

REPORTING TO THE UNITED NATIONS REGISTER OF CONVENTIONAL ARMS FOR 2017

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In October 2018 the United Nations released its annual report on submissions by member states to the UN Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA).¹ These submissions detailed their imports and exports of arms in 2017. This was the 26th annual report—UNROCA was established in 1991 and reporting started in 1993 with data for 1992.²

UNROCA aims to enhance confidence between states and ‘to prevent the excessive and destabilizing accumulation of arms’.³ The UN considers it a ‘key confidence-building measure’ that ‘may encourage restraint’ in the transfer and production of arms and ‘can contribute to preventive diplomacy’.⁴ To fulfil those aims, each year all UN member states are requested, on a voluntary basis, to provide UNROCA with information on the previous year’s actual exports and imports of seven specific categories of arms that are deemed ‘indispensable to offensive operations’.⁵ These seven categories are (I) battle tanks, (II) armoured combat vehicles, (III) large-calibre artillery systems, (IV) combat aircraft, (V) attack helicopters, (VI) warships, and (VII) missiles and missile launchers.⁶ The UN envisaged that, over the years, UNROCA would develop into a fully fledged, non-discriminatory reporting mechanism of all offensive arms and systems.⁷

¹ United Nations, General Assembly, ‘United Nations Register of Conventional Arms’, Report of the Secretary-General, A/73/185, 18 July 2018. Most, but not all, reports by member states that are included in this annual report, as well as member state reports from earlier years, can be found in the UNROCA database, <<https://www.unroca.org/>>.

² The annual reports since 2000 are available on the website of the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), ‘UN Register of Conventional Arms’, <<https://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/register/>>, accessed 22 Mar. 2019.

³ UN General Assembly Resolution 46/36 L, ‘Transparency in armaments’, 9 Dec. 1991, A/RES/46/36, para. 2.

⁴ UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (note 2).

⁵ United Nations, General Assembly, Report on the continuing operation of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and its further development, A/71/259, 29 July 2016, para. 61(g). The most recent request was UN General Assembly Resolution 71/44, ‘Transparency in armaments’, 5 Dec. 2016, A/RES/71/44, 9 Dec. 2016.

⁶ In addition, states are invited to submit information on their holdings and procurement from domestic production of arms within the 7 categories. In 2006–16 they were invited to report on their imports and exports of small arms and light weapons (SALW). Since 2017, SALW data has been requested under a ‘7+1’ categories formula. This paper focuses on the reporting of exports and imports of the 7 main categories.

⁷ On the origins of and ideas behind UNROCA, see Laurance, E. J., Wezeman, S. T. and Wulf, H., *Arms Watch: SIPRI Report on the First Year of the UN Register of Conventional Arms*, SIPRI Research Report no. 6 (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1993).

SUMMARY

● Since 1993 states have been asked to annually report exports and imports of major arms to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA) as a transparency mechanism to prevent destabilizing accumulations of arms. UNROCA has been a partial success with most states participating at least once since 1993.

However, reporting to UNROCA has never been universal and has in recent years dropped to barely 25 per cent of UN member states—the lowest levels since 1993. Participation from states in regions with international tensions and conflict has been particularly low. UNROCA reports also continue to suffer from various quality problems.

This paper focuses on reporting for 2017, the most recent reporting year, as indicative for both the problems of participation and quality. Despite the problems and ‘competition’ from a similar reporting system under the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), UNROCA remains the only global transparency instrument for arms transfers. However, it needs to be reinvigorated and expanded in scope.

