

**Forum:** General Assembly 1

**Issue:** Question of the transparency of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA)

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## Introduction

Rearmament is defined as the process of building new stock of military weapons, and it is a clear threat to preservation world peace as military tension builds up between neighbouring nations. Possession of weapons corresponds to potential damage caused to other nations during warfare. Therefore, naturally, if countries start rearming themselves, preserved peace and trust between countries will start to unstabilized. In the past, rearmament was the cause of disturbance to preservation of peace, but now, situations have changed due to the mass production of weaponry. Although the country may not rearm themselves, they already have stockpiles of weapons that could cause massive destruction if used during a war.

This indicates that safety is never assured in this world anymore as the only thing that prevents a country from waging war is the the possible military retaliation of other countries. Deterrence cannot be the ultimate solution for world peace as if one country decides to launch a war, there will be unprecedented destruction as a consequence. In order to truly preserve peace in the world, disarmament, the act of reducing stockpile of weapons, is strongly encouraged for member nations. The United Nations has held numerous conferences regarding the issue of disarmament and its importance, convincing nations to participate in the creation of sustainable peace. However, for the purpose of national security and other reasons, majority of nations are not wholly complying to the disarmament program initiated by the United Nations.

Therefore, as an alternative method, the United Nation proposed "Transparency In Armament", which is a program that encourages countries to report their armament status on certain weapon to the United Nations. This way, it would be possible to reduce the military tension created by uncertainty on the armament status between countries, increasing the chance of creation of a more collaborative and peaceful atmosphere in the world.

## Definition of Key Terms

### UNROCA

United Nations Register of Conventional Arms is an organization that is part of the UNODA. Countries are meant to send in annual reports on their arms trade status to the UNROCA. According to the website, the UNROCA has captured 90% of the global arms trade.

### UNODA

United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs is a specialized agency within the United Nations that is in charge of preserving peace through disarmament. The UNROCA is a department within the UNODA.

### Conventional Arms

Conventional Arms refer to weapons that are widely utilized during a war and cause great damage. The UNROCA classifies 7 weapons as conventional arms: battle tanks, armoured combat vehicles, large-calibre artillery system, combat aircraft and unmanned combat aerial vehicles, attack helicopters, warships, and missiles.

### Small arms

Small arms refer to portable weapons such as revolvers, rifles, and assault rifles

### Light weapons

Light weapons refer to range of middle sized and explosive weapons such as machine guns and rocket launchers.

### Transparency

In armament context, transparency refers to the honesty of countries' reports. If the report is transparent, it means that the country has correctly identified the number of weapons it has exported or imported.

### Transfer of Arms

This refers to a trade of conventional or small arms between countries, which is meant to be reported to the UNROCA.

## Background Information

### *Transparency in Armaments*

Transparency in Armaments is a program established resolution passed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1991. This program emphasized the need for transparency in armaments for preservation of peace, and encourage many countries to submit annual reports on their armament status. 170 countries have submitted a report since 1991, but many countries have not consistently submitted reports due to the non-binding nature of the resolution.

### *Purpose of UNROCA*

The United Nations Register of Conventional Arms constructs trust between countries as through they can see how much armament has taken place through the transparent report. In theory, through this, countries are able to build a better diplomatic relationship with each other as the existence of secret armament is unlikely if the reports are accurate.

Furthermore, the reports compares the armament status of various countries, which means that accurate comparison on armament status can be made. This pressures countries with large influx of weapons to put a restraint on their imports and accumulation of weapons as they might be a target of international criticism.

However, unlike its intended purpose, the UNROCA is currently unable to accurately capture the status of armament trade due to various reasons such as inconsistency and inaccuracy of the reports. At the moment, unfortunately, this report does not have viable significance in preservation of world peace.

