p. 15.

¹³ Holtom, P. and Pavesi, I., *Trade Update 2017: Out of the Shadows* (Small Arms Survey: Geneva, Sep. 2017), p. 13.

ATT template—unlike the UNROCA template—asks states to specify if the report should be made public or distributed only to other states parties. Only one state (Slovakia) chose not to make its report on transfers in 2015 publicly available. However, three states (Liberia, Panama and Senegal) chose to keep their reports on arms exports and imports during 2016 confidential. All of these states had made their 2015 reports publicly available.