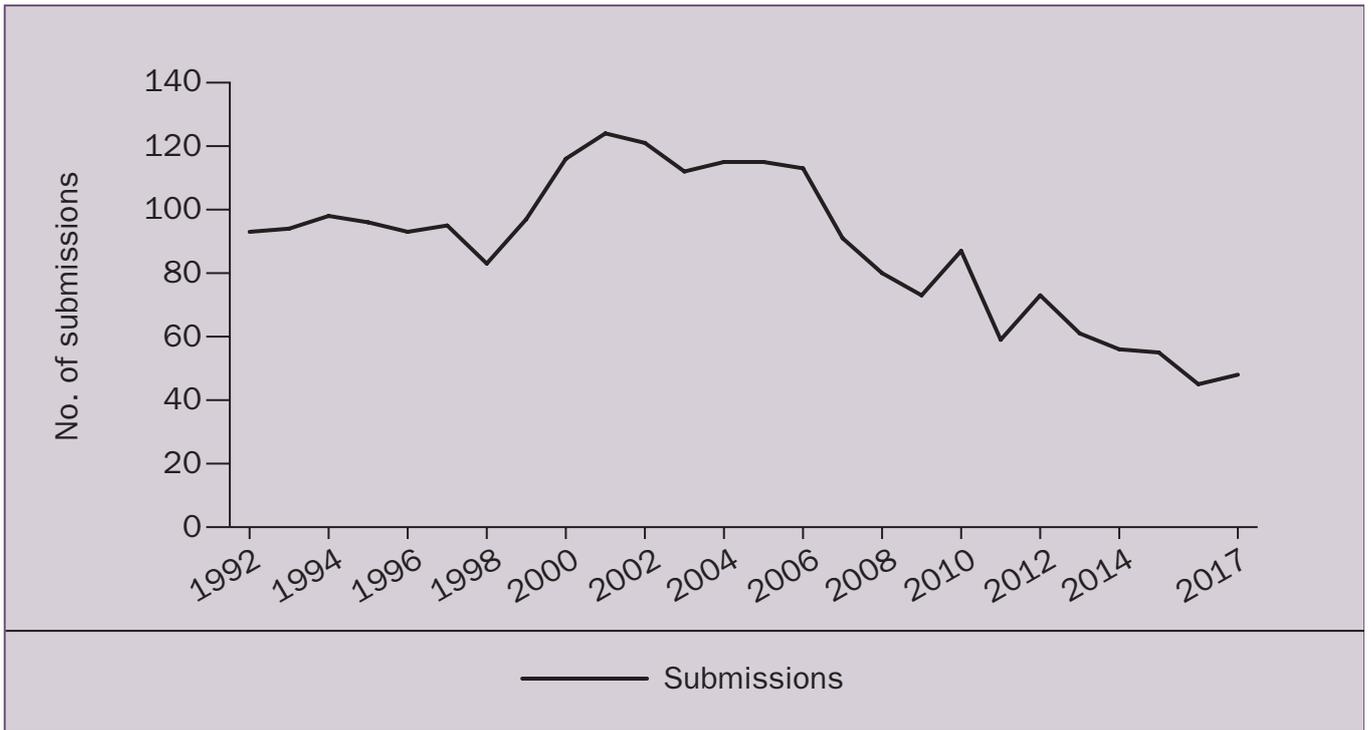


Figure 1. Number of submissions to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA), 1992–2017

Note: The year refers to the year covered by the reports, not the year of submission. Submissions by the Cook Islands and Niue, both self-governing states associated with New Zealand, are excluded.

Sources: UNROCA database, <<https://www.unroca.org/>>; and UNROCA annual reports, <<https://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/register/>>.

Since its inception in 1993, UNROCA has been a partial success. According to the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), which administers the register, more than 170 member states have reported to UNROCA. The UNODA estimates that UNROCA probably captures over 90 per cent of the global arms trade.⁸ However, UNROCA has also failed. The figure of 170 states represents states that have reported at least once since 1993; the annual rate of reporting has been much lower. In recent years, participation levels have dropped to all-time lows, especially among the importers. Capturing the estimated 90 per cent of global arms trade has been possible only because the main exporters have reported in most years. At the same time, the questionable quality of the submissions by states, identified since the register’s early years, has seen little or no improvement.⁹

However, the fact remains that UNROCA is still the only global transparency instrument for arms transfers. Even with the low level of responses and the many problems with the content, it is still a valuable and necessary instrument, especially in the context of growing tensions in many parts of the world. This paper gives an overview of reporting trends (in section I), assesses the quality of reporting for 2017 (in section II),

⁸ UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (note 2).

⁹ Groups of governmental experts (GGEs) are regularly appointed to review these and other issues, including in 2019, but few of their suggestions have been implemented. The most recent report is United Nations, A/71/259 (note 5). Most other GGE reports can be found at UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, ‘Expert group’.

**Table 1.** Reports submitted to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA), by region, 2013–17

Region ^a	No. of states	2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
		No. of reports	Share of states (%)	No. of reports	Share of states (%)	No. of reports	Share of states (%)	No. of reports	Share of states (%)	No. of reports	Share of states (%)
Africa	54	1	1.9	–	–	2	3.7	1	1.9	1	1.9
Americas	35	9	25.7	8	22.9	8	22.9	5	14.3	4	11.4
Asia	28	7	25.0	8	28.6	7	25.0	5	17.9	5	17.9
Europe	47	41	87.2	37	78.7	32	68.1	32	70.2	36	76.6
Middle East	15	3	20.0	2	13.3	1	6.7	2	13.3	1	6.7
Oceania	14	1	7.1	1	7.1	5	35.7	–	–	1	7.1
Total	193	62	32.1	56	29.0	55	28.5	45	23.3	48	24.9

– = zero.

Notes: The year refers to the year covered by the reports, not the year of submission.

^a For definitions of the regions see SIPRI, ‘Regional coverage’.