## Key Issues

### *Inconsistency of reports*

Every country is strongly advised to submit an annual report to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms as the United Nation has to keep a track on the trade of armament for them to keep the transparency within armament status of different countries. Therefore, when this program began, the the participation of countries was extremely high as the significance of disarmament was repeatedly emphasized in the world. However, as years went by, the annual reports submitted by countries rapidly diminished reaching 26 in 2017. This lack of engagement and consistency represents the low value that countries have in this report. Because of this inconsistency in amount of reports, it is not possible to

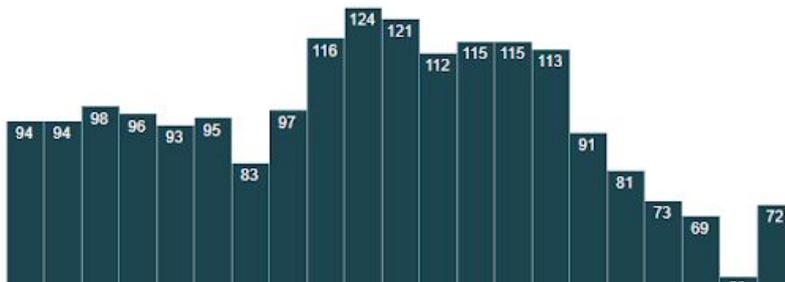
accurately identify the trade of armament, which means that the countries have to put more effort into sending in consistent reports for effectiveness of this program.

### Participation statistics

Select regional group

All

Submitted reports by regional group



### *Inaccuracy of reports*

There are categories of conventional set by the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) for countries to fill in when submitting these reports. By covering these categories, it is possible to track the approximate armament status of countries. However, it is only possible to accurately capture the transparency of armament trade if the countries report the correct value in the reports. Many countries do not report the entirely accurate figures to the UNROCA due to different reasons, and this lack of honesty in reporting ruins the transparency element of the report, leading to accumulation of inaccurate information. This defies the whole purpose of such a report, and often leads to increase in tension in an area if a country is found out to be lying.

### *Non binding agreement*

Despite the good intentions of the report, the resolution was voted by the general assembly, which means the countries are not binded to not follow the agreements reached by the resolutions. This means that countries do not have to submit reports regarding their armament trade to the United Nations. This is the biggest drawback of UNROCA. Due to the its non-binding nature, it is not possible to annually obtain information from different countries, which caused inconsistency problem that was aforementioned. If every country was required to submit annual reports to the United Nations, it would be a lot easier to accurately track the armament trade.

### *Different interpretation*

There are 7 categories (battle tanks, armoured combat vehicles, large-calibre artillery system, combat aircraft and unmanned combat aerial vehicles, attack helicopters, warships, and missiles) that

classify conventional weapons, and the countries have to report statistics on these required categories. However, every country has different ways to classify weapons. For example, a vehicle might be classified as a tank in one country and an armoured combat vehicle in another country. This means that what the UNROCA classify as a conventional weapon might not be considered a conventional weapon from a country's standard. Because of these possible different (intended or unintended) interpretations, incorrect values are reported to the UNROCA. If there is a detailed classification method created by the United Nations, such confusion will not affect the accuracy of the report.

### ***Small scope of categories***

There are a numerous variety of conventional weapons that are traded between countries, but the UNROCA only requires statistics on the 7 major conventional weapons. This means that the reports will not be able to record the trade of all conventional arms. Although the scope has recently extended to small arms and light weapons, the focus of the report is still largely on conventional weapons. Such a narrow scoped review will not give the full picture of a country's armament status, which means increasing threats may not be detected by the UNROCA. Therefore, a larger scope has to be covered by the UNROCA to detect all the possible threats caused by trade of weapons between countries.

## **Timeline of Events**

| <b>Date</b>     | <b>Description of event</b>  |
|-----------------|--|
| 9 December 1991 | The General Assembly passes a resolution that called for the creation of "Transparency in Armament". This program encouraged member nations to provide an annual report on transfer of conventional weapons between countries. |

## **UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events**

The United Nations has specialized agencies to monitor and supervise the transfer of weapons. They also try to track military holding and national legislation related to military. However, all of United Nations' efforts depend on the honesty of the reports sent by countries. Relevant UN articles in this regard include:

- Transparency in Armament (**A/RES/52/316**)

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