

Part A

United Nations Publications

1. Report of the Secretary General. *Study on the Ways and Means of Promoting Transparency in International Transfers of Conventional Arms*. UN General Assembly Document A/46/301, September 9, 1991.

Prepared by the 1991 Panel of Experts between January 1990 and July 1991, this document is the first study devoted to international arms transfers. Its authors hope to "...encourage prudent restraint by states in their arms export and import policies and to reduce the risks of misunderstandings, suspicion or tension resulting from lack of information concerning arms transfers" (p. 2).

The report examines several aspects of international arms transfers. First, past and current proposals and practices to promote transparency or regulate arms transfers (e.g. the League of Nations following the First World War). Second, the reasons for, and the consequences of, arms transfers (e.g. supplier states sell surplus weapons to defray the costs of research and development). Third, the trends in international transfers of conventional arms (e.g. the volume of arms traffic has been in decline since the middle of the 1980s). Fourth, the relationship between arms transfers, security, arms limitation and disarmament. Fifth, the purposes and objectives of promoting transparency (e.g. build confidence and security). Included in this section are several measures to implement transparency (e.g. a bilateral arrangement where participants inform one another of planned and executed arms acquisitions). Sixth, the role of transparency in facilitating limitations in arms transfers (e.g. it reduces the risk of misperceptions and makes it possible to have security with fewer armaments). Seventh, the illicit arms trade.

The final section relates the Panel's conclusions and recommendations. In addition to making a plea to governments to work together to end the illicit arms trade, the Panel concludes that arms transfers cannot be considered as necessarily destabilizing. However, they relate that both supplier and recipient governments have a special responsibility to work together to prevent excessive and destabilizing accumulations of arms. Moreover, they maintain that openness can promote restraint in the arms trade. As a result, the Panel calls for the establishment, under UN auspices, of a system to collect, process and publish official standardized information on arms transfers. This register would complement the information already available through the UN on military expenditures. The Panel recommends that this register have the following characteristics: first, it should be set up on a universal and non-discriminatory basis; second, it should be designed so as to permit prompt implementation; third, participation should be universal; fourth, its parameters should allow standardized and comparable input from all states; fifth, it should build confidence, promote restraint in arms transfers on a unilateral, bilateral or multilateral basis and allow timely identification of trends in arms transfers; and, finally, it should have the potential to expand to more comprehensive coverage (e.g. to include military holdings and procurement through national production).