Sources: UNROCA database, <<https://www.unroca.org/>>; and UNROCA annual reports, <<https://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/register/>>.

and concludes (in section III) by highlighting both the strengths and the weaknesses of UNROCA.

I. Reporting trends

Reporting to UNROCA reached its highest level in 2001, when 124 states reported. Between 2002 and 2006 the annual reporting level remained above 100 states, but since 2007 it has dropped below the level of the register’s initial years (see figure 1). For the most recent two years (2016 and 2017), fewer than 50 states have reported—less than 25 per cent of the 193 UN member states (see table 1).

Reporting rates from member states in Africa and the Middle East—two regions with multiple conflicts and high interstate tensions—have been low since UNROCA was established and have declined even further in recent years. Reporting rates in Oceania have also dropped: only one member state reported for 2017.

Participation for 2017

The 2017 annual report includes data (including ‘nil’ reports) on both imports and exports from the 36 UN member states that made submissions in time for the report.¹⁰ Another four countries had filed their submissions in a discontinued UN database and were probably therefore overlooked for the annual report.¹¹ As in previous years, several countries made submissions

¹⁰ A nil report records that no imports or exports were made. The total for 2017 includes Luxembourg, which in 2017 submitted a ‘rolling’ nil report for 2016 and in advance for 2017.

¹¹ These 4 countries are Austria, Moldova, Monaco and Mongolia. The old database is still online at <<http://www.un-register.org/ReportingStatus/Nationalreports.aspx>>. For unknown reasons,



Table 2. Reporting to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA) by the largest importers of major arms, 2013–17

Rank for 2013–17	State	2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
		Report	Annual rank								
<i>Top 10 importers for the five-year period 2013–17</i>											
1	India	✘	1	✓	1	✓	2	✘	1	✓	2
2	Saudi Arabia	✘	3	✘	2	✘	1	✘	2	✘	1
3	Egypt	✘	11	✘	20	✘	4	✘	5	✘	3
4	UAE	✘	2	✘	9	✘	6	✘	6	✘	7
5	China	✓	4	✓	6	✓	7	✓	8	✓	6
6	Australia	✓	26	✓	8	✘	3	✘	9	✓	4
7	Algeria	✘	22	✘	19	✘	9	✘	3	✘	10
8	Iraq	✘	20	✘	14	✘	5	✘	4	✘	9
9	Pakistan	✓	5	✓	10	✓	10	✘	11	✘	14
10	Viet Nam	✘	18	✓	4	✘	8	✓	12	✘	13
Total reporting by top 10 for 2013–17			3		5		3		2		3
<i>Importers that ranked in the annual top 10 in at least one year in 2013–17</i>											
11	Indonesia	✘	7	✘	5	✘	17	✘	21	✘	5
12	Turkey	✓	8	✘	83	✘	19	✓	23	✓	23
13	South Korea	✓	31	✘	11	✘	27	✘	7	✘	8
15	United States	✓	10	✓	17	✓	16	✓	16	✓	18
20	Qatar	✘	50	✘	56	✘	15	✘	10	✘	16
21	Singapore	✘	9	✓	52	✓	40	✓	14	✓	22
26	Venezuela	✘	6	✘	33	✘	36	✘	44	✘	(.) ^a
Total reporting by annual top 10 importers			4		5		3		1		3

✓ = Reported to UNROCA; ✘ = Did not report to UNROCA; UAE = United Arab Emirates.

Notes: Listed are the 17 states that were among the 10 largest importers of major arms (as defined by SIPRI) in at least one year of the period 2013–17. They are ranked in the first column by their total imports over the period 2013–17 based on the SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.

^a Venezuela had no known imports of major arms in 2017.

Sources: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, Mar. 2019, <<https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>>; UNROCA database, <<https://www.unroca.org/>>; and UNROCA annual reports, <<https://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/register/>>.



after the deadline for the report. By mid March 2019, 8 additional countries had reported for 2017, making a total of 48 states.¹² Three-quarters of these states are in Europe (see table 1).

Participation in UNROCA by the large importers has been low. Of the 10 largest importers of major arms for the period 2013–17, only 3 reported for 2017 (see table 2).¹³ Together the top 10 importers for 2013–17 accounted for 52 per cent of the total volume of imports of major arms over the five-year period; but the 3 importers that reported to UNROCA accounted for only 20 per cent. Similarly, of the top 10 importers for 2017 alone, only 3 reported to UNROCA. For the individual years 2013–16, the number varied between one and five.

Participation by the large exporters has been much better. Nine of the 10 largest exporters for the period 2013–17 reported for 2017 (see table 3). Only Israel had not reported by mid March 2019. Together, the top 10 exporters for 2013–17 accounted for 89 per cent of the total volume of exports of major arms over the five-year period; the 9 that reported to UNROCA accounted for 86 per cent. Similarly, of the top 10 exporters for 2017 alone, 9 reported to UNROCA. For the individual years 2013–16, this varied between seven and nine.

