

Cost

The question of the cost of establishing and running a light weapons register is one which is hard to answer with great precision. Costs will be dependent upon the scope of the register and whether it is global or regional. The more participants, the greater may be the economies of scale in handling data but still, in absolute terms, the volume of data to be handled will necessitate more facilities and hence more costs.

Costs will fall into two areas: costs incurred to establish and run the register, and costs to each participating country associated with the collation of raw national input data for the international register. The former costs can be estimated as part of the establishment process for whatever size of bureaucracy would be needed to set up and run the register.

National costs, however, will be dependent upon the licencing, export and domestic regulations relating to small arms already in existence in the particular nation. In a country such as Canada, the United Kingdom or Japan, existing control agencies and mechanisms may make it relatively simple to provide data. Incremental costs may be, relatively speaking, fairly minimal. On the other hand, in other countries, some data initially will not be available due to the lack of firearms ownership and usage controls, the introduction of which may be expensive or impractical to implement. In that case, the national cost of participation may be lower but the data provided (if at all) will be of lower quality and less complete, thus mitigating against the effectiveness of the register. These national costs may, for economic or cultural reasons, preclude complete participation by a particular country.

Operating costs of a register could be kept to the minimum by using existing data base formats, by maximizing electronic information exchange and by employing readily available commercial computer software. In this regard, the experience of other agreements can illustrate lessons for a future light weapons register.

In the case of the CFE Treaty, a computerized data base program was devised by NATO Headquarters' Verification Co-ordinating Committee staff for NATO member nations to track the inventory of former Warsaw Pact participants. This database consists of a dedicated central network server to which each of the NATO, and later Co-operation Partner, nations have access to track weapon inventories provided under the terms of the CFE Treaty. Some problems arose as a result of rapid changes to the software program (in response to lessons learned and a natural desire for improvement) and with the lack of electronic links from some of the less advanced states parties. As well, the initial Treaty wording did not allow the exchange of information to be done electronically and this became the cause of further negotiation among participants.⁴⁵ The OSCE set up a dedicated computer communications network to handle inspection notifications and data exchanges. It also became a useful tool for Vienna Document-related communications on a number of subjects. Based on this experience, it is advisable that any future light weapons