

A better approach for the register might be to focus on the *arms* once seized rather than upon trying to capture information about the illicit *transactions*. Once arms are apprehended as a result of police or other work and taken into custody by a state, they assume a "legal" status. Such confiscated weapons can be subsequently stored or traded. As well, much current thinking appears to recommend wholesale destruction of light weapons as a desirable, if not a mandatory approach, to bring down levels of light weapon stocks.³⁸ In other cases, states may prefer to add them to their own inventory to bolster existing armament levels of the domestic security forces or to sell the seized weapons for scarce foreign currency.

Any register, then, should allow for the recording of stocks taken into custody and their subsequent disposition whether destroyed, sold or stored by the apprehending authority. In this way, reporting in a register the number of weapons seized may provide the best way of gauging the magnitude of the illicit problem. Such an entry could have the positive effect of allowing states to draw attention to their actions and could also permit some examination of the scope of illicit arms trafficking or evaluation of measures taken against this problem in the region covered by the register.

THE ORGANIZATION OF A REGISTER

A Consultative Mechanism

One might assume that the umbrella agreement under which any light arms register is instituted will include some mechanism for oversight of the operation of the register and consultation among the parties. Such a mechanism would allow for assessment of whether or not the aims of the agreement are being met. This is common in the case of arrangements such as the CFE Treaty and the Vienna Document (albeit that they are done in different forums with differing aims). Typically, this could take the form of a periodic review of the operation of the register, an annual report of its effectiveness and/or a forum to discuss modifications or technical issues which are beyond the purview of a secretariat to resolve.

Additionally, the consultative mechanism should allow for questions and clarifications from one participant to another to be discussed among states in a routine manner. Such a mechanism would add to the confidence building utility of the register by allowing participants to query and to explain their concerns as well as the rationale for their actions. To do this, it may be necessary to provide for meetings on an as-required basis in addition to any periodic review. It would be helpful if the resources of the register's secretariat and the register data itself were available to support this mechanism. This would suggest that there would be benefits if the data in a light weapons register was continually updated so as to be available for compilation and distribution when required.³⁹