For 2017, 29 states reported actual exports and 30 states reported actual imports.¹⁴ The 29 exporters named 86 states as recipients of their exports. This means that, according to the exporter reports, 45 per cent of UN member states were importers of arms in the seven UNROCA categories in 2017. However, only 33 of these 86 recipients submitted a report to UNROCA. Of these 33 states, 18 reported actual imports and 15 reported nil imports. Conversely, the 30 importers named 27 states as suppliers for their imports. Of these 27 suppliers, 21 submitted a report to UNROCA. Of these, 19 reported actual exports and 2 reported nil exports.

Thus, while exporters tend to participate in UNROCA, importers do not. This can be further demonstrated by comparing the ‘lines’ of submissions by importers with those from exporters, where a line is a single entry of a transfer in a submission.¹⁵ Only 11 of 83 importer lines came from exporters that did not participate, while no fewer than 153 of the 306 exporter lines were to importers that did not participate.

The high level of participation of the large exporters and the additional information submitted by smaller exporters supports UNODA’s claim that UNROCA has probably captured over 90 per cent of the global arms trade, even in recent years when total participation was low. However, the data

Low participation, especially from countries in regions with tensions and conflicts, is the largest problem for UNROCA

reports by Belarus, Greece and Italy are included in the annual report but can be found in neither the old database nor the current UNROCA database (note 1).

¹² The 8 states are Azerbaijan, China, France, Hungary, India, Ireland, the Netherlands and Senegal.

¹³ The largest importers are identified by SIPRI from a variety of open sources. Wezeman, S. T. et al., ‘Developments in arms transfers, 2017’, *SIPRI Yearbook 2018: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2018), pp. 191–212; and SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, Mar. 2019, <<https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>>.

¹⁴ These figures do not include states that submitted nil reports. Japan reported exports but these were clearly imports registered incorrectly. They are counted as imports here.

¹⁵ E.g. Poland’s report for 2017 has 4 lines for Category I arms: a line for 23 units to Czechia, a line for 3 to Germany, a line for 1 to the USA and another line for 7 different Category I items to the USA. UNROCA database, ‘Poland 2017’.

Table 3. Reporting to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA) by the largest exporters of major arms, 2013–17

Rank for 2013–17	State	2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
		Report	Annual rank								
<i>Top 10 importers for the five-year period 2013–17</i>											
1	United States	✓	2	✓	1	✓	1	✓	1	✓	1
2	Russia	✓	1	✓	2	✓	2	✓	2	✓	2
3	France	✓	5	✓	5	✗	3	✗	5	✓	3
4	Germany	✓	7	✓	3	✓	5	✓	3	✓	4
5	China	✓	3	✓	6	✓	4	✓	4	✓	7
6	United Kingdom	✓	4	✓	4	✓	6	✗	7	✓	6
7	Spain	✓	8	✓	7	✓	7	✗	11	✓	9
8	Israel	✗	10	✓	11	✓	8	✗	6	✗	5
9	Italy	✓	6	✓	8	✗	9	✗	8	✓	10
10	Netherlands	✓	12	✓	9	✓	11	✓	10	✓	8
Total reporting by top 10 for 2013–17			9		10		8		9		9
<i>Importers that ranked in the annual top 10 in at least one year in 2013–17</i>											
11	Ukraine	✗	9	✗	10	✗	13	✓	12	✓	12
12	South Korea	✓	13	✗	17	✗	20	✗	9	✗	11
13	Switzerland	✓	17	✓	12	✗	10	✓	15	✓	14
Total reporting by annual top 10 importers			8		9		7		8		9

✓ = Reported to UNROCA; ✗ = Did not report to UNROCA.

Notes: Listed are the 13 states that were among the 10 largest exporters of major arms (as defined by SIPRI) in at least one year of the period 2013–17. They are ranked in the first column by their total exports over the period 2013–17 based on the SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.

Sources: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, Mar. 2019, <<https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>>; UNROCA database, <<https://www.unroca.org/>>; and UNROCA annual reports, <<https://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/register/>>.

provided by importers represents substantially less than 50 per cent of the global arms trade.

