

Recipients

Recipient countries are likely to view any proposal from supplier nations with suspicion. Measures would have to be taken to assure them that producing nations are complying with the register and are equally affected by it, perhaps by incorporating other factors such as production into the register.

Comprehensiveness and Secrecy

Some governments will be unwilling to reveal information about their arms transfers, and others will be unaware of covert transactions. In this sense no register can hope to be comprehensive. In the long run however, the existence of a register might make secrecy more difficult. It might also increase the international pressure on countries choosing not to cooperate with the register.

Military Budgets

The effort to bring about reductions in national military budgets at the United Nations provides a useful analogy. As a preliminary step the UN has established standard reporting methods for military budgets and has required states to report their annual expenditures accordingly. Twenty-one countries have so reported, including Canada.

Conclusions

The establishment of an arms register in and of itself has merit. The lack of standard, accepted information on such matters as military expenditures, troop movements and troop strengths has consistently been a problem in attempts to control them. The MBFR talks have struggled for years to establish an agreed upon database of information on the force deployments of NATO and the Warsaw Pact in Europe. A register of arms transfers, if successful, could therefore provide a model of cooperation that might be useful in other areas.

Questions about the effect of arms purchases on developing economies and on regional stability have been the subject of international debate since the early 1970s. An arms register could contribute significantly to this debate by providing reliable information for further study and monitoring. It could also lead to agreement on controls on arms transfers, although this should not be the immediate objective.

On the other hand, there is no consensus amongst states that such a register is desirable. Means of verification of the data provided would