Comparing UNROCA with similar multilateral mechanisms

UNROCA is not the only multilateral instrument to provide publicly available official data on arms imports and exports. The 2013 Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) has a similar reporting system.¹⁶ In addition, the states participating

¹⁶ Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), opened for signature 3 June 2013, entered into force 24 Dec. 2014.



in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) have had a system of sharing their annual reports to UNROCA since 1997; in 2016 the OSCE agreed to make these reports publicly available.¹⁷

The ATT is the first legally binding international agreement to establish standards regulating the trade in conventional arms and preventing illicit arms transfers.¹⁸ The ATT includes an annual obligation for all states parties to provide the ATT Secretariat with data on imports and exports of arms for the previous year. The minimum required data on actual transfers of major arms and the reporting format are almost identical to those of UNROCA: each ATT state party may report transfers of ‘arms’ as it defines them, but this definition must include all arms covered by the seven UNROCA categories.¹⁹ This similarity makes it possible to not only compare the UNROCA and ATT response rates (for those UN member states that are party to the treaty), but also to compare the content of the reports.²⁰

For 2017, 89 states parties to the ATT were obliged to provide data.²¹ By March 2019, 54 states parties had reported, including 4 for which the report is not public. Thus, with 61 per cent of state parties reporting, the ATT response rate for 2017 is substantially higher than the 25 per cent for UNROCA.

All but 1 of the 36 ATT states parties that reported to UNROCA also reported to the ATT. As would be expected, where a state reported to both UNROCA and the ATT, the contents of its ATT report differs only marginally from its UNROCA report. However, 18 ATT states parties that are also UN members reported to the ATT but did not report to UNROCA. It seems that, although many states managed to collect and provide data to the ATT, many also failed to provide that same data to UNROCA.

Of the 56 OSCE participating states that are also UN member states, 38 submitted reports to the OSCE for 2017.²² Seven of these did not report to UNROCA. However, 9 OSCE participating states did not report to the OSCE but did report to UNROCA. Thus, a total of 40 OSCE states reported to UNROCA for 2017.

¹⁷ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Forum for Security Co-operation, ‘Enabling the publication of information exchanges in the field of small arms and light weapons, conventional arms transfers and anti-personnel mines’, Decision no. 4/16, FSC. DEC/4/16/Corr.1, 21 Sep. 2016.

¹⁸ Bromley, M. and Brockman, K., ‘The Arms Trade Treaty’, *SIPRI Yearbook 2018* (note 13), pp. 405–412.

¹⁹ Arms Trade Treaty, ‘Reporting requirements’. Unlike UNROCA, the ATT allows reporting of authorized transfers instead of actual transfers and it allows financial values to be reported instead of numbers of items. In addition, the ATT requires data on SALW transfers as an 8th category.

²⁰ While data reported to the ATT is not specifically intended for publication, the ATT Secretariat by default places the information on its website. States that do not wish their information to be published have the option to make their reports only available for other states parties—an option few have used. The ATT reports are available at Arms Trade Treaty, ‘Annual reports’.

²¹ By Mar. 2019 the ATT had 100 states parties (including Palestine, which is not a UN member state). The reporting obligation is only from the year of becoming a party—89 had done so by 31 Dec. 2017 and were thus obliged to report 2017 data.

²² The OSCE reports are available at Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Forum for Security Co-operation, ‘Information Exchange on Conventional Arms Transfer’. The 57th OSCE participating state, the Holy See, also reported to the OSCE but, since it is not a UN member, it is not requested to submit reports to UNROCA.

While the ATT and UNROCA basically ask for the same data, many states that report to the ATT do not report to UNROCA

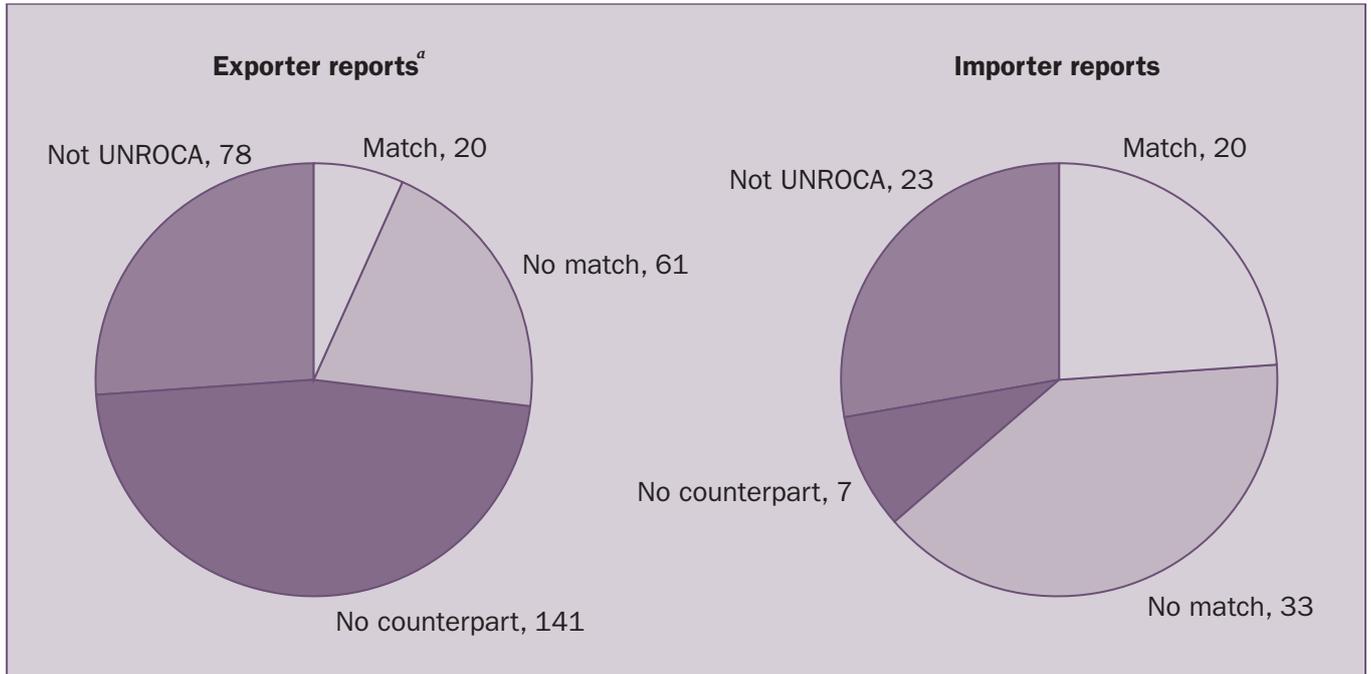


Figure 2. Matching of importer and exporter submissions to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA), 2017

Notes: ‘Match’ is the number of lines where (a) both sides report the same number of specified arms, (b) the numbers are only marginally (25%) different, or (c) one or both sides report more or less the same numbers in each category (without providing a description). ‘No match’ is the number of lines that do not match their counterpart data. ‘No counterpart’ is the number of lines in reports for which there is no counterpart. ‘Not UNROCA’ is the number of lines in reports for arms that do not fall within the UNROCA categories, are not for military use or represent mistakes in the number of units. In a few cases the author has adjusted lines that, based on the description of the item, were in the wrong UNROCA category.

^a Figures for exporters exclude 6 export lines reported by Italy for which no recipients were identified.

Sources: UNROCA database, <<https://www.unroca.org/>>; and United Nations, General Assembly, ‘United Nations Register of Conventional Arms’, Report of the Secretary-General, A/73/185, 18 July 2018.

Significantly, reporting to the ATT and the OSCE for 2017 is not yet complete. Of the 89 ATT states parties required to submit their mandatory report for 2017 by the 31 May 2018 deadline, 35 states (39 per cent) had not done so by March 2019. The OSCE reporting showed a similar pattern: 18 OSCE states (32 per cent) had not submitted a report by March 2019.

II. Assessing the quality of reporting for 2017

Aside from the problem of low participation, the UNROCA reports also suffer from problems with the content: exporter and importer reports often do not match, transfers reported widely in other sources are sometimes not included in the UNROCA reports, and a substantial part of the reported data is not relevant for the purpose of UNROCA. Despite these problems, reporting continues to yield official information that is new in the public domain.

Match and mismatch in UNROCA reporting

An important element of UNROCA is that states are asked to report both their imports and their exports. This makes it possible to compare how



the two parties to a transfer—the exporter and the importer—report the transfer. In theory, all reported exports should correspond with reported imports and vice versa. In reality, this is often not the case. There can be several explanations for the mismatches: (a) different interpretations of the seven UNROCA categories, (b) different dates when a transfer is counted, and (c) different views on the status of the transfer. For example, the United States does not consider weapons leased or loaned to other states as a transfer for the purpose of reporting to UNROCA because legal ownership is not transferred; however, importers often report such leases or loans as transfers.

For 2017, the 29 exporter reports include 306 individual lines of transfers, of which 81 were to states that also participated in UNROCA—the export data could therefore be expected to be mirrored in the import reports. However, only 20 of the export lines match, seem to match or almost match an import line. The other 61 export lines have no match in the importer reports (see figure 2).

Similarly, the 30 importer reports include 83 individual lines of transfers, of which 53 were from states that also participated in UNROCA—the import data could therefore be expected to be mirrored in the export reports. However, only 20 of the import lines match, seem to match or almost match an export line.

Information missing from UNROCA reporting

Information on many arms transfers is available from various official sources, such as national export reports and other official reports, statements by officials, and company or customs information. In many cases, the information is broadly in line with UNROCA reporting, if different in detail. In many other cases, the information is not contained in UNROCA reporting because it is not considered a transfer under UNROCA definitions. For example, contracts for and deliveries of kits or components for assembly or licensed production by the importer are widely reported in other sources but are generally not included in UNROCA reporting. Importers sometimes report these as acquisitions from national production instead.

However, there are also clear cases where official information contradicts UNROCA reporting. The reasons for not including relevant information are unknown. Possible reasons include mistakes or miscommunication in the process of compiling the reports or an agreement between exporter and importer not to include a transfer in their UNROCA reports.

In the following examples, transfers of arms that clearly belong to the UNROCA categories seem to have been missed in UNROCA reporting.

1. The delivery of at least four T-72B3 tanks from Russia to Belarus was announced mid 2017, as was their use in an exercise a few months later. However, neither Russia nor Belarus reported this transfer to UNROCA (or to the OSCE).
2. Russia delivered up to 15 MiG-29M combat aircraft and up to 15 Ka-52 attack helicopters to Egypt in 2017. These deliveries were reported by

Many exporter reports do not match importer reports, often for unclear reasons

Table 4. Number of arms reported to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA), by category, 2017

UNROCA Category	Exporters			Importers		
	Reported	Match	Not UNROCA	Reported	Match	Not UNROCA
I	191	20	16	21	20	1
II	2 816	70	149	512	113	69
III	1 242	28	32	619	51	34
IV	179	23	3	108	20	67
V	154	–	6	11	–	5
VI	19	–	–	2	–	–
VII	19 923	5 920	4 463 ^a	8 390	5 956	2 346
Total	24 524	6 061	4 669 ^a	9 663	6 610	2 522

Notes: ‘Reported’ is the number of arms that fall within UNROCA definitions. ‘Match’ is the number of lines where (a) both sides report the same number of specified arms, (b) the numbers are only marginally (25%) different, or (c) one or both sides report more or less the same numbers in each category (without providing a description). ‘No match’ (–) is the number of lines that do not match their counterpart data. ‘Not UNROCA’ is the number of arms reported that do not fall within the UNROCA definitions, are not for military use or represent mistakes in the number of units. In a few cases the author has adjusted lines that, based on the description of the item, were in the wrong UNROCA category.

^a These figures exclude 1061 units reported by Italy that probably also do not fall within the UNROCA definitions.

Sources: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, Mar. 2019, <<https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>>; UNROCA database, <<https://www.unroca.org/>>; and United Nations, General Assembly, ‘United Nations Register of Conventional Arms’, Report of the Secretary-General, A/73/185, 18 July 2018.

Russian media, the producing company and the Russian presidential office, but Russia did not include them in its UNROCA submission. Egypt did not submit a report for 2017.

3. Although the USA reported the transfer of the first 18 of 36 AH-64E attack helicopters to the Republic of Korea (South Korea) in 2016, it did not report delivery of the remaining 18 in 2017. The USA also did not report the delivery in 2017 of three such helicopters to Indonesia. Neither Indonesia nor South Korea submitted a report for 2017. However, both deliveries were widely reported in the media and by officials in the USA and both recipient countries.

Too much information in UNROCA reporting

Over the years, several states have reported data on transfers of arms that either go beyond the definitions of the seven UNROCA categories, or of arms in those categories that are transferred for non-military purposes—often demilitarized museum pieces or weapons temporarily moved to another country for demonstrations (probably as part of sales efforts). In 2017 around a quarter of the exporter and the importer lines were of this type (see figure 2), accounting for 19 per cent of all arms reported by exporters and 26 per cent of those reported by importers (see table 4).

States are free to report such extra transfers, and sometimes such information is helpful to clarify mistakes in reporting. For example, Slovakia reported transfers to Egypt and Czechia of armoured vehicles that seem to have been in Slovakia only temporarily, for overhaul. However, in many cases the information seems irrelevant. For example, for many years most lines in the United Kingdom’s export reports record transfers of arms that



are museum pieces or collector items. Fortunately, these items are easy to identify and exclude from UNROCA data because the UK usually notes the non-military use in the 'Remarks' column.²³ However, several Central European countries have been less clear when including transfers of arms that are known or assumed to be for destruction, overhaul, transit or sale to third parties.

Too little information in UNROCA reporting

The minimum reporting requirements of UNROCA call for exporters to provide the number of units in each UNROCA category transferred to specific recipient countries and for importers to provide the number received from specific supplier countries. Over the years, several states have failed to meet this minimum standard. Some states seem to be particularly reluctant to provide data on missiles and missile launchers (Category VII).

For example, the 2017 reports of China, Sweden and Australia omit some of the minimum data in Category VII. China reported exports of Category VII arms to Pakistan but entered the number of units as 'Not declared'. Sweden reported one export and one import of Category VII arms, identified the system with a precise description, but reported the number of units as 'Classified'. Australia reported imports of Category VII arms from the USA but gave the number of units as 'Not declared'—an effort at secrecy that was somewhat thwarted by the US report, which recorded transfers of four Category VII arms to Australia. Both Sweden and Australia failed to provide unit numbers for Category VII transfers in their reports in previous years too, even when the reports from the counterpart in the transfers gave the numbers.

Data on inventories and procurement from national production of Category VII weapons was also a problem in 2017, as in previous years. For example, the UK and Japan, both among the most transparent countries globally, are also among countries that, for reasons of 'national security', did not divulge the size of Category VII inventories or details of types and numbers acquired from national production.

The reluctance to provide the minimum data for Category VII indicates that these items are inherently different from the other six categories. A likely reason is that Category VII includes missiles, which are ammunition, and information about ammunition levels often reveals more about a state's war-fighting capabilities than information about weapon platforms.

Italy's report for 2017 did not follow the normal reporting format but instead gave total numbers exported by category, without providing information on the recipients. This may be an anomaly, since in previous years Italy has always followed the normal format, including specifying the weapons in the 'Remarks' column.

²³ This follows a recommendation of the 2006 GGE. United Nations, General Assembly, Report on the continuing operation of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and its further development, A/61/261, 15 Aug. 2006, para. 126(d).



New data in UNROCA reporting

While the majority of international transfers of major arms are widely known from other official or unofficial sources, UNROCA has over the years provided information that was not available easily or at all in other sources. As noted above, 153 of the export lines in 2017 were to countries that had not reported to UNROCA. Many of these could be linked to information on contracts or deliveries known from other sources, but the UNROCA data often provided more details on numbers than these other sources. In other cases, the UNROCA data was the first information available on the transfers.

Such new or improved data has included a substantial part of the information provided over the years by states with a general lack of transparency in their arms exports and imports, such as China and Russia. However, submissions from generally more transparent countries have also provided new information. For example, France's submission for 2017 listed over 600 armoured combat vehicles (Category II) exported to nine countries. While many of the agreements were already known from other sources, the UNROCA report provided details on numbers that had not yet been disclosed elsewhere.

III. Conclusions

Since 2006 UNROCA has been increasingly marred by falling rates of participation. The trend in recent years is for only a minority of UN member states to report to UNROCA and for importers, especially, not to report. At the same time, there are numerous cases of states omitting transfers or providing incorrect or irrelevant information in their submissions. These problems have undermined the usefulness of UNROCA as the confidence-building and stability-promoting instrument it was designed to be.

Reporting through the ATT and the OSCE shows that more states than currently report to UNROCA have the ability to provide the requested data. In particular, mandatory reporting to the ATT has been more successful than voluntary reporting to UNROCA in obtaining the same data. However, ATT reporting is limited to countries that have ratified the treaty. While the number of ATT states parties has grown to 100 and is likely to grow even more, 59 UN member states are not yet signatories or parties, including several major exporters and most importers in the Middle East and Asia.²⁴ However, as noted above, many parties have not submitted their mandatory reports. Moreover, the ATT is limited to arms transfers. UNROCA covers a wider range of data and still has the potential to develop into a register of all arms acquisitions and arms inventories.

The importance of UNROCA lies not so much in revealing data that is unavailable from other sources—most data in the UNROCA reports is known from other sources—but in the fact that the submissions by states to UNROCA often have the added weight of being official government communications. Its global coverage and official status still make UNROCA potentially one

Despite the low participation and problems with quality, UNROCA remains a valid mechanism but needs to be reinvigorated and expanded in scope

²⁴For details and analysis see Bromley, M., Brockmann, K. and Maletta, G., 'The Arms Trade Treaty', *SIPRI Yearbook 2019: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, forthcoming 2019).



of the most effective means of tackling the problem of arms build-ups: it makes data on arms transfers available to all relevant stakeholders, such as neighbouring states, regional organizations and the general public.

As such, UNROCA deserves to be reinvigorated and its scope expanded, to ensure that it achieves the original vision of being a non-discriminatory reporting mechanism of all offensive arms and systems. The small number of states that continue to make a commendable effort to provide accurate, detailed, timely and relevant information will need to do some strenuous work to convince the other states to report or improve the quality of reporting. Reviving the importance of UNROCA will also put pressure on the vast majority of UN members states to explain why they have failed to supply the information that they pledged to provide.



Abbreviations

ATT	Arms Trade Treaty
GGE	Group of governmental experts
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
SALW	Small arms and light weapons
UNROCA	United Nations Register of Conventional Arms
UNODA	United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs



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REPORTING TO THE UNITED NATIONS REGISTER OF CONVENTIONAL ARMS FOR 2017

SIEMON T. WEZEMAN

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